

Nation Dislocation: Hegemony and Nationalism

by

Michaelangelo Anastasiou
B.A., Portland State University, 2008
M.A., Portland State University, 2010

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Sociology

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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An examination of scholarly work on nationalism reveals that the nation is typically defined on the basis of positivistic understandings of human nature or society. Consequently, it is understood, not in terms of its own specificity, but in terms of an underlying referent that is thought to engender it. Since the unity of the nation is attributed to a “privileged” cause, the plurality of forms that co-constitute it are underemphasized. Positivist explanations have therefore obfuscated the extent to which “the nation” and “nationalism” come to be diversely imbricated in the social and political fabric, and how the nation comes to be totalized, in light of the plurality of its constitutive forms and subject positions. The present work deconstructs existing theories of nationalism, while seeking to generatively furnish a theory of nationalism that eliminates all reliance on positivism. Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of hegemony, which sees socio-political blocs as discursive terrains of multiple overdetermined forms and relations, is deployed in these efforts. Therefore, nationalism is understood, not in terms of privileged constituents, but as a variable set of overdetermined “family resemblances,” such as, “the nation,” “the state,” “the military,” “tradition,” etc., that come to represent the national communal totality. These “family resemblances” come to be dispersed variably and unevenly, as privileged nodes in the field of overdetermination, “binding” together differential identities. And since what governs any discursive formation is the uneven play of differences, it follows that a particular identity will have saturated, more than any other, the field of overdetermination and the content of nodal signifiers (e.g., “the nation”) with its narratives, thereby establishing its hegemony. “The nation” can thus be understood as a privileged signifier of historically variable content that, through its general and uneven dispersion, fuses but unevenly privileges, multiple identities into a socio-political bloc.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the following people whose contribution was essential to my completing the present dissertation. My supervisor, Peyman Vahabzadeh, for inspiring, guiding and challenging me in an unprecedented manner. His input not only helped me to grow as a theorist, but to approach theory from a completely different standpoint. My committee members, Steve Garlick and Oliver Schmidtke, for their constructive feedback and guidance. The Sociology Graduate Program at the University of Victoria, for providing a high-calibre and stimulating academic environment. My peers at the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria, and, in particular, Domenico Cerisano, for enabling me to grow as a theorist, through our myriad discussions and theoretical contestations. My parents, Theodora and Harry, and my brother, Anastis, for their invaluable contribution over the course of my whole life. Their unconditional support, love and care, enabled me to become the person I am today. All my friends in Cyprus who stood by me and provided the most socially-stimulating and (pleasantly decadent!), three years of my life. The mysterious “Princess Jasmine,” whose contribution eludes the literal conventions of the present section. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my twelve-year furry feline companion, Zorba, who, truly, gives a different meaning to the term “unconditional love.” His existence disproves Aristotle’s ontological hierarchy—*one soul, two species*.

Dedication

To my grandfather, Michalis Fantousis. First, and last, and always.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It would be fair to say that the literature on nationalism oscillates between the edges of its own uncertainties. While a plethora of fruitful theories of nationalism have been produced, they have yet to be reconciled with actual instantiations of the phenomenon they supposedly elucidate. We can very well say that the heterogeneity of historical instantiation of nationalism do not conform to the homogeneity that is attributed to the phenomenon by theorists. And while the overt essentialisms of the earliest literature have progressively been overcome, their traces are still with us, albeit in covert forms: it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that the dominant theoretical pillars, through which nationalism is made intelligible, attribute to nationalism the appearance of a literal referent. The principal questions that have guided the literature on nationalism are what the nation *is* and how it *came to be*. In other words, theories principally inquire what the *unity* of the nation, or its historical causes, are attributed to. The pervasive tendency in the literature is to answer these questions in terms of a “privileged” social or historical cause—what I term *positivities*—such as “the economy,” “the state,” “industrial culture,” “language,” and so on and so forth. In other words, it is typically the case that causal primacy is attributed to a privileged underlying factor. This holds even when the structural conditions of the emergence of the nation are accounted for. Thus, while theorists often attempt to account for the plurality of factors that constitute the national phenomenon, they do so, albeit implicitly, through a positivistic lens, where the phenomenon is, in the last instance, thought to derive from a single underlying process. The *aporetic impasse* is then reached: if nationalism is thought to derive from a principal factor that determines its structure, then nationalism’s constitutive plurality, is implicitly effaced. We can therefore say that scholarly work on nationalism has not been able to come to terms with how national totalities can emerge, *in light of the plurality of forms and subject positions that constitute any communitarian space*. In the Post-Marxist tradition, this has been articulated as the problem of “the positivity of the social.” Our efforts have therefore been prefigured. Is it

possible to articulate a theory of nationalism that can account for the plurality of forms that constitute the phenomenon, while at the same time accounting for its unity?

A Constitutive Absence: The Displacement of the Nation

The present work should be understood as an intervention operating between the cleavages of ethico-normative assumptions and theoretical convictions about “the nation.” It seeks to generatively construct a theoretical framework that can make sense of the plurality of forms that constitute, and that are in turn constituted by, nationalism. It therefore does not aim at providing new “facts” about nationalism. Rather, the task here is to reveal a certain “absence” that has been generated by means of a constant displacement. The hegemon is always hidden. In a world that is governed by the proliferating excesses of “the nation,” a silence is put into motion by the caprices of positivistic reasoning. In academic discourse, the mere utterance or recollection of “the nation” inadvertently directs us to its supposed “underlying bases.” In popular political discourse, “nationalism” is employed to invoke its “reactionary” variant. I raise the question of whether these displacements shield the phenomena of interest, from a critique that is commensurate to their terrain of operation.

I recall participating at an informal presentation with the notable Saskia Sassen in the early days of my sociological career, as a Master’s student, at Portland State University. I remember asking Dr. Sassen a somewhat challenging question, about the relationship between nationalism and globalization. Her answer, simple and somewhat evasive, has stayed with me throughout the years. I paraphrase: the nation-state is the elephant in the room and efforts to understand the phenomenon have been stifled by inept and non-comprehensive theories of social change. I believe that Dr. Sassen was alluding to the problematic at hand: the constitutive operations of the nation-state are obfuscated by our ineptness in theoretically accounting for its plural manifestations, that is, the dimension of “change” that invariably undercuts it.

What role did “nationalism” or “the nation” play in “common sense” sociological discourse at the time—a trend that still persists to this day? I can say with conviction that, at least in North America, the phenomenon of interest occupies a secondary, if not marginal, role in the sociological literature and attitude. As Billig (1995) suggest, “The enhabitation of nationalism within established nations is largely ignored by conventional sociological common sense” (p. 43). A close inspection of popular introductory textbooks in sociology, reveals obvious trends that are indicative of sociology’s inadequacy in theoretically assessing the phenomenon. The best-selling introductory textbook in North America, contains a mere two relevant entries in its subject index: “nation defined” and “nation state,” which correspond to a sum of a mere six sentences (Macionis, 2012). The situation is even direr in Henslin’s prolific *Essentials of Sociology* (2015), whose subject index does not even contain an entry on either the nation or nationalism. In fact, a thorough survey of the whole textbook reveals that the term “nationalism” does not even appear once. On the other side of the Atlantic, the situation is somewhat more satisfying. Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, and Carr’s famous *Introduction to Sociology* (2014) contains a number of relevant entries on the topic of interest: “nationalism,” “nationalism in global south,” “Islamic nationalism,” “modern society and nationalism,” “nations without states,” “religious nationalism,” “social movements and nationalism,” and “nation-states.” These entries correspond to approximately five pages of explanatory material. Yet what I find remarkable is that on the same subject index page, entries on nationalism are overshadowed by a series of entries that bear the nation’s traces: “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” “National Center for Education Statistics,” “National Center for Health Statistics,” “National Coalition for Homeless Veterans,” “National Crime Victimization Survey,” “National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey,” “National Health and Services,” “National Health and Social Life Survey,” “National Immigration Forum,” “National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,” “National Institute of Justice Sexual Victimization of College Women study,” “National Labour Relations Board,” “National Longitudinal Study of Youth,” “National Organization for Women,” “National Public Radio,” “National Research Council,” “National Social Life, Health and Aging Project,” “Nazi Germany,” “Netherlands,” “New Guinea,” “Nicaragua,” “Niger,” “Nigeria.” What we encounter

here is somewhat paradigmatic of sociology's general approach on the subject matter: the nation and its associated forms, as absent or underemphasized objects of sociological analysis, nevertheless saturate this analysis, and its accompanied assumptions, with their presence (Billig, 1995, pp. 2, 8, 9, 53; Calhoun, 2007, p. 8; Giddens, 1985, p. 172, 1991, p. 13; Mann, 2009, p. 2). A number of theorists have warned against the unwarranted elision between "the nation-state" and "society." The conflation of these terms serves the purpose of obfuscating the nation's constitutive terrain of operation (Billig, 1995, pp. 8–9, 38; Giddens, 1985, p. 172, 1991, p. 13). As Billig (1995) so poignantly notes, "Far from leading to nationhood's being in the forefront of sociological inquiry, the emphasis on 'society' and the implicit modelling of 'society' on nation, has both reified and concealed nationhood" (p. 54). In displacing "the nation" with "society," sociology has effectively erased the former as an object of sociological analysis.

The nation's absence from popular sociological discourse came in sharp contrast with my childhood and teenage experiences. I was raised in the ethnically-divided island of Cyprus, in the aftermath of ethnic strife between Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots, which culminated in the Turkish invasion of 1974. The invasion resulted in the *de facto* division of the island between the Greek-Cypriot South, internationally recognized as the Republic of Cyprus, which claims sovereignty over the whole island, and the international unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. As a number of socio-historical studies have shown, nationalist ideology and the question of national identity, were one of the principal constitutive dimensions of the so-called "Cyprus Problem" (Anastasiou, 2008b, 2008a, Mavratsas, 1997, 1999; Papadakis, 1998).

"What do you have to say about a society that brands you in every possible way?" said my friend Valandis, somewhat enigmatically, in the context of a political discussion. A society that brands you in every possible way; a society that stigmatizes its people; a society that brands its people under the halo of a nationalist patriotism that obfuscates its on-going violence against its own. *This is the Cyprus that I grew up in*. Ever since the so-called war of liberation was launched against the British colonizer, social cleavages had only come to proliferate—a trend that conforms to the evidence of history. A constitutive exclusion had marked the very instance the liberation struggle was declared, when it was declared, not in

the name of the *Cypriot people*, but in the name of the *Hellene ethnos*, not in the name of *independence*, but in the name of *enosis* (union with Greece). A fundamental intra-communal frontier had thus come to be articulated, excluding from the outset, one fifth of my island's residents—those fellow Turkish-Cypriots whom my grandfather had grown up with, and whose language he had learned fluently. Turkish-Cypriot nationalists responded in likewise fashion, demanding *taksim* (the partition of the island in accordance with ethnicity).

“One day will come when the wheel will turn in the opposite direction,” my grandfather used to say, citing a Turkish proverb—a yearning that irritates the restless Cypriot mind when it periodically frees itself from the mundane matrix of daily life. The past seems surprisingly easy to manipulate in retrospective reflection—if only *some* things were done differently, how different could our lives have been? But if the wisdom that is sequentially acquired with age has helped me to come to terms with the caprices of time, it proved inept in reconciling me with our historical apparitions. The wheel turns only in one direction but it *always ends where it begins*. This is how history feels like on this island. Reality becomes a parody of itself as past violence is reproduced and institutionalized—an on-going theatrical tragedy staged in the real world and with real victims. History has shown us that the social divisions that were articulated in our ambiguous and psychotic “national awakening” had since, only been extended to the broader social fabric: Greek-Cypriots versus Turkish-Cypriots, Right-wingers versus Communists, Makarios supporters versus Grivas supporters¹, pro-independence versus unionists, state institutionalists versus coup supporters, and so on and so forth. Our divided history had laid its claim on our futures. And while the memories of past wrongs still haunt us, they are somehow, and curiously, effectively silenced.

¹ Makarios III was the Archbishop of Cyprus, the leader of the Greek-Cypriot community prior to independence and the first president of the Republic of Cyprus. Georgios Grivas was a Greek army general of Cypriot origin who had come to Cyprus to constitute EOKA, the guerilla organization intended on unifying Cyprus with Greece. While Makarios and Grivas were the principal organizing figures of the EOKA struggle, their close association ended following Makarios' acceptance of the Zurich-London Agreement, which established the bi-ethnic (Greek- and Turkish- Cypriot) Republic of Cyprus. Intended on completing his work (Cyprus' political union with Greece), Grivas returned to Cyprus in 1971, forming EOKA B'. Approximately six months after Grivas' death, EOKA B' under the directive of the Greek military junta, led a coup against the Makarios government. The Turkish government, being one of the three constitutional guarantors of the Cypriot state, responded with invasion. This led to the on-going occupation of one third of the island. To this day, Grivas and the members of EOKA B' remain highly controversial and divisive figures.

There are times that I feel that the memories of past generations are my own. I can, in a vivid and precise fashion, recollect that dreaded day that my grandparents' neighbor was assassinated in my grandfather's cinema, right in on front of my father's four-year-old eyes. This memory, that had branded my father for life was outlined in the introductory chapter of his two-volume work on the Cyprus problem:

Then, in one chorus of movement, they bent forward and pulled dark hoods over their heads that fully concealed their faces. Thereupon, in a flash, they stood up, extended their gun-bearing arms in the direction of my neighbor, and filled his body with bullets. The repeated rounds of deafening gunfire, and the screaming and commotion that ensued, immediately filled the cinema with terror and panic. The perpetrators rushed out of the cinema hurling hundreds of declaratory revolutionary leaflets into the air. (Anastasiou, 2008b, p. 1)

The victim was left to bleed to death. His fellow villagers were too frightened to take him to the hospital, since they could be subjected to retaliatory measures by the assassins, that is, EOKA, the Greek-Cypriot nationalist guerilla organization that was executing the insurgency against the British. What was the victim's "mistake?" What could have led to such harsh "punishment?" He was an auxiliary officer for the British colonial police, an outspoken critic of EOKA and an outspoken communist. This had *de facto* branded him as a traitor to EOKA, whose political aims were principally guided by the so-called *Megali Idea* ("Big Idea"): the aim of unifying lands and peoples who were deemed to be historically Greek, under a homogeneous Greek Christian-Orthodox State. And even though my father's neighbor was Greek-Cypriot, *it did not matter to EOKA*. His humanity and that of his family's was disposable to them. His daughter, witnessing her father's assassination while sitting next to her mother, in a night that began as a family outing, to this day carries the scar of a bullet-wound on her leg. She was branded for life—a perpetual reminder of how her father was uprooted from this world right in front of her young eyes.

For EOKA, the assassination constituted a *moral necessity*; an execution of a divinely ordained creed that would render society anew. In its eyes, society would be christened proper in the baptismal font of the blood of our fallen heroes—*blessed be the Hellene ethnos*. Like every political fanatic that preceded them and will follow them, EOKA fighters considered it their duty to purge society from any traces of “impurity.” “The fanatic,” my grandmother always says, “places their face unto the mirror and expects to see their reflection.” Self-reflection, self-critique and as an extension self-growth, is absent in the universe of the extremist. Compassion, is a long forgotten possibility.

Our history is replete with such stories. If history is the creative endeavor of humanity, then our history was an artwork painted in blood: political assassinations, inter-ethnic violence, mass graves, institutionalized racism, etc. are all inscribed in the normalcy of our common remembering. As a youngster, I vividly remember encountering nationalist- and racist-ridden rhetoric in various aspects of my life—at school, in the news, amongst friends, in the playground, at the coffee shop, etc. “If the Turks have 210 soldiers and the Greeks have 30 soldiers, then how many Turkish soldiers must each Greek soldier kill in order for the Greeks to be victorious?” Such were the math problems given to us by my sixth-grade school teacher, before interrupting the class to proceed into a brief “history” lesson. Apparently, the Virgin Mary had been present during the Fall of Constantinople, where she was sighted supplying arms to the “Hellenes.”

Such was the recent history of Cyprus, in what amounted to a progressive trend toward the institutionalization of nationalism in the social and political landscape (see Anastasiou, 2008b, 2008a). And yet, sociology was remarkably silent about this phenomenon. My experiences were, for some peculiar reason, incompatible with the discipline that had changed my life. This, I could not accept, so I dug deeper into a canon that had appeared to be recalcitrant to studying this phenomenon, to finally discover a limited but very fruitful literature that could finally speak to my experiences.

This cluster of works, as I soon found out, was what was eventually labelled as “the classical modernist literature on nationalism.” By no surprise, the majority of the authors were from the Old Continent. Twentieth century developments had rendered a European experience that was intimately

familiar with nationalism. Two World Wars in the name of the nation, an approximate eighty million deaths, and a whole continent in desolation, were enough of a wake-up call.

I examined this body of work with fascination and diligence. By no doubt, it had enriched my understanding of my own experiences and those of others. And yet, I was unsatisfied with what I had received. In the likes of an internal struggle, every body of work that I surveyed, contradicted the heterogeneity of my own experiences. Whereas my encounter with nationalism alarmed me to its *general dispersion in all levels of the social*, theories of nationalism consistently relegated the phenomenon to an underlying cause that was thought to either generate or sustain the phenomenon. It was as if the richness of my own experiences was effaced by the carefully crafted molds of sociological orthodoxy. Scholarly work on nationalism—and very often by its own admission—operated against a field of “everyday” activity that undermined the premises it put forth. This, I could not accept.

By no surprise, the world that operated “outside” the formal theoretical canon, was similarly catering to my suspicions. This was a world which, from the lens of my own experiences, was governed, in its multifarious aspects, by nationalist ideology, yet was blind to the movement of its own axons. In the Western world, which in recent decades had been captivated by the liberal imaginary, it had become fashionable to regard nationalism as a phenomenon situated on the realm of political extremes. This was an outcome of two related developments. The first was the generalization of liberal humanism, which emphasized the virtues of democratic pluralism and consequently relegated nationalism to the realm of anti-humanist ideologies. In short, it was considered to be an enemy of diversity and democracy, at the backdrop of the European Union’s successes in integration. The second was the rise of right-wing extremism, which adamantly and unapologetically espoused bellicose nationalistic rhetoric. This political juncture, between the spread of liberal humanism on the one hand, and the conspicuous adoption of nationalist rhetoric by extremist factions, had contributed to a commonly-held idea: that nationalism was on the decline, and was, principally, an ideology of the extreme right. It is now 2018, and all political indications have cast serious doubt on this liberal interpretation. Let us note, as examples, the increasing and often *mainstream* success of far-right parties in Europe, as in the case of Austria, Hungary, Denmark

and Poland and the re-emergence of nationalist frontier politics, as in the case of Brexit, Catalonia, and Lombardia. As I will demonstrate, the persistence of nationalist perceptions and precepts in the structuration of today's world, is not so much the re-constitution of a forgotten nationalism, but the deployment of political imaginaries that are thoroughly imbricated in the social fabric.

These are the reasons why I regard the present work to be an intervention operating between the cleavages of "ethico-normative" assumptions and theoretical convictions about nationalism. The phenomenon that has, perhaps more than any other, contributed to the structuration of contemporary life, is the one whose presence consistently eludes us, by means of displacements. Let us consider a most-relevant development in sociological thought. It was only in recent years that mainstream sociological assumptions, which bathed the national corpus in society's holy waters, were exhausted by the limitations of their own claims. Mainstream sociology was consequently rendered an easy target for those who ardently promoted a theoretical agenda which—and rightly so—sought to radicalize social analysis by breaking the fetters of "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2002, 2003; Farrell & Newman, 2014; Robinson, 1998; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). These efforts found their most eloquent and effective expression in the work of the late Ulrich Beck. Certainly balanced in his approach, Beck (2003) assertively states that

the critique of methodological nationalism should not be mistaken for the thesis of the end of the nation-state [...] nation-states (as all investigations have shown) will continue to thrive or will be transformed into transnational states [...] the main point of the critique of methodological nationalism [...] is that national organization as a structuring principle of societal and political action can no longer serve as a premise for the social-scientific observer perspective (2003, pp. 455–456).

Thus Beck's "cosmopolitan social science" attempts to dissolve the division between "the inside" (national) and "the outside" (international) (Beck, 2003, p. 456). Beck's approach is not, however, guided

by epistemological precepts but by a particular understanding of contemporary developments. In a globalized world, the power structures of the nation-state are dissolving “from the inside and the outside,” giving way to new articulations of “space and time” and “the social and the political,” which need to be theoretically and empirically re-assessed (Beck, 2003, p. 458). This is because “national spaces have become denationalized, so that the national is no longer national, just as the international is no longer international” (Beck, 2003, p. 458).

It is indeed the case that recent social and political development that extend beyond the “classical” confines of the nation-state are altering the latter’s workings and forms of representation. But such a provocative assertion, which begins from the assumption of a “denationalized” and “de-internationalized” world, cannot operate in the absence of a comprehensive theory that can effectively account for “the nation’s” terrain of operation. If “the nation” comes to be “denationalized,” then what is that “it” (i.e., “nation”) that we are referring to? Such assertions imply that the nation-state can be understood, not as an on-going historical construction, but as an entity governed by a stable point of reference. A displacement is again put into motion.

It is this common thread that runs through theoretical and the ethico-normative understandings of nationalism that has similarly weakened political praxis and undermined theoretical clarity. The insistence on displacing “nationalism,” “the nation,” “the nation-state,” etc. to its supposed “bases,” has obfuscated the innumerable ways in which the phenomenon (comes to) constitute the modern socio-political milieu. The “answer” of nationalism is never sought in nationalism as such, but in what is thought to determine it. In the same way that the classical modernists, as an example, seek to understand nationalism in its supposed “social” or “economic” bases, political opponent of nationalism seek to mitigate its effects by “attacking” what is thought to generate it, e.g., neoliberalism, as if the former automatically follows from the latter. What is effectively effaced is the myriad and multifarious articulated constructions that come to co-constitute nationalism, and through which nationalism contaminates the social fabric.

Nationalism is not a derivative, but a construction that (radically) overdetermines the social and the political. Nationalism does not precede or proceed its relational complex, but is precisely constituted

through and with it. This means that “the nation,” is to be understood in terms of its *diffusion* in the social fabric, that is, as a constitutive point of reference through which political and social processes come to be effectuated. This realization allows us to generate a novel theoretical understanding of nationalism that broadens the terrain of political action and ethical considerations. In the formal academic literature, the consistent displacement of the nation has obfuscated the plurality of forms that constitute the phenomenon and that are, simultaneously, constituted by it. The “positivity of the nation” operates as a persistent deflection. While attempts have been made to comprehend the phenomenon, efforts have been steered away from its constitutive terrain toward its supposed “bases.” This is precisely what the present work seeks to critique in efforts to generatively construct a new framework for understanding nationalism and that can account for the broad and interstitial dispersion of the phenomenon. If the present work is regarded to be a scholarly intervention, then what is implied is some form of “assault,” that is, the introduction of certain dislocating effects in the terrain of theoretical and common-sense political discourses, so as to alter the content of dominant narratives.

Structure and Positivity

The term “positivism,” as it is deployed in the context of philosophical, epistemological and theoretical discussions, is not governed by a unitary definition. We could very well say that what the term captures, in the plurality of its discursive instantiations, is a series of related theoretical and epistemological tendencies or assumptions. My aim is not to exhaust the history of the term’s dispersion. Given the scope, I have to be selective in my approach. The present section thus sketches out the history of related theoretical currents that are constitutive of the problematic at hand: The problem of “the positivity of the social,” that is, the assertion or implicit underlying assumption, that any social space is governed by underlying immovable laws.

Our issue of interest can be traced back to two intimately related intellectual traditions. The first is the tradition of essentialism, which dates back to classical Greek philosophy (Aristotle, 1998; Plato, 1952, 2004), and the second is positivism, which is rooted in the work of Auguste Comte (2009). The doctrine of essentialism posits that the ultimately reality of objects is governed by an internal and immovable essence that can be intellectually grasped as intelligible form. And while essentialism assumes a variety of forms in the Western philosophical canon (e.g., differentiation between “essence” and “meaning,” “essence” and “appearance,” etc.), the implication is that the innermost identity of an object can find an expression at the level of meaningful statements or contemplation. As Laclau and Mouffe (1987) so aptly articulate it,

As we have said, the essence of idealism is the reduction of the real to the concept (the affirmation of the rationality of the real or, in the terms of ancient philosophy, the affirmation that the reality of an object—as distinct from its existence—is *form*). This idealism can adopt the structure which we find in Plato and Aristotle—the reduction of the real to a hierarchical universe of static essences; or one can introduce movement into it, as Hegel does—on condition, of course, that it is movement *of the concept* and thus remains entirely within the realm of form. (p. 88; original emphasis)

The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion, and which is of outmost importance to the present work, is the following: according to the doctrine of essentialism, there can be, on some level or under certain circumstances of empirical or rational verification, a one-to-one correspondence between “object” and “thought”, “object” and “idea,” “reality” and “idea,” “object” and “language,” etc. Thus, the inner-most identity of objects, i.e., their essence, is governed by an immutable core that can be rationally grasped and articulated, uncontaminated by the whims of culture and language. The role of philosophy, at a large, was to discover these essences, the most significant of which were, in their various permuted forms, “the essence of man” (Aristotle, 2000; Descartes, 2008; Kant, 2002, 2007; Leibniz, 2007; Locke, 2003;

Marx, 1978a; Plato, 2004; Rousseau, 1999), “the essence of God,” (Kant, 1992; Leibniz, 2007; Locke, 2003) “the essence of nature” (Aristotle, 1992; Leibniz, 2007; Marx, 1978a), “the essence of things” (Aristotle, 1992, 1998; Leibniz, 2007) and “the essence of history” (Hegel, 1977; Marx, 1978a, 1978c). The Enlightenment’s promise, indeed, took as its starting point, these essentialist premises (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Once the inner-most essence of “objects” and thus Truth was discovered, human experience could be ordered according to its essential predicates and be harmonious with itself (Comte, 2009; Hegel, 1977; Kant, 1996; Marx, 1978b).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the philosophical doctrine of essentialism presided over, if not dominated, Western thought, for most of the latter’s history and found its expression in variable scholarly currents, including social and political theory (Derrida, 1993; Vahabzadeh, 2009). The positivist philosophy of the so-called father of sociology, Auguste Comte, can be considered to be, at the time that it was written, a novel variant of essentialism, which considered “society” to be its ultimate theoretical point of reference. Comte’s (2009) positive philosophy rested on the assumption that human nature, and, by extension, human practice, affection and intellect, rested on natural and social laws. Thus, the task of the sociologist was to discover these objective laws, through the medium of empirical science, in an attempt to furnish an integrated system of knowledge that would be subservient to a universal human morality. This theoretical logic, is remarkably pronounced in the work of the earliest sociologists, and most notably, in the work of Marx and Durkheim, whose work foreshadowed the development of our discipline—Marx (1978c, 1978b, 1978a), with his presumable laws of historical motion, and Durkheim (1984), with his presumable laws of social order. The assumption that was common to both theorists’ work was that social predicates could be revealed through the application of the empirical scientific medium. Society could then be ordered according to these essential predicates.

How can the relationship between essentialism and positivism be interpreted, in the context of these theoretical developments? I offer the following consideration: positivism can be regarded to be a metonymical transposition of the notion of “essence” to its secular counterpart, the underlying “positivity” or “positive law.” The idea of a “positive social laws” denotes that certain determinants pre-

exist and operate independently of the social structure, in the form of “natural law.” These determinants, while allowing a certain or considerable amount of human maneuvering in the form of historical contingency, nonetheless determine, in the last instance, the social structure (Derrida, 1993). Sociological theory, in most of its variants, when critically assessed, rely on some form of theory of “human nature,” “nature of society” or, as articulated by Vahabzadeh (2009) “ultimate referentiality.” Very often, these positive references are introduced in the structure of theories, as either hidden or implicit assumptions, even when efforts are made to dispose of them.

But it should be stated that there has been considerable resistance against positivism within the sociological tradition. Efforts have been made to overcome the theoretical limitations hitherto delineated. Such efforts typically involved attempts at radicalizing the concept of “structure.” While I in no way claim that the vestiges of positivism were abandoned, it was certainly the case that, throughout the development of sociology, a number of attempts were made to minimize its reliance on essentialist determinations and, instead, conceive of society as a historically-constructed structure, composed of multiple and interdependent components. Crude definitions of “human nature,” “laws of motion” and “laws of society,” were abandoned in favour of more nuanced and complex understanding of social structure (Becker, 1966; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1998; Castells, 2009; Giddens, 1984; Mills, 2000).

While such attempts were laudable in their own right, it is the case that positivist logic was not completely abandoned and was re-introduced in sociological discourse in a surreptitious fashion. While the sociologist increasingly relied less on crude understandings of human, historical and social “laws,” the epistemological underpinnings of positivism still governed their theoretical logic, in the form of implicit assumptions. The prime-most example of this is the subordination of socio-historical processes, which may have assumed a plurality of historical forms to unbending sociological definitions. The case of Giddens’ work comes to mind. In his notable *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981), he ventures on a polemic against the essentialist and positivistic logic that had governed functionalist and evolutionary sociological models. He simultaneously affords us with a variety of defined notions that are

introduced, as if they have an objective and fully-constituted existence and, therefore, bear the stamp of an underlying universality: “modernity,” “tradition,” “allocative resources,” “authoritative resources,” “abstract systems of knowledge,” etc. As an extension, the whole structure of society, and in later works the globe (Giddens, 1991), is explained in reference to these theoretical constructs, which presumably have a determinate objective correlate.

This is paradigmatic of the “contemporary” sociological approach. Theoretical constructs are surreptitiously, if not inadvertently, elevated to the status of essential predicates or “positivities.” They become stable points of reference, through which the whole structure of society is explained. Theory, in essence, becomes law. The question of “ultimately primacy” is the rhetorical manifestation of this tendency, where the notion of “essence” is merely transmuted into privileged analytic categories that are presumed to have a determinate objective content. Mann (2009) has rightly noted that “[o]f all the issues raised by sociological theory over the last two centuries, the most basic yet elusive is that of ultimate primacy or determinacy” (p. 3). And now I ask: If one poses the question of ultimate primacy, is that not to simultaneously affirm that society is governed by certain underlying laws or essences?

What should also be noted is that the elevation of concepts to the status of “ultimate determinant” is typically fashioned alongside a series of theoretical techniques that are deployed as necessary complements to positivistic reasoning. The presumed prime-most determinant on which positivism always relies cannot be substantiated as an actual theoretical point of reference and can only materialize by means of *theoretical supplementation*. Thus, the prime-most determinant can only be understood:

- a) By re-articulating it in the form of binary categories. Thus, as an example, the privileged historical cause of “modernity” necessitates its theoretical counterpart, that of “tradition.”
- b) By attributing to it determinate content. Thus, as an example, “modernity” can be understood in terms of “industrial culture,” “world-systems,” “capitalist mode of production,” etc.

- c) By emptying it of content, so that the theory relies on implicit assumptions about its meaning.
- d) By relying on cause-and-effect reasoning, where the privileged analytic category is thought to temporally precede its effects. It is therefore conceived as operating independently of its effects.

All of the above-stated approaches are self-defeating and aporetic in character. To assert the prime-most causal efficacy of any factor is to assert that it can materialize independently of the context of its manifestation. This implicit assumption, as we will see, is radically incompatible with any affirmation of either structure (i.e., plurality) or historical contingency. Modern sociological thought is trapped in an ongoing aporetic funnel, where arguments swing between affirmations of structure and historical contingency, on the one hand, and assertion of ultimate primacy, on the other.

As I will demonstrate, this is precisely the logic that governs the classical modernist literature on nationalism. The classical modernists' attempt to move away from naturalistic understandings of "the nation," which dominated early understandings of nationhood, has reproduced a positivism of a different sort. Naturalistic understandings of human nature were abandoned, but sociological categories were implicitly elevated to the status of "social law." The aporetic tension germinated between the affirmed historical-contingency of the nation and the presumed universality of the theoretical constructs that were meant to explain the former. The literature, given its reliance on rigid theoretical constructs—typically that of "modernity"—that were thought to determine the structure or the emergence of the nation, consequently failed to come to terms with the plurality of actual historical instantiations of nationalism. Theoretical monism is logically incompatible with the plurality of social life. Positivism re-enveloped the very attempts that were advanced to eradicate it.

Decentering the Social

If sociology failed at providing the theoretical tools needed to dissolve positivism, where are we to locate the necessary pivotal points, from which to proceed with our endeavours? The answers are located in parallel but more radical theoretical domains. We can identify a number of theoretical “moments” that introduced certain disruptive effects within the dominant essentialist/positivist paradigm. While our ultimate starting point will be Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) theory of hegemony, it is useful to delineate the theoretical trajectory that has enabled, both the authors and myself, in our efforts.

Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics constitutes one of the earliest disruptions to essentialist discourse (Derrida, 1993). Nietzsche (1968) rejects the notion that an essential content can be *a priori* attributed to any sort of presumed primary or originary metaphysical value. Rather, “value” as such bears an ontological status (Heidegger, 1977) and its content is historically contingent. Freud’s critique of self-presence should also be regarded as an early disruption to the essentialist paradigm (Derrida, 1993). Freud (1990) saw “the self” as being constitutively split between consciousness and the unconscious, the latter of which exercises dislocating effects unto the former. The unconscious for Freud is constituted by a complex layers of meanings and symbolisms, whose determination lays not in any *a priori* or single point of anchorage (e.g., “the part” or “the whole”), but in its precise overdetermined relations (Freud, 1955, pp. 301, 302, 324). Hence, full-presence, in accordance with a single unifying principle, is an impossibility, because “self-consciousness” is governed by the disruptive domain of the unconscious, which is symbolic in its constitution (Lacan, 2006a), and whose content is never fully-accessible. The implication to be drawn is that the constitution of the subject is not governed by an inherent and unwavering essence.

Disruptions to essentialist orthodoxy were also advanced in the phenomenological tradition. The full implications of Husserl’s (1980) blurring of the distinction between “essence” and “appearance,” through his notion of “phenomena,” is that “essences” to the extent that they do exist can only be accessed through their phenomenal appearance. These deductions were further radicalized by the work of

Merleau-Ponty (2005) in his critique of classical empiricism and rationalism. For Merleau-Ponty (2005), the phenomenon is considered to be that constitutive point of convergence between “the thing” and “the mind.” In this sense, perception is seen as something that materializes relationally. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology represents one of the most radical attempts to dissolve the essentialisms that inhere to theoretical dualisms (e.g., subject-object, empiricism-rationalism, etc.) (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 146). These theoretical currents, alongside Nietzsche’s influence, culminates in the work of Heidegger (1999) who asserted that essences manifest themselves differentially in each historical epoch.

The introduction of the problem of language into contemporary theoretical discourse represents the most substantive moment of rupture in essentialist discourse (Derrida, 1993). These efforts were pioneered by the work of Ferdinand De Saussure (1966), who demonstrated that there are no positive terms in language. In other words, no linguistic term can be understood solely in reference to itself. Language is composed by a series of signs that are only intelligible in terms of their oppositional and associational difference. In examining the implications for theory, one should note that theoretical knowledge of social life invariably operates in the domain of language. If no sign can be understood in reference to itself, no theory can be grounded in an ultimate anchorage point (i.e., a privileged sign), since that very anchorage point necessitates the presence of other associated and differential signs. Thus, any structure cannot be understood as being determined by a privileged cause. In this sense, theoretical knowledge is itself understood as being constituted through, and necessitates, an extant cultural context, through which its terms are made intelligible.

Saussure’s work was further radicalized by the efforts of Jacques Lacan (2006a), who introduces a pronounced Freudian spin on Saussurian premises vis-à-vis Jakobson’s (2003) famous essay on metonymy and metaphor. What Lacan demonstrated was the remarkable compatibility between Saussure’s theory of language and Freud’s theory of the unconscious. The unconscious, according to Lacan, is governed by the domain of language whose elements operate in terms of oppositional and associational difference. But these elements are not merely in a differential relationship, as Saussure suggests, but are, according to Freud, symbolically overdetermined. All elements contain traces of one

other and are, therefore, constitutively dislocated. The “impurity” of elements, where each is constitutively contaminated by the presence of others, alarms us to the fact that meaning is established in terms of metonymical and metaphorical displacements (Lacan, 2006a). Any hope of locating a literal meaningful “core,” in the constitution of intelligible elements (i.e., linguistic signs), is relinquished. (Un)Consciousness and, by extension, social life, is constitutively overdetermined by planes of dislocation and constitutively disrupted by metonymical and metaphorical operations.

Perhaps, the biggest assault against essentialism, was waged by the post-structuralist school, which was led by the deconstructive efforts of Jacques Derrida. In his famous *Of Grammatology* (1997), Derrida demonstrates how the identity of elements is always established by means of exclusions and oppositional hierarchies e.g., form-matter, man-woman, etc. (Laclau, 1990, p. 32). In this sense, a structure cannot “find in itself the principle of its own closure” and consequently requires “a dimension of force which has to operate from outside the structure” (Laclau, 2007a, p. 544). In this sense, what is demonstrated is that any principle that is thought to determine the structure can only be made intelligible by what is “excluded” from the structure. The principle determining elements is, therefore, not independent from the relationships in which it is embedded, including that which is constitutively “excluded” from the structure. In this sense, Derrida’s efforts are remarkably in line with the psychoanalytic legacy of Freud and Lacan, both of whom affirm the overdetermination of any structure and the constitutive impurity of the elements at play. Foucault’s related contribution should also be noted. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), he demonstrates that discursive formations cannot be attributed to any *a priori* unifying principle. Thus, the regularity of any structure cannot be attributed to a presumed underlying essence, but is, rather, a product of its myriad constitutive relations, in their regular and dispersed operations. Finally, we should note Wittgenstein’s (1967) most relevant breakthroughs in the philosophy of language that dissolved the long-held distinction between “ideas,” “matter” and “language.” For Wittgenstein, all social processes operate through the domain of language, in which both “ideas” and “matter,” inhere. This is accurately captured in his famous dictum, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”

Critiques within the field of the philosophy of science should also be noted as being relevant. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), refuted the long-held premise that scientific advancement is governed by an internal progressive logic of development. Quine's *From a Logical Point of View* (1963), refuted the idea that there exists a verificational hierarchy between analytical statements. Science, as an example, is not truer than religion, nor is it substantively different, except to the extent that it may expedite "our dealings with sense experience" (Quine, 1963, p. 45). The political relevance of these works should be contextualized: they assaulted the altar of "scientific objectivity" from within the domain that elevated it to the status of "transcendental" truth.

Finally, and most relevantly, we should consider theoretical advances made within the Marxist tradition that attempted to move beyond the limitations imposed by essentialist conceptions of history, i.e., historical materialism. Althusser's (1967) introduction of Freud's notion of overdetermination into Marxist discourse, should be noted. What Althusser demonstrated was that historical motion is overdetermined by the confluence of multiple factors. Even though Althusser maintained that history is, in the last instance, propelled by economic contradictions, his affirmation of its overdetermined character, paved the way for more radical understandings of political antagonisms that broke free from Marxist reductionist logic. Laclau and Mouffe (2001), as an example, would affirm the radical overdetermination of the social and the political field, relinquishing any aprioristic explanations of historical motion—everything becomes entirely contingent.

Gramsci's (1971c, 1971a) re-articulation of the Leninist notion of hegemony represents the most decisive break away from the orthodox logic of historical materialism (Hall, 1986, pp. 10–12; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 65–66). For Gramsci, hegemony is a particular form of political fusion, where a plurality of subject positions and interests are cemented together by an ideological field into a historic bloc (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 66–67). The ideological field is drawn from a particular social identity, but is generalized by traversing a plurality of subject positions (Hall, 1986, pp. 15–16; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 67). Additionally, the hegemonic identity is not pre-determined by an essential historical principle (i.e., the productive forces) but is aggregated through dispersed collective wills through a

common world outlook and shared modalities of life (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 68; Vahabzadeh, 2003, p. 66). Gramsci thus demonstrates that socio-political formations are not dependent upon any *a priori* historical logic that governs the motions of the polity (Hall, 1986, p. 14). Historical blocs and their unity are effectuated through operations of political contestation between heterogeneous identities that are entirely historically-contingent (Hall, 1986, p. 15). The hegemony of the ruling class is established to the extent that its ideas “infiltrate” other identities (Hall, 1986, p. 15). “Each hegemonic formation will thus have its own specific social composition and configuration” (Hall, 1986, p. 15).

We can deduce a number of key principles from the sum of these critiques. First, the concept of structure cannot be anchored either in an originary, essential or telic point of reference that is thought to determine its constitution. Second, no element of the structure can operate simultaneously “outside” or independently of the structure. All elements are overdetermined by the terrain of their constitutive relationships. Third, the concept of structure is logically incompatible with notions such as “origin,” “law” “essence,” “substance,” “base,” “determination in the last instance,” etc. Fourth, “relations” should be understood as co-constitutive elements that overdetermine one another. Thus, the elements of a structure, to the extent that they operate within a system of overdetermined relations contain the traces of other elements. Sixth, any “progressive” or “evolutionary” understanding of history or knowledge is abandoned. What is therefore privileged is the radically contingent and constructed character of social and historical processes. As I will later demonstrate, social arrangements are contingent upon on-going complex processes of political contestation.

The key question that now confronts us is whether the groundbreaking conceptual currents that I have outlined, along with their associated implications, have penetrated the literature on nationalism. The answer here cannot be ambiguous. They have done so but only to a very limited extent. I proceed with a synopsis of the literature on nationalism, in an attempt to prime the reader for the content that will follow in the proceeding chapter.

Scholarly Works on Nationalism

An examination of scholarly literature on nationalism reveals discernable theoretical proclivities. The earliest literature, which is characteristically tied to the work of nationalism's "Founding Fathers," conceives of nationalism as a naturally occurring phenomenon: nations are deemed to be perennial in character and national consciousness is understood as supplying a perpetual primordial social bond. In contrast, classical Marxism conceives of nationalism as a phenomenon that is historically-contingent upon specific economic formations, a phenomenon whose emergence is nonetheless determined by the laws of historical development. From a Marxist view, nationalism is understood as a phenomenon that emerges in the epoch of the capitalist mode of production and its function is to obfuscate the real underlying class relations.

It is clear that these two theoretical orientations that dominated much of the early literature on nationalism are characterized by strong essentialist and positivistic tendencies, the effects of which are two-fold. First, the overreliance on essentialist determinations limits the scope of analysis. If any structure is, in the last instance, determined by an underlying essence, determinant, or cause, then the resultant analysis is predominantly geared toward discovering, capturing, and/or reaffirming the presumed essence or cause. As a consequence, a variety of other relevant elements, as well as their interaction, that may constitute the phenomenon, are excluded from the analyses from the outset. Second, the phenomenon of interest is not analyzed in terms of its own specificities. The phenomenon is displaced and replaced by the privileged, i.e., essential, analytic category. Marxism, for example, does not analyze nationalism as such but rather analyzes the economy from which a theory of nationalism is extracted. The results are what one would expect. The early literature on nationalism is characterized by an obvious theoretical poverty.

Against the backdrop of this conceptual failure, there emerged a new body of literature—what came to be known as the classical modernist paradigm—that sought to engage nationalism on its own basis and examine its historical specificities. The modernists help explicate the various social and historical planes that, through their interaction, facilitate the emergence of national consciousness and the

formation of national communities. In other words, by moving away from essentialist understandings of human nature, the modernists conceive of nationalism as a socially- and historically-contingent phenomenon. My argument is that this attempted move away from essentialism inadvertently reproduced the latter: while the modernists understand nationalism as a historically-contingent phenomenon endowed with its own specific characteristics, they nonetheless subordinate it to universalistic theories that are undermined by the plurality of forms that nationalism assumes. Two theoretical tendencies are responsible for this impasse. The first is the subordination of nationalism to definitions and pre-existing categories of analysis that have saturated the modern theoretical canon: the state, capitalism and economy, communication and language, sovereignty, identity and consciousness, ethnicity and tradition. The second is the privileging of (single) analytic categories. The combination invariably reproduces the essentialism the modernists sought to dissolve, as nationalism is ultimately understood in terms of a privileged *social* referent. In effect, an understanding of nationalism that is based on essentialist conceptions of human nature and history is replaced with one that is based on positivistic understandings of society.

It is typically the case that these theories are accompanied by a theory of modernity, through which a theory of nationalism is deduced. A familiar tale tolls from the shrines of sociological orthodoxy: nationalism precipitates from the ashes of modernity's wastelands. The general argument holds that an underlying "cause" engenders modernity, giving rise to a new socio-political milieu through which nations emerge. In the case of Anderson, it is the homogenization of languages through print-capitalism; in the case of Gellner, it is the imperatives of industrial culture, as examples. My overarching argument is that this relegation of nationalism to an underlying "social base" effaces the former's constitutive terrain of operation that operates through myriad multifarious relations. The key theoretical issue with modernist positions is that the nation is understood as both: (a) a pluralistic structure; and as (b) deriving from a single underlying social base. The first problem that emerges is one of theory: a theoretical exposition that attempts to sketch a phenomenon's structure through monistic predicates is bound to encounter aporetic impasses. The second problem is empirical. Monistic understandings of nationalism cannot account for the plurality of nationalism's actual historical instantiation. As Tilly (1999) has rightly asserted,

As in the cases of citizenship and democracy, nationalism exhibits the paradox of a general process characterized by path-dependent particularism. On one side, classic mechanisms of invention, ramification, emulation, and adaptation recur in the generation of nationalist claims. On the other side, each new assertion of nationalism responds to its immediate historical and cultural context, then modifies conditions for the next assertion of nationalism. Like all culturally constrained social processes, nationalism proceeds in cultural ruts that greatly limit the directions it can go, relies on collective learning, but by its very exercise alters relations—including shared understandings—among parties to its claims. (p. 418)

It is interesting to note that this issue was foreshadowed as early as 1965 by Hans Kohn himself, who stated that “nationalism differs in character according to the specific historic conditions and the peculiar social structure of each country” (p. 89). But it is decades later that this would emerge as an issue of concern within the literature, that is, the tension between: (a) the plurality of forms that nationalism and national identity assume in actual historical cases; and (b) universalistic definitions of the phenomena (Breuilly, 1985; Bulmer & Solomos, 1998; Calhoun, 1993, 1997; Chatterjee, 1993a; Jenkins & Sofos, 2005a; Smith, 1986, pp. 134–138, 2009; Tishkov, 2000). The outcomes of this discussion were not fruitful, in my estimation. Some theorists resorted to particularistic understandings of nationalism and abandoned attempts at theorizing nationalism in universal terms. This is reflected in the fact that, in recent years, academic studies of nationalism as such have substantially diminished in numbers. A survey of recent relevant publications on Web of Science, Google Scholar reveals an increasing trend toward case study analyses. Very often, such attempts often involve the application of existing “grand theories” theories, but to particular socio-historical contexts. Still, others continued to endorse understandings of nationalism that are undercut by universalistic dimensions. In Anthony Smith’s (1991, 2009) later works, as an example, an incredible amount of effort is directed toward unearthing the “ethnic core” of nations through an historical analysis that, in my opinion, is riddled with historical gaps. On the other end of the

spectrum, scholars have questioned the analytic utility of the terms “nation” and “nationalism.” Tilly (1975) and his colleagues, as an example, in their impressive comprehensive study of the history of European states, had abandoned attempts at theorizing “the nation,” citing, among other reasons, the term’s tendentiousness (p. 6). Tishkov (2000) advances a more forceful critique, cautioning us against using the terms and encouraging us to “forget” them, citing their “emptiness” as compared to the real diversity of social life (Tishkov, 2000). These trends mirror the crux of my argument: that the tension between the apparent universalization of nationalism and the particularity of its instantiations has not been resolved. What we observe is either attempts at grand theorizing, as in the style of Gellner and Anderson, that cannot account for the pluralistic of actual historic instantiations; or “safe” particularistic applications of theories.

It is my firm conviction that this issue can be attributed to theorists’ incapacity to address the problem of positivism as such and the relationship between universality and particularity. This move requires not merely the generation of new theories of nationalism but alternative conceptualizations of socio-political formations. Stable categories of analysis, such as “state,” “society,” “economy,” etc., have to be abandoned in favour of ones that emphasize the overdetermined character of every socio-political formation. Nationalism has to be conceived in terms of a historically-contingent phenomenon that emerges within a political logic that can enfold a relationship between universality and particularity. This task requires resolving two questions that are at the heart of the universality-particularity conundrum and that will guide the conceptual trajectory of my dissertation on nationalism:

1. Under what conditions of possibility can a phenomenon, in our case nationalism, be “universalized” while at the same time retaining particularistic content?
2. How can any socio-political community be forged, as an *attempted* totality, in light of the plurality of forms and subject positions that invariably constitute communitarian spaces?

It is time, at last, that the literature on nationalism confront its limitations and provide the long due answers to these questions. This is what the proposed dissertation seeks to achieve. This entails generating a theoretical framework that completely abandons positivistic understandings of the social. Laclau and Mouffe's work, which emphasizes the indeterminate, symbolic and overdetermined character of every socio-political formation, will be utilized in this endeavour.

Post-Marxism, a New Approach to Understanding Nationalism

The principal theoretical approach that guides the present work is Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony. Their approach was originally articulated in their ground-breaking *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001). In this work, the authors critique the persistent positivism that had plagued the historical trajectory of Marxist theoretical and political thought. They conduct a genealogical analysis of the concept "hegemony," cross-examining how the positivism that had contaminated the concept in theory had translated into inept political action. To the extent that emancipatory action was, in the Marxist tradition, thought to derive from a historically determinate "location" (i.e., the working class), the terrain of political action was *a priori* restricted.

Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Marxist orthodoxy, which revealed the aporetic impasses that had resulted from positivistic presuppositions, enabled them to generatively construct a theory of hegemony that finally broke free from the fetters of positivism. The problem of "the positivity of the social," as they articulated it, was solved by re-conceptualizing the social through the prism of radicalized epistemological and ontological presuppositions. The social was no longer thought to derive from anything "outside of itself," no less from a single point of origin, such as the economy. The social was understood as the immanent complexes of relations that constituted its terrain of operation.

The notion of *discourse* took centre stage in their efforts. It refers to the relational complexes of material and ideal elements through which any socio-political formation is established. Their concept of

discourse emphasizes that the identity of the elements at play (e.g., practices, institutions, narratives, technological infrastructure, etc.) does not precede its constitutive relations but is rather established through them. Since the identity of the elements is *necessarily contingent* upon the relation, it follows that the identity of one element *requires* the presence of other elements. The elements thus co-constitute one another. This is what the notion of overdetermination illuminates. By overdetermination, we intent to designate that the invocation of an identity simultaneously invokes all the elements that are associated with it. This involves its symbolic, as well as its material constitutive relations. To say that all relations are constitutively overdetermined is to suggest that all elements within a discursive complex contain traces of other elements. Having established these ontological premises, it is easy to see how positivism can be unabashedly rejected: it is no longer possible to assert that the determination of a structure derives from a singular referent, since the identity of any element does not precedes the relations that constitute it. No element can operate as a pure and uncontaminated point of reference that determines the whole structure. This invites us to radically re-examine our understandings of power. If power cannot derive from a single point of origin, then how is power to be understood? Taking the question a step further, one can inquire the following: Given that power does not derive from a principal source, how can a particular identities or social arrangements come to assert their hegemony?

Following the theoretical footsteps of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), hegemony is here understood as an articulated process through which heterogeneous identities are aggregated through the instituting of particular life modalities (understood here in the broadest possible sense, e.g., institutional arrangements, practices, narratives, attitudes, beliefs, etc.). The narratives and interests of a particular identity come to be generalized by overdetermining such life modalities—they come to saturate these sites of aggregation thus “infiltrating” other social and political identities. This means that the field of overdetermination—the constitutive “promiscuity” of the social—is the very condition of possibility for operations of power. It is the terrain through which an identity *disperses* its narratives and interests. Thus, social arrangements that are deeply imbricated in, and therefore overdetermine, the social (such as “the state,” “the nation,” “the education system,” “the economy,” etc.) are understood as *nodal points* through which an identity

articulates its hegemony. The identity that is able, to the greatest extent, to saturate these nodal points with its narratives and interests, is the identity that has effectively articulated its hegemony. But this constructed hegemony will always be a contaminated hegemony, since it will invariably be overdetermined by the narratives of subordinated identities as well. Thus, while instituted life modalities (i.e., nodal points) will receive determinations from plural political identities, one identity will have effectively saturated them, more than any other, with its interests and narratives. Power is never a zero-sum game. The implications to be drawn from this discussion are the following. If power or resistance is no longer thought to derive from a principal source, the field of possible political action is radically broadened. Politics is no longer understood as a process of “acquiring” power from a determinate source (e.g., the state), but of effectively dispersing and instituting modalities of life, whose content is unevenly saturated by plural narratives and interests.

As a methodological approach, Post-Marxism, by disposing of positivistic reasoning, affords the potential of incorporating various theoretical positions. Why is this so? As already stated, it is typically the case that scholarly work on the nation and nationalism tends to understand these phenomena by privileging one or certain of their constitutive dimensions, e.g., language, the state, the economy, ethnicity, etc. In disposing attempts at identifying the element(s) that determines the nation or nationalism “in the last instance,” the constitutive dimensions of the nation and nationalism, can be assessed in terms of how they relationally come to overdetermine the social. Thus, while (a) Anderson attributes the rise of national consciousness to the standardization of language through print-capital, and (b) Kedourie understands nationalism in terms of a philosophical position which holds that the nation and the state should be convergent, I can suggest that (a) and (b) are actually co-constitutive processes that come to overdetermine one another. In regards to this particular dimension of analysis I can thus suggest that in *certain* historical cases, nationalism entails, among other processes, the broad dispersion, through a common linguistic medium, of a philosophical principle that holds that the state and the nation should be coterminous. Each process is thus understood as being each other’s *condition of possibility*. It is in this sense that the literature’s findings can be reconsidered in the absence of the positivism that governs them.

I therefore do not seek to dispose of the history of the literature on nationalism, which has been fruitful in its own right. Rather, the attempt here is to provide the appropriate epistemological tools that can reveal the breadth and complexities of nationalism's terrain of operation, by broadening the theoretical gaze. This affords us two advantages. First, an understanding—and therefore critique—of the phenomenon can now encapsulate its multifarious and generalized workings. Second, political action, which invariably operates within the national milieu, can at last broaden its repertoire and terrain of operation.

I will begin my endeavours by first conducting a thorough literature review so as to reveal the general terrain of positivities through which nationalism is made intelligible. As we will see, virtually all theories relegate the phenomenon of interest to an underlying base that is thought to determine its structure. I then proceed into a detailed critical examination of the key authors that have defined the course of the literature. In doing so, I aim to paradigmatically reveal the positivistic mechanisms, which invariably result in aporetic tensions, that have governed the course of the literature. My critique aims at shattering these positive references, thus opening up the theoretical “space” that can account for the complexity of the phenomenon and the plurality of forms that co-constitute it. I will then proceed in critically examining three principal canonical issues: (a) the history of nations, (b) the modernity of nations, and (c) the hegemony of nations.

In regards to the history of nations, I will argue the following. The emergence of nations is best understood as a complex and on-going process of political aggregation of (changing) heterogeneous elements (e.g., institutions, practices, values etc.). These elements, given appropriate conditions of possibility that vary from context to context, are totalized as a specifically national totality. Their totalization entails that a particularity—in our case, the signifier of “the nation” which through complex processes of political contestation is elevated to the status of the “transcendent”—assumes the role of representing the communal totality. This process entails the constant and proliferating displacement of “the nation” in the discursive fabric, enabling it to operate as a node: (a) through which heterogeneous elements and subject positions are aggregated; (b) upon which novel political antagonisms converge; and (c) through which power is unevenly distributed.

In regards to the “technological question” that is often linked to the modernity of nations, I will argue that technology does not reside in a determinate object or social process. Technology is understood as an ontological potential, wherein the subject enlarges the scope of its articulative potential through the construction of discursive interlinkages. The execution of this potential results in territorial interconnectivity and the proliferation of social dislocations. The social thus comes to be increasingly overdetermined. A two-pronged consequence follows. Firstly, diverse populations are incorporated in what become attempted and contested articulations of novel totalities (e.g., nations). Secondly, identities are rendered ambiguous by the proliferation of dislocating effects. Identities thus become vulnerable to processes of inter-identity infiltration. This enables hegemonic possibilities since hegemony entails that a particular identity “contaminates” others, with its own narratives.

In regards to the question of the hegemony of nations, I will argue that the articulation of national hegemonic blocs entails that the privileged signifier of “the nation,” through its broad dispersion and imbrication in the discursive fabric, comes to operate as a privilege node of social condensation. It becomes the reference point par excellence, through which: (a) heterogeneous subjectivities, institutional arrangements, and spaces of representation, come to be aggregated, and (b) upon which political antagonisms converge. Nationalism is by extension understood as the hegemonic fabric through which “modern” communities are performatively executed and politically constructed. It is understood as a variable set of overdetermined “family resemblances” that come to represent the national communal “totality.” These “family resemblances” come to be dispersed variably and unevenly, as privileged nodes in the field of overdetermination, “binding” together differential identities. And since what governs any discursive formation is the uneven play of differences, it follows that a particular identity will have saturated, more than any other, the field of overdetermination and the content of nodal signifiers (e.g., “the nation”) with its narratives, thereby establishing its hegemony. “The nation” can thus be understood as a privileged signifier of historically variable content that, through its general and uneven dispersion, fuses but unevenly privileges, multiple identities into a hegemonic bloc.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The aim of the present section is to sketch out the thematic contours that have made nationalism *intelligible*. The category of interest not only traverses a variety of theoretical landscapes but its *intelligibility is reliant on a series of auxiliary concepts*: the nation, national consciousness, ethnicity, national movements, the nation-state, etc. These notions are encountered in the literature as either subsets of nationalism or as replacements of the category itself. It is often the case that nationalism has been made intelligible, either indirectly or inferentially, through these categories, which are governed neither by a theoretical or a systematic unity in the literature. I therefore cannot limit my literature review solely to studies of nationalism but I will have to, in various instances, access the category vis-à-vis the aforementioned ancillary concepts.

The literature review has as its foci, and is structured around, the classical modernist paradigm, which is, up to this day, the most dominant theoretical orientation in studies of nationalism. As Anthony Smith so succinctly articulated it, “The paradigm of nationalism which was so widely accepted till recently is that of *classical modernism*. This is the conception that nations and nationalism are intrinsic to the nature of the modern world and to the revolution of modernity” (1998, p. 3). My purpose is to interrogate the breadth of the literature by showing how and in what ways the literature: (a) helps generate; (b) converges with; and (c) diverges from the classical modernist paradigm. This will facilitate an understanding of the thematic “centre” of the discipline which will be of outmost importance in constructing, generatively, a new theoretical framework.

The paradigm of classical modernism is, to a considerable extent, a reaction against the dominance of earlier perennialist and primordialist conceptions of the nation, which we find in the works of the “Founding Fathers” of nationalism and, certainly, in the political climate of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Europe and America (Smith, 1998, p. 18). Examples of such earlier works include those of Fichte (2000), Herder (2004) and Mazzini (2009). The nation was deemed to be organic, immemorial and intrinsic to human nature. In contradistinction, the modernists treat nationalism as a

historically-situated phenomenon and as an exclusive product of modernity (Smith, 1998, p. 21). While it is impossible to adequately sum up the array of exploratory avenues that this body of literature follows, we can identify a series of tendencies that constitute its theoretical landscape. The first is that nations are political territorial communities that are bound and integrated by the modern state (Smith, 1998, p. 20). The second is that national bonds constitute the primary political and social identity in modernity, and supersede or subsume other forms of identity, such as gender, class, race, sexuality, etc. (Smith, 1998, p. 20). The third is that the global political and economic arena is primarily shaped and guided by nation-states (Smith, 1998, p. 20). The fourth is that the nation involves the construction of a social structure that has been furnished by complex processes and interactions between its citizens, its elites and the state (Smith, 1998, p. 20). The fifth is that the nation-state constitutes the prime engine of social and historical development (Smith, 1998, p. 20).

Modernism's Intellectual Origins

As Anthony Smith (1998) has pointed out, the modernist literature on nationalism is, to a considerable extent, shaped by the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and crowd and social psychologists, such as Le Bon, Freud, Mead and Simmel (p. 11). However, none of these theorists or schools conducts a systematic analysis of nations or nationalism (James, 1996, pp. 48, 83; Smith, 1998, p. 11). Rather, they provide the raw material for later (and more comprehensive) studies.

Durkheim provides a series of theoretical leitmotifs that curve out the course of the literature, and while his work is not always explicitly referenced, his concepts, as well as their underlying assumptions, appear ubiquitously in the literature (Smith, 1998, pp. 14–16). His notion of collective conscience and the emphasis on collective morality and values, which are seen as the binding force of all communities, takes centre stage in studies of nationalism (e.g., Brass, 1991; Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1986). Lastly, his thesis that the division of labour in modern societies is the essential social adhesive, is encountered

pervasively in the literature, albeit in transmuted formulations (Brass, 1991, p. 19; Gellner, 1983; Hechter, 1975; Hroch, 1985, pp. 5–7; Smith, 1986, pp. 130–134; Wallerstein, 2004).

Weber tackles the question of the nation explicitly, though he is brief in his assessment. Weber defines the nation as “a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own” (Weber, 1946, p. 176). Weber’s emphatic insistence on the connection between nations and the state prompted a number of authors to explore in further detail the interlinkages between the two. Moreover, Weber’s ideas about the state and rationality are encountered in a variety of works that examine the role the state played, historically, in engendering or solidifying national unity through various forms of economic, political and rational-bureaucratic integration (Giddens, 1981, 1985; Mann, 2010; Smith, 1986; Charles Tilly, 1975).

The link between theories of crowd behaviour and social psychology and the literature on nationalism is more nebulous. According to Smith, there are not many theorists of nationalism that have made explicit use of the intellectual tradition of crowd psychology (Smith, 1998, p. 13). Nonetheless, “many of their insights have permeated the thinking of recent scholars of nationalism” (Smith, 1998, p. 13). The most commonly borrowed idea is that modernity has disrupted traditional forms of support and stability and, as a consequence, has disoriented the individual (Smith, 1998, p. 13). This theme is encountered extensively in the literature in permuted forms.

For Marx and Engels, nations are also generally seen as modern phenomena, though the term is often used equivocally to refer to modern nations, ethnic groups, states, or peoples-in-general (Connor, 1984, p. 9). For them, nations and nationalism are seen as historically-situated social relations engendered and determined by the contradiction between the capitalist productive forces and relations of production. This understanding stems from their reliance on (and privileging of) economic and technological categories of analysis. Extra-economic phenomena are considered to be by-products of the productive forces and relations of production, therefore belonging in the realm of the “superstructure” (Connor, 1984, p. 7; James, 1996; Smith, 1998, p. 48).

More generally, Marxism's interest in nationalism is, to the largest extent, incited by its commitment to presumed laws of historical change. "The national question," as it came to be known in this strand of literature, involves the theoretical examination of how national movements could either contribute to or hamper the historical succession from capitalism to socialism (Hobsbawm, 1977, p. 10; Kedourie, 1961, p. 90; Smith, 1998, p. 48). This is the de facto direction that Marx's followers took, though we can discern three variations of this general orientation (Connor, 1984, pp. 19–20).

The first variation, in line with Marx's perspective on the subject-matter, treats nationalism as a mere epiphenomenon and it affords it with scant theoretical and political validity, casting it as an orientation incompatible with class struggle (Connor, 1984, p. 19). This, we encounter in the works of Rosa Luxemburg (1976). The second variation treats "the national question" in terms of its strategic utility, acknowledging that in certain socio-historic contexts the shift from capitalism to socialism is to be achieved first and foremost within the national context (Connor, 1984, pp. 20, 30, 31). Therefore, "the national question" acquires practical validity, since national affinities can be utilized instrumentally to contribute to the working class' struggle against capital. The principal name associated with this particular treatment of "the national question" is Lenin (1964). The third, which is associated with the work of Austrian-Marxist theorists such as Otto Bauer and Karl Renner treat nations as entities of historical significance and the principal agents of social change (Connor, 1984, pp. 20, 29). Bauer asserts that nations existed before the capitalist mode of production, but were fragmented by the latter (Connor, 1984, p. 29). With the increasing socialization of the productive forces, nations are once again brought together and come to constitute viable and potent vehicles of revolutionary change (Connor, 1984, p. 29). The move toward socialism can only unite nations and eliminate cross-national domination (Connor, 1984, p. 29).

But the Marxist legacy in the study (and politics) of nationalism owes, perhaps to the largest extent, the fruits of its merits to Joseph Stalin (Davis, 1978; Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 2; Nairn, 1975, p. 4). Stalin defines the nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common

culture” (Stalin, 1953, p. 307). His analysis thematizes, though in a cursory fashion, a variety of elements that have since become stable theoretical reference points in the study of nationalism: the mass media, division of labour, the intelligentsia, bureaucracy, the pre-national kernels of national identity, nationalism’s recourse to folk culture etc. Though Stalin’s definition and discussion of the nation is, one can claim, multidimensional, it ultimately understands national movements and the national question through economic categories. The national struggle is, according to Stalin, “in its essence, [...] always a bourgeois struggle, one that is to the advantage and profit mainly of the bourgeoisie” (Stalin, 1953, p. 319).

It should be noted that Marxism, despite its contribution to the study of nationalism, nonetheless lacks a systematic theoretical treatment of the subject-matter (James, 1996, pp. 48–49; Löwy, 1976, p. 81; Nairn, 1975, p. 4; Smith, 1998, p. 4). As we have come to know, this deficiency, which stems from Marxism’s reliance on economic explanations, contributed to a number of theoretical, as well as political failures. As Nairn (1975) unapologetically states, “The theory of nationalism represents Marxism’s greatest historical failure” (p. 3). This prompted a number of theorists of a Marxist background to push beyond Marxism’s economistic limits and develop a string of new theories that sought to engage the phenomenon on its own basis. Their work will be reviewed in forthcoming sections.

The Classical Modernist Paradigm

Modernist overtones can be found, albeit in nascent forms, in theories of nationalism dating as far back as the late eighteenth century. Ernest Renan’s most-famous lecture “What is a Nation?” (1990), for example, advances the idea that the modern nation is historically-situated and not perennial. The characteristically modern character of nations is also endorsed by a number of social historians who were writing during the middle of the twentieth century and whose work, as noted by Hutchinson and Smith (1994), represents the first serious and comprehensive studies of nationalism (p. 160). The works of Carlton Hayes (1931),

Louis Snyder (1954), Frederick Hertz (1944), Boyd Shafer (1955) and Hans Kohn (1965) (1982), stand out in this respect. The work of Kohn in particular has been tremendously influential, through his distinction between “Western” and “Eastern” nationalism. For Kohn (1965), the early “Western” nationalisms that emerged during the Age of the Enlightenment were political in character and took aim at limiting governmental power and securing civic rights (p. 29). The purpose was “to create a liberal and rational civil society representing the middleclass and the philosophy of John Locke” (Kohn, 1965, p. 29). In contrast, the Eastern nationalisms that emerged after the Napoleonic Wars in Central and Eastern Europe were cultural in character (Kohn, 1965, p. 30). These new nationalism “looked for its justification and differentiation from the West to the heritage of its past. It often extolled ancient traditions in contrast to the Western Age of Enlightenment (Kohn, 1965, p. 30). This differentiation between the Western “civic” model and the Eastern “ethnic” model has become a prolific point of reference and organizing principle in the literature at large (see Calhoun, 1993, pp. 221–224; Giddens, 1985, pp. 216–218; Habermas, 1996b; Ignatieff, 1993; Smith, 1986, pp. 140–149).

What many of the aforementioned historical studies reveal is that nations emerge well after the nineteenth century. Kohn (1965), for instance, notes that it was not until the late eighteenth century that nationalism, in the modern sense of the word, emerges as a force that increasingly shapes private and public life (p. 9). Moreover, “Only very recently has it been demanded that each nationality should form a state, its own state, and that the state should include the whole nationality” (Kohn, 1965, p. 9). Related studies support these findings. Kedourie (1961), for example, has found that the very concept of “the nation” only starts to approximate its contemporary usage in the late eighteenth century (pp. 13–19). Weber’s (1976) historical study of the French peasantry illustrates that many small-town citizens in France did not self-identity as French nationals even as late as World War I. Connor’s study of European rural immigrants to the U.S. similarly reveals that nationality was not the most predominant form of self-identification even during the nineteenth century (1990, pp. 93–95).

Probing deeper into the modernist roots of nationalism, Elie Kedourie (1961) traces the phenomenon to modern German philosophical thought. Kedourie (1961) notes that, for Kant, ultimate

morality and thus freedom are provided and attained inwardly by the individual (p. 23). This idea was developed and re-formulated by Johann Gottlieb Fichte who asserted that ultimate morality lies not in the individual but in a universal Ego (Kedourie, 1961, pp. 35–36). His philosophy is hypostasized by an ontology that heavily privileges the whole over its parts. The application of this ontology to the social level means that the individual, in and of oneself, is unreal (Kedourie, 1961, pp. 37–38). The individual's freedom and self-realization constitutes a progressive struggle "in identifying himself with the whole [...] which endows him with reality" (Kedourie, 1961, p. 38). A political theory is deduced from this model. It holds that well-being and freedom can only be attained if the individual (the part) is completely and progressively, through struggle, subsumed by the state (the whole) (Kedourie, 1961, p. 38).

One of Kant's auxiliary premises is that the world is naturally divided amongst peoples whose diversity cannot be subsumed or eliminated by any universal political arrangement, such as a global state (Kedourie, 1961, p. 53,56,57). Building on this idea, philosophers such as Schleiermacher, Herder and Fichte, asserted that language is a natural circumscription of ethnicity and a barrier to political universalism (Kedourie, 1961, pp. 63–64). Language is the simultaneous depository and expression of a people's common historical experience (Kedourie, 1961, p. 62,63). And if the principle of diversity is to be respected, it is the responsibility of each nation to cultivate its cultural particularities, especially as they find an expression in language. Herder, as an example, is therefore persuaded that "the best political arrangement obtains when each nation forms a state on its own" (Kedourie, 1961, p. 58). To the extent that a state houses more than one nation, it is deemed to be oppressive and bound to perish, as it violates the natural principle of diversity. Therefore, it is only when the particularities of nations are cultivated and find their outmost expression in their own state, that the world shall be harmonious, as it will be governed by a plurality of distinct nations, each couched within political boundaries that are congruent with its cultural particularities. For Kedourie (1961), these principles come to constitute the ideational pillars of nationalism, which he defines as a doctrine that "divides humanity into separate and distinct nations, claims that such nations must constitute sovereign states, and asserts that the members of a nation reach

freedom and fulfilment by cultivating the peculiar identity of their own nation and by sinking their own persons in the greater whole of the nation” (p. 73).

In the context of this discussion it is worth mentioning that there is a strong tradition, dating back to the founding fathers, that supports the claim that nationality presupposes a common language or, at the very least, a common medium of communication (Anderson, 2006; Deutsch, 1966; Fishman, 1989; Gellner, 1983; Herder, 2004). But others have cast doubt on this claim, disproving it by citing examples of multi-lingual nationalities, such as the Swiss (Renan, 1990, p. 12). Connor has also noted that a nation’s self-awareness can outlast its linguistic commonalities, directing our attention to the example of the Irish and the Scots (Connor, 1978, p. 389). The relationship between language and nationality has been an on-going theme of concern in the literature and has received much critical attention. The principal topic of concern is whether, and to what extent, common language constitutes the basis or an element of nationality.

For Karl W. Deutsch (1966), a modernist forerunner in this line of work, a people is constituted on the basis of complementarity of social communication that is facilitated by “communicative effectiveness” in “facilities of communications,” such as a shared language, memories, associations, habits and preferences; in short, a common culture (pp. 96–97). By extension, “ethnic complementarity” is “distinguished by its relatively wide range” of complementarity, since it involves an inter-class and inter-occupational concoction of communicating individuals, all of which are organized around a central leading group (Deutsch, 1966, p. 98). And while “the primary basis of this alignment is the complementarity of communication” it also requires complementarity in economic preferences, such as in “buying and selling, work, food and recreation, courtship and marriage,” and the provision of security and potential success in the ever-changing milieu of institutionalized social technological change (Deutsch, 1966, p. 101). A nationality then “means an alignment of large numbers of individuals from the middle and lower classes linked to regional centers and leading social groups by channels of social communication and economic intercourse” (Deutsch, 1966, p. 101). A nationality will emerge as a nation to the extent that the cohesiveness of its members is effectively controlled and attached to group symbols.

This can be ensured by formal political organizations, such as the state, or through “informal social arrangements, pressure of group opinion, and the prestige of national symbols” (Deutsch, 1966, p. 104).

Benedict Anderson (2006) embarks on a considerably more complex theoretical and historical exposition. He similarly identifies shared language and communication as the necessary historical grounds that engendered nationality, but he sees nationalism as a particular type of collective consciousness. Nationalism for him is an “imagined” political community that is both limited and sovereign. “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). For Anderson, the emergence of the national imagined community is an after-effect of the fatality of human linguistic diversity and the diffusion of common language, via print-capital, over large territorial units (Anderson, 2006, pp. 42–43). This diffusion of language brought together diverse linguistic communities under a more general linguistic “umbrella” that formed the basis for the emergence of national identity (Anderson, 2006, p. 44). Collective consciousness, in essence, was transposed from the “local” to the mass and national level.

The theme of communication assumes centre stage in Ernest Gellner’s work, as well. Gellner’s theory was first articulated in *Thought and Change* (1965) and later refined in his ground-breaking *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). Gellner situates the origins of nationalism in the functional requirements of industrial society. Industrial societies, notes Gellner, are dominated by the principle of rationality, which is facilitated and sustained by a commitment to perpetual growth, improvement, change and exploration (Gellner, 1983, p. 22). This new European Geist dissolved traditional social structures and generated an economic and productive system that necessitated constant occupational restructuring (Gellner, 1983, p. 24). In order for these imperatives to be satisfied, workers had to be provided with a standardized base-level education and a standardized language, so as to become occupationally interchangeable. This was achieved through state provision of public education, the consequent outcome of which was the generalization of a state-diffused national “high culture” (literate and training-

sustained). This concomitantly satisfied the nationalist principle “which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1).

The association between industrialism and nationalism is a theme that is explored pervasively in the literature. An issue of contention is whether the emergence of nationalism is attributed primarily to economic or industrial processes. This theme is taken up explicitly by Gellner (1983) who states that modernity, and by extension nationalism, is propelled by industrialism rather than capitalism (p. 20). Giddens (1981), on the other hand, in specifying the emergence of the nation-state, emphasizes both capitalism’s and industrialism’s transformational effects, namely, their role in space-time compression. Mann (2010) similarly acknowledges the impact that both capitalism and industrialism had on the emergence of nations but notes that their causal efficacy varied according to region and historical period. Others see nations and nationalism as being, principally, by-products of economic processes (Hechter, 1975; Nairn, 1975). A number of these works, as noted earlier, are advanced by Marxist-oriented theorists. But there are also a number of theorists who, despite the fact that they come from the Marxist tradition, acknowledge that the Marxist model is plagued by fundamental limitations that obstructs adequate analysis of nations and nationalism (Connor, 1984; Löwy, 1976; Nairn, 1975). Consequently, a number of economically-oriented analyses of nationalism that moved beyond Marxism’s theoretical boundaries, were advanced (see Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Hechter, 1975; Nairn, 1975; Wallerstein, 2004).

The influential work of Tom Nairn stands out in this respect. Nairn (1975) sees nationalism as an ideological mechanism—a form of false consciousness that functions as “adjustment” and “compensation” against uneven processes of economic development (p. 7). Even though nationalism bears an ideological component, its origins, nonetheless, lie in what Nairn sees as the material contradictions in global economic uneven development, dating back, at least, to the late eighteenth century. The contradiction is identified as the concomitant global diffusion of capitalism and the social fragmentation it brought about, echoing, of course, an articulation of Marxian logic. “The unforeseeable, antagonistic reality of capitalism’s growth into the world is what the general title ‘uneven development’

refers to. It indicates the shambling, fighting, lop-sided, illogical, head-over-heels fact, so to speak, as distinct from the noble uplift and phased amelioration of the ideal” (Nairn, 1975, p. 10). Global uneven economic development, driven by the imperial core centres that controlled the developmental forces, resulted in social upheaval, not just within the core centres but also in the periphery. The periphery found itself excluded from the development process and victimized by development. “There was never either time or the sociological space for even development. The new forces of production, and the new state and military powers associated with them, were too dynamic and uncontrolled, and the resultant social upheavals were far too rapid and devastating for any such gradual civilization-process to take place” (Nairn, 1975, p. 10). Faced with the reality of global exclusion from development, peripheral nations led by their elites, sought to at once fight the machine of progress and become a part of it in their own way. This resulted in populist movements that were tailored by nationalistic ideology, against the imperial colonizers. The nationalist doctrine valorized the particularity, history, and culture of these peripheral regions and invited the masses to participate in the struggle against the imperial core. Following this line of reason, Nairn goes on to audaciously state that “as the most basic graph of nationalist history will demonstrate, the ideology has always been produced on the periphery” (Nairn, 1975, p. 14). The West, having subsequently adopted the nationalist doctrine, crafted it with greater efficacy owing to their larger reservoir of human and material resources.

One of the most widely explored themes in the literature is the relationship between the state, nations, and nationalism. Discussions and debates typically revolve around the causal order between the state, the nation, and nationalism, and the analytic utility of the category of the “nation-state.” Though their level of orthodoxy varies, there are a number of theorists that maintain that any sort of analysis of nations or nationalism is only accurate and useful if it is analytically related to the state (Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1981; Hobsbawm, 2012; Kohn, 1965). Breuilly (1994), for example, understands nationalism as a form of opposition politics that is exercised by a political group that either controls or seeks to control the state. The group is deemed to be nationalistic if it endorses the particularity of the nation, its right to self-determination and independence and the superiority of its values and interests. From this definition

evolves a six-class typology of nationalism based on whether a nationalist movement seeks separation from, reformation of, or unification with a nation-state or a non-nation-state. Others privilege the category of “the state” by granting it analytic and temporal primacy. Charles Tilly (1975), for example, considers the nation to be a most “tendentious” and “puzzling” term (p. 6). His and his colleagues’ historical analysis reveals that it is the state that preceded the formation of nations. The seventeenth and eighteenth century “were not generally periods of nationalism, of mass political identity or even of great cultural homogeneity within the boundaries of a state” (Tilly, 1975, p. 6). Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) are also convinced that “A systematic look at the history of the modern world will show [...] that in almost every case statehood preceded nationhood, and not the other way around, despite a widespread myth to the contrary” (p. 81).

An ardent supporter of, and a name closely associated with, the category of the “nation-state” is Anthony Giddens. Giddens (1981) defines the nation-state as “a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence” (p. 190). For Giddens (1981), the “nation-state” is an indispensable analytic category because it signifies one of the dimensions that differentiates traditional and modern forms of social organization, the former of which was underpinned by the city, and the latter of which is underpinned by the modern state (pp. 100–103, 160, 165, 189). The historical transition between the two is but an outcome of the inextricable relationship between the expansion of industrial capitalism and the administrative unification of the state over larger territorial networks (Giddens, 1981, pp. 189–190). It is only under these conditions that nations emerge (Giddens, 1981, p. 190). The nation is thus coeval with the administrative centralization and consolidation of the state. Nationalism, on the other hand, which is certainly hierarchically subordinated to the nation-state in Giddens’ (1981) analysis, is defined as the beliefs, symbols and sentiments that signify a communal experience, and may or may not coincide with the boundaries of a nation-state (p. 13). Nationalism is, nonetheless, the cultural counterpart to the state’s administrative centralization, because administrative unity requires “elements of cultural homogeneity” (Giddens, 1985, p. 219).

The conflation of the categories of “the nation” and “the state” has been an object of considerable controversy. The primary line of critique asserts that the notion of the nation-state tends to conceal the fact that the presumed convergence between nation and state is inherently unstable, given that most societies are pluralistic (Connor, 1978; Hutchinson, 2005, p. 136; Smith, 1991, 1998). Connor (1978), for example, has demonstrated that only about 10% of nation-states are constituted on the basis of this seamless convergence. As Smith notes, “While most states aspire to become nation-states in this sense, they tend to limit their claims to legitimacy to an aspiration for political unity and popular sovereignty that, even in old-established Western states, risks being challenged by ethnic communities within their borders. These cases, and there are many of them, illustrate the profound gulf between the concepts of the state and the nation” (1991, p. 15). In light of this observation, it is important to distinguish the normative nationalistic principle of territorial, ethnic, and political unity, from its contextual implementation, which is invariably restricted by the complexity of inter-cultural and inter-territorial relations between communities.

Eric Hobsbawm, much in line with state-centric theorists, while emphasizing the role the state played in national formations, puts greater weight on the role that nationalism, understood in the Gellnerian sense, played in nation formation. Hobsbawm (2012) is clear that “for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations” and that “Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round” (p. 10). He is in agreement with Giddens (1981, 1985) that a nation “is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the ‘nation-state’, and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it” (Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 10–11). But the novelty of Hobsbawm’s contribution lies in his concept of “invented tradition.” The nation, notes Hobsbawm, is to a considerable extent a project of social engineering and invention. He argues that in the wake of the dissolution of the Feudal socio-political organization in Europe governments were faced with the challenge of procuring “new methods of ruling and bonds of loyalty” (Hobsbawm, 2013b, p. 263). This required that the state invents new or re-articulates older traditions. The goal was to forge and strengthen social bonds and bonds of loyalty to the emerging political system. Despite the engineered

character of nations, Hobsbawm is clear that the “invention of tradition” is not purely instrumental and that it is only successful if it is in line with the cultural “wavelengths” of the populace (Hobsbawm, 2013b, p. 263).

The “alliance” between tradition and nationalism has received a considerable amount of attention in the literature. Giddens (1994), for example, stresses the role that tradition plays in ensuring historical and spatiotemporal continuity, the overall function of which is to impart, as he puts it, ontological security. This theme has been deployed by more recent studies, which examine the role that nationality plays in offering a sense of security in light of uncertainties engendered by modern (Haugaard, 2002) or contemporary developments (Kinnvall, 2004; Skey, 2010, 2013).

A theme that is commonly encountered in the literature is that nationalistic narratives generally proclaim that the nation is a part of a direct bloodline lineage that connects it to a “mythical” ancestral past (Armstrong, 1982; Connor, 1993; Smith, 1998). As Hobsbawm suggests, “Modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so ‘natural’ as to require no definition other than self-assertion” (2013a, p. 14). In this sense, nationalist narratives affirm the “ancient, primordial, possibly even natural” and a-political basis of the nation (Calhoun, 1993, p. 214). The argument is that the legitimacy of nationalism, as well as its generalization, entails that nationalistic narratives be co-articulated with the content of tradition (Armstrong, 1982; Giddens, 1994). Nationalist rhetoric articulated by appropriating folklore culture and traditional myths, customs, and habits and imputing unto them nationalistic overtones. Culture is presumed to be transmitted through a direct ancestral bloodline that is thought to tie together the people of the past with the people of the present and the future (see Ignatieff, 1993). This imputed biologism is one of the principal dimensions of national loyalty (see Ignatieff, 1993).

It should be noted that this kindled interest in the cultural dimensions of nationalism can be traced back to Kohn’s (1965) distinction between Western “civic” and Eastern “ethnic” nationalisms, the latter of which is articulated primarily in reference to its cultural past, that is, its traditions (p. 30). But the question of tradition has also received its fair share of critical attention. There is considerable controversy

surrounding the question of whether nationalistic traditions are instrumentally engineered or whether they developed organically. Gellner (1983), for example, takes an extreme instrumentalist approach calling the nation an “arbitrary” construction that can be engineered out of any old “shred and patch” (1983, p. 56). Theorists such as Brass and Hobsbawm emphasize the invented and engineered nature of nationalistic traditions, though both accept that instrumental articulations of tradition for political purposes can and often do make use of the available cultural stock (Brass, 1991, pp. 74-77; Hobsbawm, 2013a, pp. 7, 13; 2013b, p. 263). Ethnicity and nationality for Brass, as an example, hinge on elite competition, which is guided by political and economic considerations. The emergence of ethnicities and nationalities are guided by elites who instrumentally engineer culture for the group’s interests by taking into consideration the cultural stock that resonates with the people (Brass, 1991, pp. 74–75).

The ethno-symbolist school, on the other hand, maintains that the formation of nations is intimately tied to pre-existing bonds, identifications and traditions. It is particularly critical of instrumentalist conceptions of tradition and nationality and emphasizes the ethnic and symbolic origins of nations (Armstrong, 1982; Hutchinson, 1987, 2005; Smith, 1986). The ethno-symbolists are in agreement with the instrumentalists that the symbolic content of national identity is not constant but, rather, time and place specific. However, the formation of nations is not merely an invention, as an extreme instrumentalist would hold, but it necessitates an extant cultural pool from which “material” is drawn from. Taking it a step further, some ethno-symbolists have suggested that even though nations and nationalism, as generalized phenomena, are of a modern character, there is enough evidence to support that there is “some measure of national continuity” across time (Smith, 1998, p. 10). Historical studies of nations attest to this assertion and find that in Europe, there were nation-like manifestations and expressions, dating as far back as the Middle Ages (Greenfeld, 1992; Hroch, 1996; Seton-Watson, 1977) and even antiquity (Smith, 1986, 1991).

In his ground-breaking book, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) Anthony Smith defines ethnic communities as “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity” (p. 32). For Smith, it is these cultural

affinities that are embodied in shared memories, ethnic symbols and myths of descent, that constitute the basis of ethnic and, in subsequent historical stages, national communities (Smith, 1998, p. 192). In other words, the constitution and self-awareness of a people needs to latch onto collectively embodied symbols and sentiments (Armstrong, 1982; Smith, 1986). The difference, then, between pre-modern ethnic communities and nations is that the former in very rare cases constituted the basis for polity formation (Armstrong, 1982, p. 4; Smith, 1998, p. 192). It was only during and after the political, economic, technological, and cultural revolutions of the modern world, all of which fundamentally transformed socio-political communities, that ethnic identity became politically salient and a viable basis for polity formation. According to Smith, this was achieved, historically, in two main ways. The first involves the bureaucratic incorporation of population clusters by the state. The culture of an aristocratic *ethnie* is gradually diffused through the state and becomes the basis of the emerging territorial nation (Smith, 1998, pp. 193–194). The second “route to nationhood we may term one of *vernacular mobilisation*. Here a demotic *ethnie* is transformed largely under the aegis of an indigenous intelligentsia into an ethnic nation [...] The result is a type of nation founded on ‘ethnic’ conceptions, and fuelled by a genealogical nationalism” (Smith, 1998, p. 194).

It should be noted that the historical linkage between pre-modern ethnicities and modern nations has received much critical attention, even within the ethno-symbolist school (Armstrong, 1982; Guibernau & Hutchinson, 2004; Smith, 1991). Smith (1991), for example, acknowledges that “the relationship of modern nations to any ethnic core is problematic and uncertain” (p. 41). He nonetheless insists that the emergence of national consciousness should be sought in its (presumed) ethnic core, for two reasons. First, the first nations that emerged were formed on the basis of a presumed shared ethnic identity. Second, the generalization of ethnonationalism became the basis for subsequent nation-formations. Even in settings where an ethnic historical core was absent, it was fabricated through the construction of presumed historical ethnic mythologies and symbolisms. “Without some ethnic lineage,” notes Smith, “the nation-to-be could fall apart” (Smith, 1991, p. 42).

In examining the broader relevance of the ethnosymbolists' contribution, it is important to note that it challenges the idea that the nation and nationalism are principally and, in the last instance, political phenomena. The political understanding of nationhood has its roots in the works of the early social historians (e.g., Kohn, 1965) of nations and, even more so, the classical modernists, whose work disputed the common-sense primordialist/perennialist understanding of nationhood. Rather, their observations revealed that nations are distinctively modern, and therefore political constructions of modernity. Political understandings of nationhood, therefore, see the nation as being instrumentally fashioned for political purposes (Brass, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 2012, 2013b) or as a by-product of state (i.e., the political unit) expansion and penetration in society (Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985; Mann, 2009). Others affirm the political character of nationalism by focusing on its constitutive ideological narratives. Kedourie has effectively articulated this position as early as 1961, by showing how nationalist narratives presuppose the convergence between politics and culture—a theme later adopted by notable authors, like Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (2012) and Giddens (1985).

In assessing the ethnosymbolists' argument, it is important to note that the political dimension of nations and nationalism are not disputed. Far from it. Rather, the ethnosymbolists claim is that nations are underpinned by an extant ethnic and cultural core that predated their formation. In this sense, nations are not seen as being principally political or instrumental constructions. Rather, ethnic culture is the basis of nations-to-be, even when it is deployed “instrumentally” or for political purposes. Hutchinson (2005), as an example, has critiqued Mann's state-oriented approach, noting that his “interpretation underplays the degree to which *cohesive states could only be founded on older ethnic legitimations* and also the extent to which *class mobilisation itself was shaped by prior ethnic visions*” (p. 131). Hutchinson (1987) then proceeds to suggest that what is key in understanding nation formation is “the appeal of nationalism as a constructor of meaning that was able to trump without eradicating previous attachments to family, region, class, region and religion” (p. 131). In this sense, what is emphasized is the *long duree* of culture and ethnicity. Consequently, nation formation and the emergence of nationalism are best understood by examining the inextricable link between culture and politics. Indeed, Smith (1986, 1991) has shown how

nationalism and nation formation entails the very politicization of ethnicity and ethnic elements that have predated modernity. This helps explain not only the political force behind national projects, but also their relative stability over time (Hutchinson, 2005; Smith, 1986, 1991).

Perennialism and Primordialism

The debate concerning the link between ethnicity and the nation is a subset of a broader debate in the literature which concerns the historical origins of the nation. Modernists generally emphasize the engineered, rational, political, and voluntary aspects of nation formation. It is this lean toward constructivism that pushes the analysis toward an understanding of the nation as characteristically modern. In contradistinction, a number of theorists maintain that the nation is perennial and primordial in character. These forms of perennialism and primordialism should, however, be differentiated from the crude primordialism of early theories of nationalism, such as that of Herder and Fichte. In brief, perennial theorists regard the nation to be either a continuation of its pre-modern ethnic kernel or, in extreme cases, identical with it (Smith, 1998, p. 60). They nonetheless generally refrain from explicitly essentializing the nation (Smith, 1998, p. 60). Primordialists also see the nation as immemorial but they take the argument a step further. As a critical response against modernists' overemphasis on the presumed rational and political aspects of the nation, primordialists emphasize the psychological and ineffable non-rational bonds that underlie nation formations. Though they also refrain from essentializing the cultural characteristics of nations, they nonetheless endorse the "naturalness" of the non-rational bond.

Walker Connor, as an example, defines the nation as a "self-aware ethnic group" (Connor, 1978, p. 388). What differentiates the nation from an ethnic community is that an ethnic community can be other-defined, whereas the nation has to bear self-consciousness. And while Connor is clear in a number of his works that nations and nationalism are modern and mass in character, he asserts that what underlies the national bond is a non-rational, unconscious, emotive psychological mechanism that is as much a

characteristic of modern nations as it is of pre-modern ethnicities (Connor, 1978, 1984, 1993). This bond is riddled with a variety of symbolisms that proclaim the presumed kinship ties and common ancestry of ethnic or national members (Connor, 1993). A nation, therefore, is “a group of people who feel that they are ancestrally related. It is the largest group that can command a person’s loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is, from this perspective, the fully extended family” (Connor, 1993, p. 382). And while this felt kinship almost never accords with factual data, what matters is that people believe it to be true and that this belief has consequences. What is, therefore, perennial about the nation is the fact that it evolves, as a self-conscious entity, out of pre-existing ethnic communities, and the fact that the community is furnished on a psychological (ethnic) bond-type that is not a property of modernity.

Joshua Fishman advances a more forceful argument. For Fishman (1989) ethnicity is a mode of “being,” “doing” and “knowing” that includes a wide variety of practices, such as songs, prayers and rituals, that facilitate communal bonds and inter-generational continuity (p. 16). Most interestingly, Fishman sees ethnicity as being inscribed unto and expressed by the body and, hence, is experienced as a bodily and biological connection between the people of the past and the present. For Fishman there is a biological basis to ethnicity, but it extends beyond to the realm of cultural construction. In this sense, ethnicity is not merely determined by biology but is subject to historical change that is nonetheless determined by the particularities of the ethnic culture. Nations are, therefore, a historically situated instantiation of underlying ethnic expressions (Fishman, 1989, p. 106).

As already noted, theorists have formulated even more extreme endorsements of the presumed eternal character of the nation. They stress, not just the perennial character of the nation, but also its primordiality. Clifford Geertz (1973) proposes that identity formations of various sorts (e.g., national, linguistic, racial etc.) are animated by a primordial attachment between the members of the community (pp. 259–260). The primordial attachment flows out of the everyday “givens,” continuities, and congruities of social existence, such as kin connection, common language, religion, etc. (Geertz, 1973, p. 259). He further suggests that these congruities “have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves [...] as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity,

common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself” (Geertz, 1973, p. 259).

Pierre van den Berghe (1978) approaches the matter of primordial attachment from a sociobiological perspective. The key concept that van den Berghe uses to advance his argument is “inclusive fitness,” the conscious and unconscious predisposition toward kin selection and cooperation in the service of survival and reproduction. He suggests that ethnicity is an “extended and attenuated form of kin selection” that is facilitated by the “cultural inventions of unilineal descent and lineage exogamy” (van den Berghe, 1978, pp. 403–404). Van den Berghe is clear that he does not endorse the idea that an ethnocentric gene exists nor that inter-ethnic relations are restricted amongst kin. Rather, he suggests that “those societies that institutionalized norms of nepotism and ethnocentrism had a strong selective advantage over those that did not” (van den Berghe, 1978, p. 405).

Despite the creative ways that the aforementioned authors have re-articulated primordialist and perennialist answers to the problem of the nation, they have, to this date, failed to attract much interest and support from the discipline (Smith, 1998). The only exception is Walker Connor, who, despite his perennial tendencies, is still largely within the modernist framework.

Contemporary Theoretical Contributions

Recent literature on the nation and nationalism has cast doubt on many of the assumptions that underlie the modernist paradigm. A number of authors have scrutinized the concept of the nation and ethnicity on the grounds that such terms are often assumed to be self-evident and, most importantly, unitary (Homi Bhabha, 1990; Chatterjee, 1993b; Hall, 1997, 2005; Hutchinson, 2005; McNeill, 1986). McNeill (1986) for example, argues that, with the ascent of nationalist projects, polyethnicity became Europe’s “forgotten” norm, and observes that, as nations become increasingly de-centred and fragmented, we are once again returning to the polyethnic standard (McNeill, 1986, pp. 6–7).

Interestingly, certain modernist premises are even challenged by modernist adherents. In *Nations as Zones of Conflict* (2005), Hutchinson challenges the idea of “the unified mass nation” and of “a national state as sovereign power container, capable of circumscribing its populations” as an economically and militarily autonomous entity (p. 121). Indeed, the operations of the national state were always embedded in and necessarily contingent upon international relations (Billig, 1995; Hutchinson, 2005; Wallerstein, 2004), while the content of national identity and nationalist politics is invariable undercut by a dimension of conflict (Hutchinson, 2005).

Other theorists have scrutinized the category of the nation by zeroing in on recent global economic, political and technological developments. Ever since the generalization of neoliberalism and the concomitant proliferation of cross-national technological interconnectivity, a number of theorists have focused on how these very globalizing developments alter the workings of the nation-state (Bauman, 1992; Beck, 1992, 2009b; Sassen, 2006), as well as national identifications (Bauman, 1992; Beck & Levy, 2013; Pieterse, 2006). David Held and his colleagues (2003a) have done a remarkable job in effectively capturing the breadth of these debates. While the lines of contention are remarkably diverse and nuanced, what is relevant to our endeavours is the question of whether, how and to what extent, globalization or neoliberalism have transformed the constitutive dimensions of the nation-state. A number of works have demonstrated that the institutionalization of a wide array of cultural, political, economic, and technological processes beyond the confines of the nation-state have either undermined or transformed the nation-state) (Beck, 2009a; Brown, 2010; Castells, 2009; Holton, 2011; Sassen, 2006; Schlesinger, 1992) and national identifications (Bauman, 1992; Beck & Levy, 2013; Melucci, 1990; Pieterse, 2006). The work of Habermas, has been remarkably influential in promoting this argument, by linking it to questions of democracy. Habermas (2003) suggests that

Development trends collected under the catchphrase ‘globalization’ have transformed a historical constellation that had defined state, society, and economy as more or less coextensive within national boundaries. In the wake of globalization, the international economic system—in which

states establish the boundary between their domestic economies and foreign trade relations – has been transformed into a transnational economy. (p. 87)

As an outcome, nation-states are increasingly unable to effectively manage their “national” economies (Habermas, 1998). This is due to the inability of nation-states to manage economic processes that extend beyond their territorial jurisdiction, while nonetheless being subjected to their effects (Habermas, 1998, pp. 236–237). The transnational economy has thus, in varying degrees, weakened national economic assemblages, while subordinating them to the norms of the global economy.

These developments have compromised the autonomy of nation-states. As Habermas (2003) suggests, states are “increasingly ensnared in the interdependencies of a global economy” and “forfeit their own capacities for autonomous action as well as their democratic substance” (p. 89). These interdependencies stem from an array of economic initiatives that have been institutionalized through international agreements and legislation but which are not subject to supranational management. Thus the transnational expansion of economies is facilitated by the state but is not necessarily accompanied by equivalent transnational competencies in oversight.

Under these conditions, the state is increasingly unable to live up to its prescribed economic, social and democratic functions, resulting in legitimation withdrawal (Habermas, 2003, pp. 90–91). Habermas (2003) observes that “the reduction of state autonomy reveals that individual states no longer adequately protect their citizens from the external effects of decisions made by other actors, or from causal chain decision-making processes originating beyond the national borders” (p. 90). This can be attributed to the fact that key decision-making processes are increasingly withdrawn from the national arena and are, therefore, not subject to national democratic participation (Habermas, 2003, p. 90). For example, the G8 summits and World Trade Organization agreements that have been instrumental in engineering the global economy have taken place primarily behind closed doors by economic and political elites.

It is useful to note that some of the principal names that are associated with the classical modernist thesis have weighed in on the globalization debate (Anderson, 2005; Hutchinson, 2000; Mann, 1997; Smith, 1990). Smith (1990), as an example, interrogates whether one can identify a discernable movement toward the emergence of a global culture. He begins by noting that the notion of a global culture is itself self-defeating, since a particular culture can only be understood in differentiation from other cultures (Smith, 1990, p. 171). He proceeds by conceding that we are witnessing—but partly—the emergence of a global culture that is underpinned by a technological, technical and communicational base (Smith, 1990, p. 177). This is a context-free culture “drawn from everywhere and nowhere” that is driven by “global telecommunication systems” (Smith, 1990, p. 177). However, there is nothing to suggest that the development of this global culture is overshadowing national identification (Smith, 1990, p. 188). Global culture, to the extent that we can speak of one, is “artificial” in character, “answers to no living needs” and does not foster identities (Smith, 1990, p. 180). This is because, unlike national identity, it does not operate on the basis of “shared memories,” cannot contribute to “a sense of common destiny” and neither can it impart a sense of historical continuity between succeeding generations (Smith, 1990, p. 179). Thus, the vision of an emerging global culture eclipsing national identities, is highly unlikely (Smith, 1990, p. 188).

Mann (1997), in a more multilayered analysis, examines whether globalization has ended the rise of the nation-state. More specifically, he examines whether global capitalist transformation, post-nuclear geopolitics, (transnational) identity politics and environmental danger, have contributed to either strengthening or weakening nation-states. His findings are ambiguous. Global capitalist economic developments contribute to the weakening of the nation-states of “the North,” but that it will probably lead to the strengthening of nation-states elsewhere (Mann, 1997, p. 494). The decline of geopolitical “hard politics” may weaken the core nation-states, but it may simultaneously increase their assertion through “soft politics,” even if these operate through nation-state networks (Mann, 1997, pp. 493–494). “And identity politics may (contrary to most views) actually strengthen nation-states” (Mann, 1997, p. 494). Clearer evidence in favour of the globalist thesis points to the expansion of global interaction

networks and the diminution of local interaction networks, but even the case of the former is “segmented by the particularities of nation-states” (Mann, 1997, pp. 494–495). The ambiguity and contradictory nature of these developments caution us against any unequivocal assertions that nation-states have either weakened or strengthened (Mann, 1997, p. 494). It is worthwhile noting that Mann and Smith’s reservation about the “globalist thesis” mirrors those of a number of theorists who are firmly situated within the globalization debate. There are a number of authors who are (highly) skeptical of the “globalist thesis,” which affirms the unprecedentedness, pervasiveness, and inevitability of “globalizing trends,” citing the vague and, often, uncritical deployment of the catch-all term “globalization” (Held & McGrew, 2003b; Helleiner & Pickel, 2005; Hirst, 1997; Hirst, Thompson, & Bromley, 2009; Weiss, 1997)

In returning to our principal issue of concern, that is, of the nation and nationalism, it is of utmost importance to note that discontent against the modernist paradigm has been expressed by recent gender-oriented literature that argues that modernist theorists of nationalism have, to a very large extent, ignored the question of gender (Enloe, 2014; Kandiyoti, 2004; McClintock, 1993; Walby, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1993; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Yuval-Davis (1993) notes that women partake in the nation-state project as intergenerational culture transmitters and biological reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1993, pp. 627–630). These roles are fed by and sustained by underlying patriarchal structures that, on the one hand, include women in nation-state projects and, on the other, relegate them to second class citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 1993, pp. 625–626). Chatterjee (1993a) has summarized this argument quite forcefully in his postcolonial studies:

If nationalist ideology in late nineteenth-century Bengal legitimized the subjection of women under a new patriarchy, its history must be a history of struggle. The difficulty which faces historians here is that by working from the conventional archives of political history, women appear in the history of nationalism only in a “contributive” role. All one can assert here is that women also took an active part in nationalist struggle, but one cannot identify any autonomous

subjectivity of women and from that standpoint question the manner in which the hegemonic claims of nationalist culture were themselves fashioned. (1993a, p. 137)

The primary “determinants” of the state and quality of women’s oppression have their roots in: (a) the institutionalization of the public-private divide, which invariably excludes women from the political domain and the structures of powers; and (b) the configuration of the institution of the family and its accompanying practices, e.g., marriage, divorce, welfare laws, etc. (Yuval-Davis, 1993, pp. 625–626).

Jayawardena’s (1986) critique takes as its prime foci the role feminist movements played in national projects in the “East,” more specifically. Her empirical findings point to the fact that feminist movements intersected, helped shape and contribute to nationalist liberation struggles and nation-building projects. She counters the commonly-held belief that feminism is solely a product of the West by providing empirical evidence to the contrary. Questions of gender and “feminist” movements were political realities in a number of non-Western countries even as early as the nineteenth century. This is not to say that Western feminism did not have a role in shaping “Eastern” feminism but rather to suggest that feminism is not saturated, determined, and shaped completely by the interest of Western bourgeois women.

Enloe’s (2014) analysis also takes an international scope by exploring how constructions of gender and gender relations play a key role in the structuring of the international nation-state system. She notes, for example, that imperial domination is often justified through gendered representations. “Oriental” women, as an example, are often eroticized as exotic objects of pursuit that need European men’s protection. Tackling the topic of nationalism more specifically, Enloe suggests that national movements were born out of the male imaginary as masculine constructions. As an inevitable corollary constructions of nationhood mirrored this masculinity. This leads Enloe to conclude that national projects would be characteristically different had women been included in the course of their construction. This assertion is mirrored by Walby (1992) who notes that, while women are in fact participants in nation-state

projects, their differential involvement, which is mediated by race, ethnicity and supra-national processes, results in differential articulations of nationalism and understanding of the nation and the state.

In situating the total sum of the aforementioned contemporary contributions in a broader schema, one should note that what we are witnessing is a progressive trend toward the de-essentialization of the nation, nationalism and the nation-state. Indeed, some recent works have advanced strong critiques of modernist understandings of nationalism (Calhoun, 1997, Chapter 1; Helleiner & Pickel, 2005, pp. 7-13; Sutherland, 2005; Tishkov, 2000), while others have attempted to move beyond positivistic definitions of the phenomenon (Billig, 1995; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Jenkins & Sofos, 2005a; Stavrakakis, 2007; Sutherland, 2005; Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009). Billig (1995), as an example, is highly critical of the long-held distinction between “Eastern” and “Western” nationalism, noting that this distinction assumes a normative dimension in real-life politics. “Western” civic nationalism is seen as the “good” type of nationalism, and it is typically the lens through which U.S. society sees its own nationalism. “Eastern” ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, is seen as the “bad” type or “hot” type of nationalism that is reserved for other nation’s nationalism. This distinction, in turn, obfuscates the everyday “banal nationalism” that is highly imbricated in the social structure, and which continuously manifests in an array of everyday “rituals.”

Calhoun’s (1997) critique of the classical modernists is broader and much more comprehensive. He notes that each modernist theory of nationalism only partially explains the phenomenon at hand (Calhoun, 1997, p. 21). He further asserts that any theoretical explanation of nationalism that relies on “a master variable” is bound to be arbitrarily reductionistic and (Calhoun, 1997, p. 21). These “master variables” may help explain the various contents and processes of nationalism, “but they do not explain the form of nation or nationalist discourse itself” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 21).

Calhoun’s critique runs parallel to post-structuralist assessments of the nation, which interrogate the aporetic tensions that inhere to the category of “the nation” (Bhabha, 1990; Derrida, 1992). Such works have critically assessed the very assumptions that underlie the category of “nationhood.” Bhabha, in his capriciously entitled essay “DissemiNation” (1990), prozes, in very much a post-structuralist vein,

the ambiguities that are immanent to the very construction of the term “nation” that undermine the category from within. “The nation,” he notes, is born out of a disjunction in nationalistic narratives, which endorse both a linear cursive and a performative understanding of time (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 212-215). The former turns the people into objects of history—they become the sedimentation of the continuous and uninterrupted history of the people (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 214-215). The latter turns the people into living subjects that operate iteratively in the present as emblems of the nation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 215). The antinomy between the linear and recursive conception of time opens up a void that needs to be bridge by means of supplementation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 217). The process of supplementation, however, has the partial alteration of the national identity as a necessary consequence (Bhabha, 1994, p. 218). The void is, therefore, that precarious space between the signification of the nation’s totality and its very vulnerability that exposes it to alterity.

The “turn” away from essentialist understandings of the nation and nationalism, is also reflected in recent trends in the literature that attempt to examine nationalism and the nation by employing discourse-oriented theory (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999; Hall, 1996; Stavrakakis, 2005, 2007; Sutherland, 2005; Wodak et al., 2009). Laudable contributions come from the Vienna School of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is spearheaded the work of Ruth Wodak. CDA “is faced with the twofold task of revealing the relationship between linguistic means, forms and structures and concrete linguistic practice, and making transparent the reciprocal relationship between discursive action and political and institutional structures” (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 9). The construction of national identity is, in turn, understood in terms of its content, strategies and means of realization (Wodak et al., 2009, pp. 30–47). In this sense, CDA employs a broadened understanding of language (i.e., discourse) that shows how it is imbricated in, and constitutive of, social structures. However, from the standpoint of CDA, language is still largely restricted to written and verbal discourse. This restricted understanding of language, or discourse, has been thoroughly critiqued by Post-Marxists, who afford us a more radicalized conception of language that sees it as being coterminous with social life (Laclau, 2014, p. 145).

Discourse-oriented analysis has also been advanced by Lacanian scholars. The work Easthope (2005) is remarkably instructive on how to understand how national identity is co-imbricated in, and co-constitutive of, cultural structures. In his notable study of English cultural life, he examines how empiricism, and the assumptions that underlie it, are imbricated in the cultural structure of English life, in a diversity of ways. Easthope's study demonstrates how English national identity is accessed through, and constituted by, metaphorical instantiations of empirical philosophy in everyday life, including the media, humour, literature etc. Other Lacanian scholars, such as Žižek (1993) and Stavrakakis (2007), place greater emphasis, in their analysis of nationalism, on how national identity and national forms of life come to be invested with affect. Stavrakakis (2007) begins his exposition by critiquing the modernists. He notes that, while the modernists are correct in affirming the constructed character of the nation, they nonetheless fail to explain "the durability and salience, the depth and longevity" of national identifications (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 192). The answer is to be sought in the nature of the psychic bond between people and the nation (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 192). His argument takes off from the commonly-held structuralist premise that identity is invariably constructed in terms of difference. In this sense, identity does exhibit the characteristics of a semiotic form (Stavrakakis, 2007, pp. 194–195). However, difference alone is not enough to explain the *force* behind political antagonisms, which may very often assume a "sinister" form, where another identity is experienced as "my" possible negation (Stavrakakis, 2007, pp. 194, 200). In order to explain this force, or drive, behind political antagonisms, Stavrakakis he introduces Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, which refers to our inherent drive toward a "primordial" full-enjoyment, that is "sacrificed" when we enter the realm of language, which is characterized by a dimension of lack (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 196). This desire toward enjoyment, which can only be partially fulfilled, undercuts our choices and identification acts (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 196). But there is also a sinister dimension to *jouissance*. By virtue of the fact that, enjoyment is invariably partial and incomplete, *jouissance* is simultaneously capriciously diverted, as negativity, toward that which supposedly obstructs full-enjoyment (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 197). This means that any identification act that incubates a partial satisfaction, will invariably be accompanied by a dimension of "hatred" toward "that thing" that

supposedly “steals” our enjoyment, that is, what comes to represent our lack of enjoyment (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 197). Thus, “national solidarity is maintained through the ritualisation of practices which offer limited enjoyment (celebrations, festivals, consumption rituals, and the like), as well as through the reproduction of the above-mentioned myth of national destiny in official and unofficial public discourse” (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 199). What is concomitantly produced is the “obscene Other” that symbolizes our lack of enjoyment, or the “theft of enjoyment” (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 202). “This is what accounts for the ever-present potential for violence, aggressiveness, and hatred marking national identification” (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 202).

In the context of this discussion it is imperative to mention how theoretical currents that precipitate from the Marxist tradition have found a most-effective counterpart in Lacanian theory. That the premises of orthodox Marxism have been progressively weakened over the course of the twentieth century, should come by no surprise to us. The works of Gramsci (1971c, 1971a) in particular were instrument in this leap: he saw socio-political formations as particular configurations of power that rested on historically-contingent relations. The notion of hegemony was instrumental in capturing this dynamic, which refers to a process of “infiltration” or “contamination,” where one identity asserts its rules through the production of subjectivity: it successfully, although only partially, “infiltrates” the subjectivity of other identities, through the production of culture. This opened up new paths for understandings the construction of socio-political blocs (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), in general, and studies of nationalism and ethnicity, in particular (Hall, 1986, 1996). The works of Laclau (2005b, 2007b, 2014) and Mouffe (2005) have been remarkably influential in studies of hegemony, politics and democracy. Their ground-breaking *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) affords us a reading of Gramscian theory through a (post)structuralist lens. In this sense, the work of Gramsci was radicalized with the creative theoretical introduction of Foucault, Freud, and, especially, Lacan, and Derrida. The problem of “the positivity of the social,” was solved through the introduction of novel epistemological frameworks that affirmed the radically indeterminate and overdetermined character of the social, which was seen as the terrain through which a hegemonic bloc was constructed.

In studies of nationalism, in particular, it is worth noting that there have been some limited attempts to understand the phenomenon of nationhood or nationalism, through a Post-Marxist lens (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Nikisianis, Kioupkiolis, & Siomos, 2017; Sutherland, 2005). The most direct application of a Post-Marxist theory to the question of nationalism, is that of Sutherland. Sutherland's (2005) endeavours are marked by the objective of moving beyond deterministic theories of nationalism "which purport to find their favoured factors at the root of all nationalist movements" (p. 186). Instead, the nation should be understood as an ideological construct, that is, as a coherent interpretive, institutional and belief system that maintains the political status quo (Sutherland, 2005, p. 188). The nationalist ideology, specifically "is organised around the core principle of prioritising the nation" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 188). From there on, Sutherland introduces a number of concepts from discourse-oriented theorists, including Laclau and Mouffe, while showing how these concepts can be applied to theoretical, as well as empirical, studies of nationalism. She introduces Laclau and Mouffe's concept of discourse, which refers to the whole socio-political fabric, while noting that ideology should be understood as a subset of discourse that orders common-sense interpretations (Sutherland, 2005, p. 191). She grants theoretical centrality to the political conflicts that underlie any hegemonic formation, noting how they involve "asserting one form of Discourse over another" through the construction of new common sense perspectives that have the effect of altering social identities (Sutherland, 2005, p. 191). Much in line with Laclau and Mouffe, she notes that the identity of antagonistic camps cannot be aprioristically relegated to any domain, e.g., class, but should be understood as being historically contingent (Sutherland, 2005, pp. 191, 193). "Allowing for a plurality of historical subjects" therefore "makes room for nationalism and nationalists as a subject of research" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 191). So, too, should nationalism be understood as being historically contingent and malleable (Sutherland, 2005, p. 193). Nationalism is not determined by the specific content of its elements but by the organizing principle that grants such elements unity and significance (Sutherland, 2005, p. 194). In this sense, any social formation is understood as being governed by plural attempts of hegemonizing particular societal organizing principles (Sutherland, 2005, p. 194). Thus, "In a world of omnipresent

nationalist ideology, the 'nation-state' is the hegemonic nationalist construct. The more entrenched this discourse is, the harder it will be to impose an alternative project as hegemonic" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 194). In this context, minority nationalist movements will aim at rearticulating social organizing principles by "using an alternative national construct" that is tied to different common sense beliefs (Sutherland, 2005, p. 194). National projects, therefore, concern the articulation of the content of the nodal point of "the nation," and common-sense perceptions that come to be tied with it (Sutherland, 2005, p. 195). "The prize is conceptual hegemony. However, campaigners challenging generally accepted definitions find themselves in a far more difficult position than ideologues supporting an existing 'nation-state' construct. The latter have successfully decontested the concept of the nation to their advantage, thereby hampering attempts at resistance" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 195). Nationalist studies should therefore aim at deconstructing the manner by which the signifier of "the nation" permeates the rhetoric of actors, while delineating the signifier's "constitutive elements and internal tensions" (Sutherland, 2005, pp. 96, 97). "The nation," then, is understood as being "characterised as the rhetorical expression of an underlying ideology" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 198), which is entirely contextual (Sutherland, 2005, p. 200).

Chapter 3: The Vestiges of Historical Materialism

In the field of nationalism studies, it is generally understood that Marxian contributions are deficient, if not peripheral to the topic of interest. To my knowledge, no major author in our field utilizes an orthodox Marxist approach. This, of course, is not to suggest that Marxism has not influenced our field of study, or that the traces of its reasoning do not periodically pop up in the midst of our formulations. Contemporary theory is, in many respects, an on-going conversation with Marxism. It is to suggest, however, that there has been a conscious distancing from Marxian thought and an attempt to dissolve the essentialist determinations that guided its epistemological premises. What we are of course referring to here is Marxism's overreliance on economistic reasoning. As already delineated in Chapter 2, classical Marxist theories (e.g., Stalin, 1953, p. 319), typically conceived of nations as *epiphenomena* that are the by-product of historical laws of motion (Connor, 1984). In this sense, nations are principally understood and theoretically interrogated in reference to the so-called "national question" (e.g., Lenin, 1964; Luxemburg, 1976), where the authors articulate a position on whether national determination can spearhead a progressive movement toward international socialism (Hobsbawm, 1977, p. 10; Kedourie, 1961, p. 90; Smith, 1998, p. 48). Marxist proponents of the right to national self-determination suggest that the institutionalization of socialism vis-à-vis national determination will result in the elimination of cross-national domination, since under the precepts of a national socialism, class consciousness would come to be actualized (Connor, 1984, p. 29). It would therefore extend beyond national divisions (Connor, 1984, p. 29). In this sense, progressive change is principally seen as being propelled by a class consciousness that operates through an intermediary (and temporary) national consciousness. But this position has also been critiqued on the grounds that any movement toward socialism should be, from the onset, international in character.

But as Anderson (2006) suggests, Marxist convictions of an eminent internationalism do not conform to actual empirical cases (pp. 1-4). He notes that "since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms—the People's Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of

Vietnam, and so forth—and, in so doing, has grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past” (Anderson, 2006, p. 2). This view is one shared by Hobsbawm (1977, p. 13) as well. A number of other theorists of nationalism have advanced substantive critiques against Marxism, by examining its theoretical, and, consequently, its political failures (Giddens, 1981; Löwy, 1976; Nairn, 1975). The most prolific author within our field that is associated with this line of critique, is Tom Nairn. Nairn wages, one might suggest, a polemical critique against orthodox Marxism and its failure to properly examine nationalism. His work, moreover, reveals how the very theoretical deficiencies in orthodox Marxism found expressions in political failures. A concise exposition of this line of critique is clearly advanced by Nairn in the following passage from his most-famous essay, “The Modern Janus” (1975):

The *coup de grâce* to their dithering was administered by Stalin’s essay on *The National Question* (1912). By the most sinister of coincidences, the one text most suitable for canonization in the new creed was by the great dictator himself. That this essay was one of the more modest relics of the great unfinished pre-1914 debate [on the national question] mattered little. Under the new conditions it riveted Stalin’s name to the halo of Lenin. This is why it is still almost universally parroted by every brand of party Marxism. For half a century, organized Marxism has relied almost entirely upon this inadequate instrument in grappling with this most baffling and dangerous historical opponent—whose force seemed set fair to annihilate it altogether until the turning-point of Stalingrad. (p. 4)

At the backdrop of this theoretico-political failure, Nairn develops a new theory of nationalism that deploys modified Marxian concepts, fused with a world-systems approach. As I will demonstrate, despite Nairn’s attempts to overcome the obstacles that have been laid by the Marxist tradition, he comes back full circle only to be devoured by the very epistemological premises that guided the authors he so adamantly critiqued. Let us proceed in delineating his theory.

Nairn's argument rests on a premise that he makes explicit: "As I say, the task of framing a 'theory' of nationalism is that of understanding the destructive mechanisms and contradictions of uneven development—and this, in turn, is the task of re-interpreting modern history as a whole" (Nairn, 1975, p. 25). His argument can be sketched out as follows. Nationalism is a by-product of the material contradictions in global "uneven development." As the developmental forces spread unevenly throughout the globe, they generated a unified global political economy, while simultaneously fragmenting it. Being primarily motivated and motioned by the "sordid material interests" of those who controlled them, the onslaught of the developmental forces resulted in a new form of imperialism and, thus, antagonism between "the core" and the colonized "periphery." From the standpoint of "the periphery," this imperialism, which was very often accompanied by a series of devastating effects, was signified by the idea of progress. Nationalistic ideology emerges as a compensatory mechanism, used by elites in "the periphery" to mobilize the masses against imperialists. "Peripheral" would-be nations, steered by elite nationalist ideology, mobilized against "progress," while simultaneously trying to take ownership of it, in attempts of improving their "position" within the global political economy.

Even at the level of this synopsis, we already encounter analytic categories deeply embedded in the social, political and economic canon: contradiction, antagonism, ideology and materialism. Let us now proceed by examining in greater detail, how Nairn employs these categories, in his attempts to advance a novel understanding of nationalism.

Nairn's (1975) argument takes as its starting point, what he perceives to be a primary historical contradiction that operates on a global scale (pp. 8, 22). His prime object of analysis, and, therefore, the root of nationalism, is the world political economy (Nairn, 1975, p. 8). But it is a specific feature of the world political economy that is thought to engender nationalism, and that is the global uneven diffusion of the developmental forces, or, more generally, progress. The whole argument rests on the borrowed Trotskyite concept of "uneven and combined development," which, Nairn (1975) defines as: "The unforeseeable, antagonistic reality of capitalism's growth into the world [...] It indicates the shambling, fighting, lop-sided, illogical, head-over-heels fact, so to speak, as distinct from the noble uplift and phased

amelioration of the ideal” (p. 10). This process is, moreover, governed by an inherent contradiction: capitalism’s global onslaught has united human societies, while also engendering “a perilous and convulsive new fragmentation of that society” (Nairn, 1975, p. 12). He foreshadows his conclusion by asserting that “[t]he socio-historical cost of this rapid implantation of capitalism into world society was ‘nationalism’” (Nairn, 1975, p. 12). But for Nairn (1975), it is apparent that the fissures introduced by the global spread of capitalism were greater than its unitary tendencies (p. 24). The fact that the developmental forces were being principally controlled by a relatively small group of elites in European metropolises, meant that development was primarily driven by “sordid material interests,” which were often motioned alongside the deployment of new military and state powers (Nairn, 1975, p. 10). The associated effects were devastating for peripheral regions, which, apart from being subjects to imperial rule, were soon being drowned up by a foreign cultural vortex, which gave neither the space nor the time for assimilation. In Nairn’s (1975) poignant words, “For those outside the metropolis (where in unique and unrepeatable circumstances things had matured slowly) the problem was not to assimilate culture at a reasonable rate: it was to avoid being drowned” (p. 10). So what we are witnessing here is the efflorescence of an antagonism as it outpours from the cultural and economic spaces curved out by the global contagion of capitalist development.

In the context of this burgeoning antagonism, elites in peripheral nations soon found out that only a few of them at a time could be seamlessly incorporated into the cosmopolitan technocracy (Nairn, 1975, p. 11). Rather, the norms of this sort of incorporation were similarly characterized by novel antagonisms and associated exclusions. So the elites turned elsewhere in their attempts to steer the path of history. The challenge here was to mobilize politically against the onslaught of progress, while simultaneously taking ownership of it. The challenge was to assimilate the means of progress that were introduced by the imperialists, while simultaneously marking them with their own identity. In Nairn’s (1975) own words

Unable to literally ‘copy’ the advanced lands (which would have entailed repeating the stages of slow growth that had led to the breakthrough), the backward regions were forced to take what

they wanted and cobble it on to their own native inheritance of social forms. In the annals of this kind of theorizing the procedure is called ‘uneven and combined development’. To defend themselves, the periphery countries were compelled to try and advance ‘in their own way’, to ‘do it for themselves’. Their rulers—or at least the newly-awakened élites who now came to power—had to mobilize their societies for this historical short-cut. This meant the conscious formation of a militant, inter-class community rendered strongly (if mythically) aware of its own separate identity vis-à-vis the outside forces of domination. (p. 11)

So the masses were invited into a historic battle against the oppressor. Their political inter-class mobilization was executed on the basis of a distinctive people, that is, of an inherited ethnos of cultural particularities in speech, folklore, skin-colour, etc. (Nairn, 1975, p. 11). Nationalist ideology, which proclaimed the cultural individuality of the people, was deployed in these efforts. It was utilized in a highly idealistic, rhetorical, sentimental and romanticist fashion, that was accessible to a plurality of strata, in attempts to forge a unified frontal line of attack against the oppressor (Nairn, 1975, p. 12). As Nairn (1975) notes, “Nationalism works through *differentiae* like those because it has to. It is not necessarily democratic in outlook, but it *is* invariably populist” (p. 11). Thus, the forces of combined and uneven development generated a novel dimension of political antagonisms that were executed on the basis of nationalist ideology.

It is paramount to note that Nairn’s explanation is predicated on a causal chain that is, in the first place, propelled by economic factors: the uneven diffusion of the developmental forces generates an antagonism between “core” and “periphery,” which in turn generates nationalist ideology that is deployed in the context of this antagonism. The vestiges of Marxist thought are undoubtedly present in Nairn’s exposition. Nairn is, essentially, transposing the notion of antagonism from “class struggle” to, let us say, “anti-colonial national populism.” In this sense, I believe I am justified in stating that the theory’s internal workings are housed in the Marxian logic that Nairn sought to extricate. This becomes all the more apparent if we examine how Nairn conceives of the relationship between “matter” and “ideology.” What

does Nairn mean, exactly, when he asserts that nationalism is “ideology?” Referring specifically to the “universal folklore of nationalism,” Nairn suggests that it is ideology because

it is the generally acceptable ‘false consciousness’ of a social world still in the grip of ‘nationalism’. It is a mechanism of adjustment and compensation, a way of living with the reality of those forms of historical development we label ‘nationalism’. As such, it is perhaps best regarded as a set of important clues towards whatever these forms [of historical development] are really about. (Nairn, 1975, p. 7)

We should note, as a preliminary step to our argument, the aporetic tensions in this passage. In the absence of a clear distinction between “nationalism” and “nationalist ideology” (there is none), nationalism is simultaneously presented as being both *the milieu and the explanation for that milieu*. Strictly speaking, then, nationalism cannot be regarded to be a form of “false consciousness,” which implies an underlying truth, or essentialist determination, against which an ideology operates and obfuscates. I will preliminary say that this mishap outpours from an incorrect theoretical treatment of the relationship between “ideas” and “matter.” Nationalism, is, in essence, accorded causal primacy as a form of ideology, while the ultimate primacy of material conditions of existence is asserted. Let us briefly bypass this theoretical mishap, while keeping it at the back of our heads, in efforts of revealing the full breadth of Nairn’s argument.

Preliminarily accepting the argument that nationalism constitutes a form of ideology, let us proceed in examining how Nairn defines false consciousness. Nairn is clear that nationalism is not entirely counter-factual. It would be unable to function as ideology if it were not, as it would be unable to capture the populace’s imagination, so to speak. It therefore contains a measure of truth. But it operates as ideology, as false consciousness, to the extent that it obfuscates its underlying determinant: global uneven development. For it is only in the context of accelerated development that nationhood acquires its systemic and abstract meaning, but this meaning does not derive

from the fact of development as such. This is the sensitive juncture at which truth evaporates into useful ideology. It is simply not the case (although humanity has always had plenty of reasons for wishing it were the case) that national-ism, the compulsive necessity for a certain sociopolitical form, arises naturally from these new developmental conditions. It is not nature. (Nairn, 1975, p. 7)

Thus, the ideology of nationalism transgresses in its internal presumption that the national form is somewhat naturally co-extensive, coeval and coterminous, with development. But where exactly does nationalism *actually* derive from and, therefore, obfuscate? Nairn (1975) is clear that nationalism operates as a “compensatory reaction,” whose “ideal intensification” corresponds to the “absence of a material reality,” which for Nairn is understood as the “economic and social institutions of modernity” (p. 14). Nationalism is thus understood as a “compensating ideological weapon” against this absence (Nairn, 1975, p. 14). And Nairn (1975) is clear that nationalism constitutes a “forced response” to the “material dilemma” of “underdevelopment” (p. 14). Thus, the “ideological” component of nationalism is revealed in the fact that, while its emergence is in actuality determined by the absence of modern economic and social institutions, it proclaims the nation to be the natural carrier of these institutions.

We have very much returned into the trenches of the notion of material contradiction. As a reminder, the material contradiction that Nairn is identifying, refers to the concomitant outcomes of global capitalist expansion: the unification and fragmentation of human societies. This duality is effectuated through the “uneven” global dispersion of “matter,” which Nairn defines as the economic and social institutions of development. The following passage summarizes this proposition clearly:

The real origins [of nationalism] are elsewhere. They are located not in the folk, nor in the individual’s repressed passion for some sort of wholeness or identity, but in the machinery of world political economy. Not, however, in the process of that economy’s development as such—

not simply as an inevitable concomitant of industrialization and urbanization. They are associated with more specific features of that process. The best way of categorizing these traits is to say they represent the uneven development of history since the eighteenth century. This unevenness is a material fact; one could argue that it is the most grossly material fact about modern history.

(Nairn, 1975, p. 8)

I find this assertion to be highly problematic. What we are witnessing here is a series of unsound theoretical techniques that are thoroughly abused in the Marxist canon. The first—which bypasses a theoretical history on the notion of matter that dates back to the classical philosophers—is to equate “matter” with “economy.” The second, is to suggest that matter, while operating independently of ideas, exercises determinate effects unto ideas.

Let me address the first point as a leeway. While I do not want to suggest that there is any sort of positive meaning inscribed in the word “matter,” I do not consider it theoretically sound to deploy a term that is deeply vested in a theoretical canon, in a manner so casual, that it actually drains the notion of its conceptual history, so as to mold it to the whims of the theorist. Marxists have been incredibly cavalier in this respect. A concise, but nonetheless substantive critique of the irregular and often casual deployment of this term in the Marxist canon, can be found in Laclau and Mouffe’s “Post-Marxism Without Apologies” (1987). The authors’ conclusion is most-relevant to our discussion. Matter, refers to that indeterminate scope of the Real that is not exhausted or subsumed by thought: “This last individual residue, which is irreducible to thought, is what the ancient philosophers called *matter*” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, p. 87). From this, they go on to conclude that “the crucial boundary for Aristotle, and for philosophy generally, does not pass between thought [idea] and thing [matter] *but within each of these, between form and formlessness or indefiniteness*” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, pp. 88–89). The distinction between materialism and idealism is, therefore, centred upon *the degree* to which the Real can be subsumed by intelligible thought, i.e., “ideas.”

Now, how can we situate Nairn in the context of this debate? I will not be unambiguous in my assessment. The term “matter” is deployed ambivalently, where it retains the traces of its philosophical tradition, while it is simultaneously equated with “economy and production.” It is at this point that the structure of the theory essentially implodes. And this is something that Marxists are frequently guilty of. My argument is, however, somewhat speculative, since it is, essentially, deduced from the argument presented. Nairn (1975) does not go into a detailed philosophical discussion on the relationship between ideas and matter, but, toward the end of the essay, he addresses, albeit in a cursory manner, the issue:

It is not true that the conception of nationalism outlined earlier is reductionist in character. It does not wish or think away the phenomena in question (political romanticism, the idealism of under-development, subjectivism, the need to ‘belong’, etc.) by asserting that these are merely manifestations of economic trends. It does exactly the opposite. It awards them a real force and weight in modern historical development—one quite distinct from the groanings of metaphysical irrationalism— by explaining the material reasons for this newly-acquired leverage. It locates them in relation to the material dilemmas of backwardness, and so makes of them an objective fact [...] To show they are the other face of capitalism’s invasion of our world does not entail their demotion to mere appearance or epiphenomenon. (p. 25)

The theoretical tensions are apparent, for on the one hand, Nairn attempts to afford ideology the historical causal efficacy it deserves, while simultaneously locating it “in relation to the material dilemmas of backwardness.” He attempts to dissolve the epiphenomenal reasoning that is so pronounced in Marxism, while simultaneously asserting that nationalist ideology can be explained through “material reasons” for its “newly-acquired leverage.” To the extent that the power of ideology is not granted an apparent causal efficacy *by acknowledging its co-constitutive relationship with “matter”*—whether we conceive of matter as indeterminacy or economic production—the theory falls prey to epiphenomenal reasoning, whether Nairn intends it or not. In fact, Nairn utilizes a theoretical technique that is thoroughly abused by Marxists,

when he implicitly suggests that matter, or its “absence,” exercises determinate effects unto the realm of ideas. His argument suggests that the “absence of a material reality” necessitates a compensatory mechanism at the level of ideas—nationalism is what fills in this “void.” Leaving aside the remarkable terminological confusion here (equating “absence of matter” with “absence of modern development”), what we are witnessing here is a theory that conceives of “matter” as the prime historical causal force. Not only is “matter” granted temporal causal primacy, it is also afforded efficacy of determination and *causal independence*. Nowhere in Nairn do we encounter an instance where it is suggested that *ideology can also exercise historical effects unto matter by coming to be co-imbricated with it*. Nationalist ideology, for him, surely exercises historical effects at large, but it is still located within a material base that engenders it. “Matter” is, essentially, accorded *causal independence*.

The argument I wish to advance is the following: to the extent that “matter” is understood as operating independently from “ideas,” it cannot be understood as exercising effects unto the latter, as it would operate in exteriority to its constitutive “ideal” terrain of operation. This discussion invites us to investigate the notion of *relation* itself. Surely, an element (e.g., “matter”) exercising effect unto another element (e.g., “ideas”) requires it being in a relation with it. But can one element, in the context of a relation, exercise determinate effects unto the other, or exhaust the relation in accordance with its own identity? Surely, such a situation is improbable. If a relation between two elements came to be determined by one of the two elements, they would simply collapse into one identity and their difference would come to be eliminated. The relation would thus come to be dissolved. The implication here is clear: a relation, by necessity, requires that *both* elements exercise, at least on some level, effects unto each other. If this were not the case and power was unidirectional, one identity would come to exhaust the identity of the other. The relationship, therefore, by necessity has to be undercut by dimensions of resistance, that is, processes of mutual disruption. This can only mean that the identity of the elements can only be established in reference to one another if they both prevent each other’s full-constitution. Effects can therefore only be exercised in the context of a relationship of mutual “contamination,” where the presence of differential elements prevents them from being fully-constituted. This means that “ideas” and “matter”

invariably operate within a relationship of *necessity* and mutual “disruption,” thus *placing limits on causal independence*. This argument stands whether we conceive of “matter,” in the philosophical sense, as indeterminate/irrational trace, or in the Marxian sense, as economy, production and development. Thus, if nationalist opposition simultaneously embraces *and* antagonizes the developmental process (matter), as the uneven and combined development theory argues, then its emergence cannot be subsumed by the latter. This duality can only be symptomatic of their discourse, that is, of the ontology of relations. To the extent that nationalism is able to resist the developmental process or re-articulate it according to its own particularity, it cannot be determined or engendered by it. This relationship can only be understood as one between differential elements, which enter into a relationship, and by extension become each others’ *condition of possibility*. We therefore reject the argument that nationalism is *caused or determined* by uneven economic development. Indeed, if we accord nationalism the causal efficacy it deserves, it would be easy to see how it has very often co-constituted processes of uneven economic development, where economic interests are articulated in reference to national superiority.

A remarkable insight emerges from this discussion. The very possibility of antagonisms is furnished by the ontology of relations. An antagonism does not entail a frontal opposition between fully-constituted identities. If they were, indeed, fully-constituted, they would be internal to themselves and thus operate in exteriority to one another. An antagonism, by definition, requires a relational terrain between “oppositional” forces. But what “opposition” means, in this sense, is the exercising of uneven power effects by both identities. This means that each identity becomes each other’s condition of possibility while at once becoming its possible negation. The possibility of antagonisms thus emerges within the context of co-constitutive relationships. This means that the very disruptive effects between “ideas” and “matter,” as well as between “ideas” themselves, furnish the *general terrain of antagonisms*.

Now, how do we situate Nairn’s argument, in light of our theoretical breakthroughs? Does our critique imply that uneven development has not contributed to, or overdetermined, nationalist struggles in certain contexts? Absolutely not. In my opinion, Nairn’s argument, minus its underlying positivism, is certainly applicable, albeit in limited historical contexts (i.e., anti-colonial nationalist movements). It

becomes just one out of many possible executions of nationalism. But we should also add that in the absence of presumed essential historical determinations, the notion of uneven economic development can be understood as just one of many possible elements that may come to co-constitute nationalist politics. In this sense, ultimate primacy is dissolved in favour of an approach that emphasizes the *plurality* of elements that, through their aggregation, can come to constitute national movements. In other words, the articulation of national movements may also come to be propelled by extra-economic demands, e.g., political, educational, etc.

I preliminarily suggest that the theoretical challenge is not to identify historical “prime” causes, but to furnish an analytic framework that can account for how a plurality of “causes” may come, through their aggregation, to co-constitute a relational terrain through which antagonisms can operate. In this sense, Nairn’s argument can be executed more effectively vis-à-vis theories of populism that can account for how a plurality of identities and historical possibilities may come to be aggregated under general forms of representation (Laclau, 2005b). The argument, in summary, can be re-articulated as follows. Uneven global economic development, among other factors, may result in a series of unfulfilled demands that bear no *a priori* unity and that can assume multiple forms. To the extent that the plurality of demands come to be articulatively aggregated into a frontal opposition, through general forms of representation, between two opposite poles (e.g., “core nation” and “imperial oppressor”), we can speak of *populism*. To the extent that this opposition is saturated, to the greatest extent, although never fully, by nationalist narratives, we can speak of a *national populism*. This process will be an object of thorough discussion in Chapter 9.

Based on this discussion, one can deduce that Nairn’s theory lacks a proper theory of particularity, in the sense that the particular historical instantiations of nationalist movements are presumed to be “pre-given” by the universality of the forces of combined and uneven development. This presumption underemphasizes that nationalist movements are highly dependent on context-specific considerations, constraints and possibilities that may come to be “aggregated” in a plurality of forms. As already mentioned, this tension between the presumed universality of theories of nationalism and the

plurality of forms that actual historical cases assume, constitutes one of the principal terrains of contention in the literature—a chapter still left unresolved. It is my conviction that the particularity of nationalist movements cannot be assumed to be pre-given by any universal force or developmental model but can only be understood as an articulation of plural and heterogeneous elements, according to contextual considerations, constraints, and possibilities. The precarious “unity” of the plurality of actual historic instantiation of nationalism should, therefore, not be understood in terms of an underlying universal unifying principle but as the dispersed application of nationalism’s ‘family resemblances’ that are invariably implemented in accordance with contextual limitations and possibilities.

Chapter 4: Language and Communication

The question of language constitutes a recurring point of reference in the literature on nationalism. Three principal questions are addressed. The first, which was launched in response to early primordialist and perennialist theories of nationalism (e.g., Fishman, 1989; Herder, 2004), explores whether there is an essential and corresponding connection between a particular language and a particular national identity or culture. The conundrum has long been resolved primarily on empirical grounds: there is no essential connection between language and nation. Nations, nation-states, and national identities are by no means isomorphic with particular languages (Billig, 1995, pp. 31–36; Calhoun, 1993, pp. 224–227; Giddens, 1985, p. 270; Hobsbawm, 2012, Chapter 2; Mann, 2010, pp. 235–243; Renan, 1990, pp. 16–17). Renan’s (1990) famous remark that “Language invites people to unite, but it does not force them to do so” is poignant, as it is instructive (p. 16). The United States and England, Latin America and Spain, may speak the same language, but do not constitute single nations (Renan, 1990, p. 16). Switzerland, on the other hand, is comprised of three distinct linguistic regions, yet forms a nation (Renan, 1990, p. 16). We should nonetheless note that historical studies of nationalism have shown that national unification through linguistic homogenization, is a distinctively modern phenomenon that was executed at the backdrop of rich linguistic diversity (Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995, pp. 32–33; Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 51–53; E. Weber, 1976, Chapter 6). But, to the extent that a common language effectively operates as a substratum of national unification, it is due to complex processes of social and political construction, or coercive imposition (Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995, pp. 10, 24, 32, 33; Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 54; E. Weber, 1976, Chapter 6).

The second question of interest in regards to the topic of language, is whether, how, and to what extent, the valorization and privileging of a language comes to constitute a key element of nationalism and nation formation (Anderson, 2006, Chapter 5; Calhoun, 1993, pp. 224, 226; Smith, 1986, p. 145). This line of inquiry is often connected to the Eastern-Western typology (Kohn, 1965; Smith, 1986, pp. 135–138, 144–145), which distinguishes between Western civic and the Eastern ethnic nationalism, the

latter of which is very often articulated in reference to linguistic criteria (Smith, 1986, pp. 137–138). Research has examined how philologist historiography effectively articulates a supposed historical linguistic linearity of national peoples, while extolling the uniqueness of its national language (Anderson, 2006, Chapter 5; Mann, 2010, p. 236; Smith, 1986, p. 145). This constructed narrative, consequently comes to comprise an integral part of nationalist rhetoric.

The third line of inquiry, which is unresolved up to this day, asks whether and to what extent language constitutes a necessary or a sufficient cause for nation formation (Calhoun, 1993, p. 226). Several very prominent modernist authors suggest that language constitutes the principal dimension of nation formation (Anderson, 2006; Deutsch, 1966; Gellner, 1983). It is this third question that I will answer and resolve by critically examining the theories of two most-prominent authors in our field, whose work principally focuses on language and communication: Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner. While I do not claim that my critique exhausts all the dimensions of the literature, I nonetheless do claim that the impasses we encounter in Anderson's and Gellner's theories are paradigmatic of the deficiencies we encounter in the literature in general.

In keeping with our general efforts of forging a theoretical framework that can account for the nation's constitutive plurality, the question of principal concern is the following: how can a plurality of languages be incorporated into a general linguistic terrain that comes to represent the communal totality? I will suggest that this question can only be resolved through an epistemology of language that expands the simplistic notion of "common language," which generally underscores theories of nationalism, to that of "discourse." This latter notion will help us make sense of how socio-political communities are constructed, in general, and, most importantly, how they can be constructed in light of the plurality of (linguistic and cultural) subject position that always come to occupy any socio-political space. Let us begin by delineating the progression of Anderson's argument.

Benedict Anderson: Nations as Imagined Communities

The nation, according to Anderson, as anyone who is even marginally acquainted with the literature knows, is an “imagined community.” As Anderson (2006) clearly specifies, “imagined” is not to be equated with “invention,” “fabrication,” or “falsity” (p. 6). A nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). But as Anderson (2006) notes, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (p. 6). So the notion of an “imagined community,” in and of itself, is not sufficient to differentiate between the national community and other types of community. What differentiates communities is the *style* by which they are imagined (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The national imagined community is thus distinguished as an *imagined political community that is imagined as being inherently limited and sovereign* (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). So what is unique about the national imagined community according to Anderson’s (2006) definition is that it is “a political community,” that is “limited,” in the sense that its boundaries are imagined as being finite, and “sovereign,” because its members “dream of being free”—a dream that is symbolized by the sovereign state (p. 7).

Anderson proceeds in examining the historical conditions that enabled the emergence of national consciousness: “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 42–43). What were print-language’s effects, then, in enabling the conditions through which the national community could be imagined?

According to Anderson, these effects can only be understood in reference to a parallel revolution that had occurred: a new conception of time. “What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and

fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (Anderson, 2006, p. 24). Mediaeval time was conceived as vertical and simultaneous and the temporality of cosmology and history were virtually indistinguishable (Anderson, 2006, pp. 24, 36). This means that the past and present were thought to instantaneously reside in the present, in the Christian world as a “frozen” moment awaiting the fulfillment of salvation (Anderson, 2006, p. 24). Conceptions of time therefore lacked the chronological transverse linearity that is so characteristic of modern times. “In such a view of things, the word ‘meanwhile’ cannot be of real significance” (p. 24). With the rationalization of time, this conception of “simultaneous time” metastasizes to a conception of time as homogenous, empty, transverse, and calendrical (Anderson, 2006, pp. 24, 25). It is this new paradigm that print reinforced and through which it exercised its historical effects of engendering the imagined national community.

The novel, according to Anderson (2006), conjures up a new imaginary: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time” as “a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (p. 26). Different localities are “linked” because they are conceived as “operating” within the same rationalized (e.g., calendrical) timeline. Characters can therefore be conceived as acting in a more or less stable sociological entity. A preliminary comment of contention is in order before I proceed: Does this idea of a stable sociological organism that mirrors the workings of the nation-state strictly outpour from a particular conception of time or is it concomitantly contaminated by nationalistic narratives that overdetermine such conceptions of time? We will return to this question later.

According to Anderson it is the newspaper that had a more decisive historical effect in engendering the national imaginary. This is because the newspaper can *connect* a diversity of topographically (unrelated) events temporally: “The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection — the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time” (Anderson, 2006, p. 33). As an ephemeral medium that is consumed on a daily or half-daily basis, it reinforces a calendrical experience of time. Most importantly, the reading of the daily newspaper, as a process that is carried out simultaneously by a diversity of people that the reader

has never encountered but “whose existence he is confident” of, incubates a new communal consciousness (Anderson, 2006, p. 35). In Anderson’s (2006) own words, “At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (pp. 35–36). Thus, the newspaper functions as a form of representation of the national imagined community. The question which now follows is how this emerging community that is predicated on a conception of time as horizontal and transverse, comes to be imagined as, specifically, a *national* community (Anderson, 2006, p. 37). According to Anderson (2006), “a strong case can be made for the primacy of capitalism,” which, in standardizing vernacular languages and destabilizing the sacred imagined community, contributed to the birth and proliferation of the national imaginary (p. 37).

Book publishing, being one of the earliest forms of capitalist enterprise, initially targeted a thin stratum of Latin-readers, a market that was eventually exhausted (Anderson, 2006, pp. 37–38). Printers, thus, in seeking to expand their markets, began publishing in vernacular languages. These efforts were aided by three factors that contributed to the decline of the predominance of Latin and the sacred imagined community. The first was the increasing perception of Latin as an antiquated language, by the European intelligentsia. In combination with its removal from ecclesiastical and everyday life it acquired an arcane and esoteric character (Anderson, 2006, p. 39). The second was the Protestant Reformation, which in combination with print-capital, resulted in the mass dissemination of Luther’s works, including his translations of the Bible in vernacular languages. This contributed to the creation of large vernacular reading publics. As a result, Latin ceased to be the only language through which ontological truth was accessed and thusly lost its privileged status. The related political outcomes were, of course, the fragmentation of the sacred imagined community and the political reorganization of Europe e.g., the establishment of Dutch Republic and the Commonwealth of the Puritans. “Third was the slow, geographically uneven, spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization by certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs” (Anderson, 2006, p. 40). This elevation of vernaculars to “languages of power” further contributed to the dethronement of Latin and the decline of

the sacred imagined community (Anderson, 2006, p. 42). We are now in a position to proceed to the crux of Anderson's argument: paralleling the decline of the sacred imagined community, the thrust of print-capital dipping into vernacular markets led to the standardization of languages and the fatality of linguistic diversity.

The varied European dialects "were capable of being assembled, within definite limits, into print-languages far fewer in number" (Anderson, 2006, p. 43). And nothing contributed to this development more than print-capital, "which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through market" (Anderson, 2006, p. 44). As these standardized vernaculars were disseminated, they created a unified terrain of communication between populations who, in the past, could not even comprehend one another. People thus became aware of the presence of a large number of other people to whom they were connected through common language. "These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson, 2006, p. 44). And while the standardization of language, according to Anderson, was largely "unselfconscious," particular dialects emerged as dominant languages that displaced, assimilated or effaced others (Anderson, 2006, p. 45). This model was to be subsequently transplanted and imitated consciously by nationalists and would-be nations (Anderson, 2006, p. 45). The argument is summed up coherently by Anderson (2006),

We can summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation. The potential stretch of these communities was inherently limited, and, at the same time, bore none but the most fortuitous relationship to existing political boundaries (which were, on the whole, the highwater marks of dynastic expansionisms). (p. 46)

Thus, it is through the death of linguistic diversity and the standardization of language through print-capital, that the national community (i.e., limited and sovereign) came to be imagined. But Anderson's (2006) argument is not without qualification for while he is clear that "Print-language is what invents nationalism, not *a* particular language per se," (p. 134) "the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages" (p. 46). From my perspective, *this subtle admission is analogous to my critique: that the theory is not adequate in capturing the plurality of actual historical instantiations of nationalism.* It is basically an admission that the dissemination of a standardized linguistic medium via print over a determinate territorial spread does not *necessarily* engender national consciousness. Anderson tackles this shortcoming by introducing *supplementary* categories of analysis, out of which a typology outpours. Thus "creole nationalism," "linguistic nationalism" and "last-wave nationalism," are each explained by appealing to additional or different analytic categories. The rise of creole national consciousness is explained, by Anderson, by the common experience of the creole pilgrimage and creole political disenchantment with the imperial centre, *in addition* to the common linguistic experience. The rise of national consciousness in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth century, is attributed to linguistic unification over determinate territories *vis-à-vis* print, *in addition* to the valorization of language through: the generalization and elevation of vernacular languages via the rise of philology, the arts and the linguistic sciences, the proliferation of schools and universities, the expansion of the bureaucratic state, the expansions of (middle-class) reading classes, the elevation in power and status of languages-of-state (Anderson, 2006, pp. 70–71). "As literacy increased, it became easier to arouse popular support, with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages they had humbly spoken all along" (Anderson, 2006, p. 80). But this invitation was only attractive because of the huge success of the French and American Revolutions, which became immemorialized and generalized as models for nation-making, in print. It should be noted that these revolutions, as models of nation construction, were utilized by both popular national movements and dynasts, which were often in conflict with one another. In the case of dynasts, it led to "what Seton-Watson bitingly calls 'official nationalisms,' of which Czarist Russification is only the best-known

example. “These ‘official nationalisms’ can best be understood as a means for combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power, in particular over the huge polyglot domains accumulated since the Middle Ages” (Anderson, 2006, p. 86) but they became possible only after the emergence of popular-linguistic nationalism (Anderson, 2006, p. 110). Finally, “Last Wave” nationalisms, which mostly include anti-colonial nationalisms, are explained by *additionally* appealing to the categories of “educational and administrative pilgrimages.” Colonial states, having invited its subjects into schools and administrative positions, not only produced bilingual intelligentsias, but also exposed these emerging intelligentsias to extant models of “nation, nation-ness, and nationalism” (Anderson, 2006, p. 140). These models were subsequently utilized to give political content to the unfulfilled political desires and dreams of subject populations. Most importantly, owing to the advancement of communication media in the twentieth century, the emerging national community could be represented *in the absence of print*. In Anderson’s (2006) own words, “with increasing speed capitalism transformed the means of physical and intellectual communication, the intelligentsias found ways to bypass print in propagating the imagined community, not merely to illiterate masses, but even to literate masses reading different languages” (p. 140).

I find this last point to be particularly illuminating of Anderson’s underlying theoretical structure. What can be deduced from this discussion is that it is not “common language” or “print media” that engender national consciousness, but communication media *in general*. It is, communication media that engender the imagined national community, for it is the only element common to all of Anderson’s typologies. Let me delineate the last leg of the argument.

In his discussion of “Last Wave” nationalisms, Anderson claims that national consciousness can emerge in the absence of a common language, in the absence of print, owing to advancements in modern communication media that make it possible to *represent* the community in the absence of common language: “Finally, as in the case of the Southeast Asian examples, the appearance of Swiss nationalism on the eve of the communications revolution of the twentieth century made it possible and practical to ‘represent’ the imagined community in ways that did not require linguistic uniformity” (Anderson, 2005, p. 139). So in accounting for a nation-type that cannot be neatly morphed to his theory, Anderson requires

displacing the categories of his own theory in a dual movement: print is replaced with the more general term of communication media, while the notion of representation comes to displace Anderson's principal guiding theme, that of the common linguistic experience. Suddenly, the question of national consciousness is presented as an issue of *representation*. And it is precisely at this point that the unity of the theory is revealed: in order for the national community, which spans over diverse populations, to be imagined as a limited and sovereign totality, it has to be *represented as such and communication media is the necessary tool used in this process of representation*.

While this last displacement seemingly affords unity to the theory, it is precisely what reveals its aporetic tensions. Let me begin my critique by posing two key questions. First, can any form of representation operate outside a (common) linguistic terrain? Second, can communication media operate its dislocating and constituting effects outside the domain of a (common) linguistic terrain? The answer to both questions is undoubtedly in the negative. Anderson's theory, far from ridding itself from the burden of "the question of (common) language," actually circumvents it by means of a categorical displacement. The key question to be answered is the following: given that a common language is by no means isomorphic with nation formation, how can a *plurality* of (linguistic) identities be incorporated into a political bloc under a general form of representation? This is the question that the literature has been unable to answer and epistemological poverty is at the root of the issue.

A general canonical tendency can, by no doubt, be observed: Studies of nationalism that address the question of language typically lack a comprehensive theory of language. In Anderson, specifically, the notions of language and communication media, both of which are central to his theory, are assumed to be self-evident and are not accorded any theoretical consideration. I maintain that what is necessary, is a theory of language that can make sense of how a plurality of languages can be incorporated into a general linguistic terrain that can come to constitute a socio-political formation (the nation in our case). Having accepted this realization, we can now proceed to a brief introductory discussion of one of my key theoretical concepts, namely, *discourse*.

Discourse is to be understood as the relational terrain through which all meaning, objectivity and, thus, socio-political formations are established. It is the general conceptual *and* material terrain through which reality is constructed and made intelligible. In this sense, discourse encapsulates and is constituted by the interpenetration of ideas *and* matter, of knowledge *and* institutional processes. What the category of discourse emphasizes is the very *relation* that comes to constitute the identity of its constituent elements. The identity of its elements “do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 68). The identities of the elements are thus established in terms of their differential position within the plurality of elements that constitute the general discursive formation. But what of the identity of the elements themselves? How are we to understand these notions and their relationship with language? To the extent that any element is made intelligible by an identity that names it and ties it to an idea, it then operates in the general domain of language (Laclau, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Saussure, 1966). As Laclau (2005b, 2007a, 2014) has repeatedly emphasized, discourse is, essentially a radicalized conception of language that broadens the notion beyond mere “speech” or “writing,” as it is virtually the terrain through which reality is simultaneously accessed and constructed. The traces of Heideggerian thought are evident in this assertion. To the extent that all that is intelligible operates through the domain of language, then language bears the status of general ontology, since it invariably cuts through and is constitutive of all experience (Laclau, 2014, p. 145). In light of this realization, no socio-political bloc can operate outside the general domain of language. This statement, however, is not without qualification, for what is most relevant to our problematic is that the category of “discourse” exceeds that of “common language.”

The implication here is that relations can be established outside the domain of a “common language,” in the naïve sense of the term. Let me demonstrate by means of an example. Let us assume that an employer hires a worker for simple repetitive manual work. Let us assume that the worker and the employer speak different languages and cannot communicate with one another but the terms and responsibilities of the position were initially agreed upon with the help of, let us say, a translator. Given the simplicity of the task and the commitment of both parties, they are now incorporated in a capitalist

relation of production, in the absence of a “common language”—I repeat—in the naïve sense of the term. But they are nonetheless engaged in a *relation*. What ties them together beyond the initial terms of the agreement is the capitalist relation of production, the simplicity of the task, and the commitment of both parties, all of which are *intelligible* to both of them. If intelligibility always operates within a linguistic terrain, then how can this mutual intelligibility operate outside a “common language?”

As various theorists have demonstrated (e.g., Lacan, 2006a; Laclau, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), linguistic signifiers (that constitute any social terrain or element) are invariably polysemic. This means that all linguistic signifiers reference multiple meanings and are not rigidly tied to particular concepts. The capitalist relation of production, in our example, is a signifier through which two individuals that speak different languages enter into a relation. The signifier of the “work relation” is, in other words, simultaneously referencing two different clusters of meanings that operate in two different languages: the language of the worker and the language of the employer. So to conclude, language, far from being absent in any relational proceeding, actually constitutes the terrain through which the relation is established by virtue of its polysemic potentials, even in the absence of a “common language.” To the extent that a signifier comes to constitute a point of convergence of a plurality of identities, social processes, meanings etc. it will be referred to as a *nodal point*. The capitalist relation of production, as an example, constitutes such a nodal signifier in modern European nation-states, as they incorporate a varied range of institutions, values, beliefs and behaviours, such as the state, the economy, the education system, the family, liberal values, the structure of work life, the rationalization of time, etc.

Let me comment in brief what the implications of the preceding discussion hold for a theory of nationalism. The first is that all (national) communities are established through a discursive terrain that is always operating in the domain of language. The second is that polysemy is what enables the articulation of such (national) formations, since it is what grants the potential to integrate a plurality of heterogeneous subject positions (e.g., different languages), something that is characteristic of all socialities. And while the focus in this chapter has been on linguistic plurality, our conclusion is by no means restricted to it. The construction of a socio-political community involves the incorporation of not just linguistic

differences but also difference of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion and so on and so forth. The ordering of nodal points that, by virtue of their polysemy, can incorporate a plurality of subject positions in a socio-political bloc, is, therefore, one of the principal political undertakings. By extension, the manner by which the bloc is constructed *vis-à-vis* the instituting of nodal points, and the consequences that ensue, becomes the political theorist's principal focus. The question of nationalism is therefore no longer relegated to the realm of determinate social causes that are thought to generate nations *ex nihilo*. What now interests us is precisely how these "causes" (nodal points in our case) have been ordered in ways that can incorporate a plurality of subject positions in national socio-political blocs. In effect, the cause-and-effect logic is abandoned and all causes are re-conceptualized not as entities "prior" to the construction of communities but as entities that have come to constitute those very communities. From then on, the key principal issue of interest is how the ordering of nodal points becomes the path through which forms of conduct and representation can be dispersed and overdetermine the various identities that converge upon these nodal points. Strictly speaking, a socio-political bloc cannot emerge by mere incorporation of differential subject positions, since that would entail relations of complete externality, thus eliminating the potential of establishing a communal space. Socio-political blocs also require the construction of a common space of representation. This process of "dispersion" whereby forms of conduct and representations, by coming to be unevenly generalized in the discursive fabric, come to mark the community's limits, is what is here understood as *hegemony*. But even as the argument stands, what is warranted is a further investigation into the very process by which nodal points are constructed. If a nodal point is to bring together a plurality of identities, it has to be constructed in a manner that serves that effect. A signifier will not come to be shared by differential identities simply due to "social effect" or an underlying social or historical logic. The convergence needs to be constructed. And in order to understand the workings of this process of construction, whereby a plurality of identities converge upon common signifiers, we need to introduce the concept of *articulation*. I will do so *vis-à-vis* my critique of Gellner and I will then finalize my critique of Anderson.

Ernest Gellner: Nationalism as “Context Free” Communication

Gellner (1983) defines nationalism as “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (p. 1). Gellner is clear from the outset that nationalism is distinctly a modern phenomenon, since the nationalist principle can only be satisfied in the context of modernity. How does Gellner substantiate this argument? For Gellner, the emergence of nationalism is tied to what he claims to be the *objective requirements of industrialization: cultural homogeneity and context-free communication*. This requirement outpours from the imperatives of rationalization, the relevant tenet being that a single and unified conceptual system can express all forms of knowledge (Gellner, 1983, p. 21). In order for all elements of knowledge to be subordinated to this common conceptual language and to be “re-packaged” into an intelligible unitary system of knowledge and practice, the elements themselves have to be conceptually “separated” and “purified,” a process that requires constant change and innovation. On the social level, this translates to a commitment to perpetual development and growth. “Mankind is irreversibly committed to industrial society, and therefore to a society whose productive system is based on cumulative science and technology” (Gellner, 1983, p. 39). This willingness to “explore” and “re-order” results in the dissolution of any (traditional) structures, or processes that are not conducive to efficiency, unified regularity in knowledge and growth:

If cognitive growth presupposes that no element is indissolubly linked a priori to any other, and that everything IS open to rethinking, then economic and productive growth requires exactly the same of human activities and hence of human roles. Roles become optional and instrumental. The old stability of the social role structure is simply incompatible with growth and innovation. Innovation means doing new things, the boundaries of which cannot be the same as those of the activities they replace. (Gellner, 1983, p. 24)

This commitment to constant improvement and development necessitates a complex and ever-changing system of labour division, whereby workers become occupationally interchangeable. In order for this requirement to be satisfied, a baseline medium of communication, common to all occupations, needs to be established. This is what ensures fluid and efficient occupational interchangeability: workers can move from one occupation to another with minimal training, since both occupational spaces share a common communicatory culture. This communicatory culture is what Gellner calls “context-free communication.” In order for context-free communication to operate on a societal scale, a mass and standardized system of education, which inculcates this standardized communicatory culture, needs to be institutionalized. The task is taken up by the centralized modern state, the only organization logistically capable of carrying it out (Gellner, 1983, p. 37). A standardized communicatory high (i.e., literate) culture is consequently diffused by the state, through the education system. What consequently emerges is cultural homogeneity between state and society, thus satisfying the nationalist imperative “that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). This is the reason why nationalism can only emerge in modern society, as it is the only type of society that requires cultural overlap between state and society. No such overlap was necessary, as an example, during the agrarian period where cultural differentiation between state and people conferred prestige upon the ruling strata and legitimated the political system. On the basis of the argument that was thus far delineated, nationalism can be summarized as

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 of the totality, of the population. It means the generalized diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves. (Gellner, 1983, p. 57)

Fruitful as Gellner's theory may be, it is not without substantive shortcomings. Let me begin my critique by tracing the temporality of events in Gellner's argument: the requirements of rationalized industrial society necessitate the general diffusion of a context-free communicatory culture, which is achieved through the state imposition of a "high" culture. The nationalist principle is satisfied to the extent that the culture of the state overlaps with the culture of society. Note that the whole argument is structured around the *temporal primacy* of "the industrial requirement," which exercises its historical effects unto the rest of society, those being the diffusion of a standardized communicatory culture. However, to the extent that the industrial requirement is conceived as operating *within* a social structure, it presupposes an already-established common discursive terrain, through which (a) it becomes intelligible and (b) operates its "effects." If we are to speak of a "*geist*" of rationality, as Gellner does, within which this requirement operates, then are we not simultaneously implying a *common discursive space through which this requirement operates*? We may ask the following question in accordance with Gellner terminology: can the *geist* of rationality exercise any "effects" *before* the generalization of "context-free communication," or does the very "elevation" of rationality to the status of "*geist*" require the concomitant generalization of "context-free communication?" Strictly speaking, the requirements of industrial society cannot precede the generalization of "context-free communication" or, in our lexicon, and more generally, the construction of a common discursive space.

Gellner's argument cannot be sustained in light of this realization, unless, through theoretical wit, we surreptitiously cast the requirements of industrialization "outside" the discursive structure, thus attributing to it a positive and determinate essence. The logical shortcomings of this well-abused technique have already been explored in great detail by Laclau and Mouffe (2001). In sum, to the extent that any element is understood as operating "outside" the discursive structure, it is unable to exercise any effects, since it stands in a relation of complete externality to the structure. To the extent that it operates within the discursive structure, it then enters into a contingent and necessary relationship with the

complexes of elements that constitute that structure. The “purity” and thus the temporal primacy and causal independence of the generalized “industrial requirement” cannot, therefore, be affirmed.

This realization, does not lead us to discard Gellner’s valuable contribution, so long as we reformulate the terms of his argument. The question of concern is the following: if the “industrial requirement” has somehow captivated the *geist* of an era by exercising profuse historical effects, then how are we to explain the *movement* from the “inception” of this idea to its generalization, which *requires* a common discursive space at the backdrop of the historical fact of linguistic plurality? The implication is that the generalization of the industrial requirement of rationality, was tied to the concomitant construction of a common discursive terrain. What I am suggesting is that these historical developments were unevenly coeval and necessarily co-constitutive. In other words, these processes came to constitute each other’s *conditions of possibility*. All positive references dissolve in light of this realization, since we are not aprioristically privileging one historical cause. How are we to then conceive of this dualistic movement of (a) the generalization of rationality and industrialism and (b) the generalization of a common discursive terrain? Two new concepts need to be introduced to answer this question: *antagonism* and *articulation*.

In my brief discussion of “discourse,” I noted how signifiers are polysemic in character, in the sense that a particular signifier can be attached to and reference a series of ideas and varied material formations. What this tells us is that the signifier *exceeds* what it signifies and that it can theoretically be tied to an endless chain of signifieds. The process whereby a particular signifier is symbolically tied to and made to reference a signified, by the human subject, is what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) call *articulation*. The absence of this concept from the literature on nationalism constitutes one of its most substantive deficiencies. It is precisely the reason why nationalism and its emergence are typically subordinated to a “social base.” It is conceived as an *automatic* outcome that outpours from social factors, instead of being perceived as a set of related ideas and processes that, through political acts, come to overdetermine such social factors. By overdetermination, I intent to designate how a signifier (e.g., “the

nation”) and its associated symbolic constituents come to co-constitute other ideas or social processes (e.g., education, transverse calendrical time, industrialization, etc.).

In the case of Anderson, this theoretical deficiency is revealed when he explains the movement from the imagined sacred community to the national community. There is historical validity in the assertion that empty homogenous time and the death of linguistic diversity, both of which were exercised through the dislocating effects of print, constitute *contributing* factors to the development of nationalism but they cannot—and neither can print—be conceived as exercising *determinate* effects. What is being left out of the analysis is the variety of nationalistic ideas and narratives that were overdetermining these developments and therefore contaminating them with nationalistic overtones. In other words, empty homogenous time and the death of linguistic diversity do not *by default and in and of themselves* generate national consciousness unless they are *tied to nationalistic ideas and narratives*. This practice, whereby a certain process or idea (e.g., homogenous time) is tied and associated with another (e.g., national society), falls under the general category of articulation, that is, political acts that alter the meaning of any idea or institutional process. And it is this very concept that is only marginally and implicitly evoked in Anderson’s analysis. “Official nationalism,” “popular nationalism,” “creole nationalism” and “anti-colonial nationalism” entail processes of articulation, whereby nationalistic ideas came to be tied to a variety of social and political processes: unfulfilled political demands, pilgrim disenchantment with the imperial centre, oppression, state bureaucracy, education, the dissemination of newspapers and novels, etc. A national consciousness can only emerge to the extent that the signifier of “the nation,” and its associated narratives, by means of articulated associations, comes to constitutively mark the various domains and processes of the social, acquiring a privileged status, and thusly becoming an object of identification.

In the case of Gellner, nationalism is thought to flow out of the requirements of industrial society. But what he fails to explain is *how* this movement from the “cause” to the “effect” came to be saturated with and guided by nationalistic narratives and ideas. It does not follow that the general diffusion of a standardized high culture generates nationalism unless this standardized high culture is articulatively

saturated with nationalistic narratives that are underpinned by the nationalist principle. In other words, Gellner fails to explain how the nationalist principle *itself* came to guide the myriad social and political processes that came to constitute the articulated convergence between the culture of the state and the culture of the social. Gellner treats the nationalist principle (of convergence between state and society) as a mere *actualization* by virtue of historical accident (the emergence of the modern state and the culture of rationalization) as opposed to an articulated construction that, through its effective dispersion, altered the political and cultural configuration of Europe. And finally, the diffusion of a high culture should itself be read as an articulated process, overdetermined by nationalist narratives, whereby a common linguistic space is constructed and, moreover, one that is articulatively linked to the articulated expansion of the imperatives of rationalization.

What I am gradually bringing to the fore is the presence of the *articulating subject* that stands at the centre of any process of political construction. New modes of thought and being (e.g., the politicization of labour, the decline of the nobility, the ascendance of the bourgeoisie from mere economic to a ruling class etc.) can only emerge to the extent that a disruption is introduced in the social, something that necessarily entails *conflict* between identities. *Political antagonism* can thus be understood as the obverse of social change and thus becomes a necessary category of analysis when examining how the stasis of repeated patterns of affair (e.g., sacred imagined community) metastasize to a new political paradigm (national imagined community). For example, it does not follow that the death of linguistic diversity over large territorial units in combination with the proliferation of new conceptions of time, both of which are mediated by print, gives birth to nations. These processes come to be overdetermined by “the nation” and its associated narratives, in a context of political antagonisms between a plurality of identities. These identities “confront” one another precisely by articulatively constructing a meaningful symbolic universe that orders their human experience. Signifiers become a common point of reference crisscrossed by political antagonisms and are ordered according to political considerations. As an example, the signifier of “the nation,” during nineteenth century political conflict in Europe, was invoked by political antagonists, e.g., popular nationalist movements *and* ruling dynasts. It became a discursive

node of convergence and a signifier that was deployed for political mobilization but each faction aimed at articulatively “tying” the concept to different ideologies, institutional processes, values etc.

In sum, what I have paradigmatically revealed through my critique are what I consider to be the most substantive deficiencies in the literature, in regards to the question of language. It is astonishing to note that even the most prominent theorists in this line of work, whose work principally relies on the causal efficacy of either language or communication media, fail to adequately theorize the very categories themselves. They are left, by and large, devoid of any theoretical substance. Consequently, language—which in my epistemology bears an ontological status—is essentially treated as something that causally generates a determinate effect (i.e., nationalism), or as something that is generated as a determinate effect. For Anderson, the dispersion of a common linguistic medium over a determinate territory is thought to generate national consciousness. For Gellner, the imperative of industrialization engender a national community of communicatory complementarity. What both theorists miss, stemming from their under-theorization of language, is that language, bearing an ontological status, is essentially something that cuts through all socio-political formations. Language is the building block of communities as such. Language, in and of itself, cannot therefore explain the phenomenon of nationalism, nor differentiate it from other forms of socio-political formations. The challenge is to explain precisely how and in what manner *nation-*alism comes to occupy a privileged and dispersed point of reference in a linguistic terrain that *always preceded it*. This involves sketching how the signifier of “the nation”, both synchronically and diachronically, through complex articulated processes, come to constitutively mark the multifarious processes that compose national communities. It thus involves tracking how it comes to operate as a privileged point of convergence for a plurality of subject positions and forms of life. This is something that will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 9 and 11. The underlying implication of my argument is that any analysis of nationalism cannot treat the latter as a by-product of any social, economic or political process, but as something that comes to be *articulatively constitutive* of these processes. It is, ultimately, an epistemological question: are we to submit our theory to cause-and-effect arguments, where particular underlying causes are aprioristically attributed conceptual and “real” unity, or are we to collapse the

cause-effect distinction, so as to allow us to understand the formation of socio-political blocs in novel ways that break free from the shackles of positivism? What is necessary is a framework that privileges, not particular causal elements (or causality as such), but the radical relational terrain through which all socio-political blocs are constructed. In this sense, discourse, articulation and antagonism, in the sense that Laclau and Mouffe (2001) employ them, become indispensable analytic categories for an understanding of nationalism. The relevance of Anderson's and Gellner's work can only rise to its highest potential and be rid of its limitations, if it is re-interpreted through this novel theoretical prism.

Chapter 5: Nationalism as Politics

Within the “modernist paradigm,” the nation and nationalism is most often understood as being principally a political phenomenon (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, pp. 79, 81–83; Breuilly, 1994; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985, pp. 219–222; Hobsbawm, 2012, 2013b; Kedourie, 1961). This line of work has displaced earlier “primordialist” theories of nationalism (e.g., Fichte, 2000; Herder, 2004) which see national identity and consciousness as an expression of an underlying essential and pan-historical culture (Smith, 1998, p. 18). The pronounced political dimension of nations and nationalism is, similarly, accepted by modernist scholars who emphasize the ethnic or cultural roots of nations and nationalism (e.g., Brass, 1991; Hroch, 1985, 1996, Hutchinson, 1987, 2005, Smith, 1986, 1991). Anthony Smith, as an example, the principal proponent of ethnosymbolism, has unequivocally endorsed the political dimension of the nation: “To mobilize formerly passive objects of history into citizens and subjects of history requires in turn a new attitude to power. It means forsaking the realm of culture and entering the political arena. But, even more important, it entails the conjunction of culture with politics, a key element of nationalism itself” (Smith, 1986, p. 156). The political dimension of the nation and nationalism is an undisputed fact.

In considering arguments that adhere to a principally political understanding of nationalism, some general themes can be discerned. Nationhood and nationalism may be seen as a necessary response to the breakdown of traditional bonds or modes of legitimation that help foster new forms of political legitimation or social integration (Giddens, 1985; Habermas, 1996b; Hobsbawm, 2012), or as ideologies that are deployed in the context of state politics and political power struggles (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 82; Brass, 1991; Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1985, p. 220). From the standpoint of these perspectives, what is typically emphasized is the instrumental construction of nations vis-à-vis nationalist narratives (Brass, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 2013b, 2013a). What is paramount to note, however, is that these theoretical positions are enveloped by broader theoretical contours that treat the nation and nationalism as byproducts of modern state activity (Breuilly, 1994; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1981;

Hobsbawm, 2013b; Mann, 2010) or, in some cases, the world state system (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, Chapter 4). Mann (2010), as an example, understands nationhood as an effectuated state project of cultural homogenization (p. 730), while Giddens (1985) sees it as the necessary cultural counterpart to the administrative expansion of the modern state (p. 219).

Under these general orientations, two most-prominent theoretical practices can be observed, which will constitute the *foci of my critique*. The first, is *to subsume the categories of “the nation” and “nationalism” under the category of “the state.”* The second, is *to subsume the category of “the political” under the category of “the state.”* Let us consider the following passage from Giddens (1985):

So far as the state is concerned, the most important consequence of the easy and cheap availability of printed materials was an enlargement of the sphere of the ‘political’ [...] What printing made possible, and what it was increasingly used for during the phase of the consolidation of absolutism, was a very profound furtherance of the surveillance operations of the state. (pp. 178–179)

Clearly, the presumed enlargement of the sphere of the political is conflated with the increased surveillance of the state. The broader implications of this tendency is to analyze nationalism and politics as state-derived phenomena. The theoretical consideration of interest thus becomes how “the state” engenders “the nation.” A short pause, so as to consider the implications, is warranted. An aprioristic understanding of politics, which delimits it to the domain of the state, may ignore the wider networks of power that are co-imbricated with, and co-constitute, state processes but that may, nonetheless, principally operate “outside” the realm of official state politics. Second, since politics and, by extension power, are conceived as being principally derived from the state, political antagonisms are identified only if they derive from or oppose the state. This excludes from the outset, an array of wider political struggles that may come to constitute national socio-political movements or blocs.

Historical examinations of Greek nationalism, as an example, inform us that the construction of Greek national consciousness was not solely a product of modern state activity, nor did it initially involve political or military clashes with the Ottoman state. Rather, Greek nationalist ideas were primarily articulated by intellectuals, whose work was disseminated through schools and libraries that were principally funded by rich merchants. This process of political construction was neither a product of state activity, nor did it initially take the form of state-opposition politics. However, with the ascent of Greek national liberation movements, and the later institutionalization of the modern Greek state, the seeds that were laid by early nationalist intellectuals, came to contaminate, in various and uneven ways, Greece's political landscape. I am using the example of the Greek case, which I will analyze in further detail in Chapter 9, so as to reveal one of the most substantive dimensions of my critique. If theorists' analytic focus is principally centered on state politics, then what is effaced is how a plurality of political struggles may come to coalesce in uneven executions of nationalist politics. By extension, what is missed is precisely how "the nation" and nationalist narratives comes to emerge as a (privileged) point of reference that are unevenly dispersed in social and political fabric. Thus, what is underemphasized, is how various sites of nationalist struggles come to overdetermine one another through shifting planes of aggregation. What the example of Greece reveals is that political sites and struggles that may lie "outside" the domain of formal politics, may nonetheless come to operate as the latter's *conditions of possibility*. Clearly, then, what is obfuscated are the plurality of "factors" that through their contextual aggregation, come to engender novel political arrangements and possibilities.

I have chosen to critique John Breuilly's *Nationalism and the State* (1994), not least because it is indicative of the approach I am critiquing, but also because the political dimension in his analysis is most pronounced. In this sense, Breuilly's work bears none of the theoretical deficiencies that we encountered in Gellner's and Anderson's works. Breuilly's principal analytical axis concerns political antagonisms and the articulation of political alliances in the pursuit of power. His analysis, therefore, does not relegate nationalism to an underlying social base, and is particularly sensitive to historical contingency and political constructions. But as I will demonstrate, his position is, nonetheless, not a tenable one, as it still

exhibits features of “epiphenomenal” reasoning, because the content of “the political” is attributed to a determinate institution, that is, the state. Consequently, his understanding of the structuration of the political landscape is, aprioristically delimited to political struggles that involve the state.

My argument is that the asserted division between “the state” and “civil society,” which constitutes the crux of Breuilly’s argument, can be sustained neither theoretically nor empirically. As we will see, the structuration of any political terrain presupposes the inclusion and interaction between elements that lie “outside” the realm of official politics, i.e., the state. Furthermore, it is only in dissolving this dichotomy that we can truly understand how (national) socio-political movements and blocs come to be constructed. From this point of view, what interests me is not whether nationalism is a by-product of any entity, but how the signifier of “the nation” comes to become a privileged point of reference in plural political conflicts and in the construction of socio-political blocs.

Let me begin by considering some points of convergence. According to Breuilly (1994), “Nationalism is a form of politics” that should not be understood in terms of an underlying or real “non-political base” (p. 14). Rather, “The only starting point for a general understanding of nationalism is to take its form of politics seriously and to study that politics in a way that does justice to the complexity and variety of nationalisms whilst seeking to locate common patterns” (Breuilly, 1994, p. 14). So it appears that the essential task is to identify the diversity of nationalism’s instantiations, while simultaneously accounting for its unity, by zeroing in on its political dimension. In this respect, Breuilly’s endeavours are remarkably convergent with my own. But does Breuilly’s work contain the necessary theoretical tools that allow him to achieve this? Is Breuilly’s theory of politics adequate in exhausting the dimensions of his intended analysis? Let us proceed by examining his general argument, but with an important qualification. Breuilly’s analysis is remarkably broad and it examines a wide array of nationalism “types” across different places and time-periods. In this sense, his theory is nuanced and displays an apparent sensibility toward historical contingency. My critique, therefore, cannot be exhaustive. But there is, nonetheless, a common conceptual thread that runs through his whole argument

that is particularly pronounced in his analysis of early European nationalisms, and it is on this segment that my critiques centers upon.

Breuilly's theory takes as its analytic starting point, not nationalism as such, but nationalist movements. This prioritization is guided by an underlying assumption that the answer to the nationalist riddle is, so to speak, to be found in the sphere of political action and organization. This is not to suggest that Breuilly (1994) does not take "non-political" factors—such as ideology, class, and economics—into consideration, but that he is strongly committed to the position that "research for the common features underlying all nationalist movements should focus upon the political context" (p. 72). This position reoccurs throughout his work and is made perfectly clear from the outset when he states that "nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics" and "politics is about power" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 1). But what, for Breuilly (1994), specifically constitutes "politics" and "power?" His position is clear: "Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state" (p. 1). The theorist's central task, therefore, "is to relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 1).

Breuilly's theoretical core is thus principally constituted by the categories of "nationalism," "politics," "power," and "the state." The manner by which each category functions in his theory is of crucial importance, for a number of theoretical impasses, as I will demonstrate, emerge by means of a dual displacement: the replacement of "power" and "politics," with "the state." The unity of the multiple heterogeneous elements that constitute "nationalism" or "the nation" is, therefore, *a priori* attributed to "the state." The dynamics of political antagonisms are subsumed entirely by state politics and the broader terrain of political action that is co-constitutive of state politics and nation formation, is excluded, underemphasized or thought to be determined by the state. Now the question is whether we can accept this foundational role that Breuilly attributes to the state. Let me proceed with a brief critique of the very concept of foundation before elaborating a more detailed critique of Breuilly's work.

If politics is about power and if politics in modern times is principally associated with the state—institutionally as the privileged locus of power—then the key theoretical question is whether and to what extent "the state," as the presumed foundation of politics comes to exhaust the ordering of power

relations. If the state indeed exhausts politics, in general, then we are to succumb to the argument that Europe was a-political prior to the advent and construction of the state. Obviously, this proposition cannot be substantiated either on theoretical or empirical grounds. Conversely, if the state is to be understood as just *one* dimension of politics, then we are faced with a situation where politics is, over the course of time, hypostasized by *variable changing institutions*. In Western Europe, as an example, “the political,” prior to the emergence of the modern state, could be hypostasized by “feudalism,” “Christendom,” “the Roman Empire,” etc. If we accept this proposition, then we are once again faced with the question of whether these institutions (e.g., the state, feudalism, Christendom, etc.) exhaust the category of “the political,” in which case we could regard them as being foundational. If we accept this premise, our argument becomes extremely problematic, since, by definition, “foundation” cannot be subject to the whims of historical transition. If the Roman Catholic Church were, indeed, foundational, as an example, its inversion and subjection to the general form of Feudalism and, subsequently, the modern state, would be impossible. A foundation-proper determines all the elements that constitute its structure, as the elements’ identity, “stems” from the former. This would entail the elimination of social change through and any subversive elements that are necessarily immanent to processes of social change. The subversion of any institution necessarily entails the presence of elements within its domain that, nonetheless, represent the potential of its negation (Laclau, 1990). In this sense, even what may come to appear as a foundation, necessarily encapsulates the elements of its potential subversion. Having rejected any theoretical routes that may attribute a foundational status-proper unto political institutions, we can now proceed in examining whether specifically, in modern times, “the political” and “power” are subsumed by “the state,”—a claim that cuts through Breuilly’s work. How does Breuilly explain the emergence of the state and how does he connect it to the rise of nationalist movements and ideology?

According to the author, the political concept of “the nation,” was related to the ways in which the absolutist or would-be absolutist state, in early modern Europe, shaped political thought and action (Breuilly, 1994, p. 367). This concerned the gradual consolidation of state power and the extension of its sovereignty, which typically involved the consent of the political community. The gradual extension of

the state's powers over such domains as justice, the church, and taxation, for example, were achieved "through negotiations between monarchs and the political community within which their rule operated" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 373). It is "[o]nly on the basis of some consent from that community, to which various rights and liberties were conceded" that the monarch was "able to established and enforce some kind of sovereign power" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 373). The argument here is clear: the emergence of the modern territorial state is coeval with the extension of political rights, which were, in the first instance, restricted to the political community.

But according to Breuilly (1994), this stage represents only the first steps toward nationalism, precisely because the extension of rights and liberties were confined only to small political communities (p. 374). Nationalism, according to Breuilly (1994), refers to "political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalism arguments" (p. 2). These "arguments" are structured around the following basic premises: that "there exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character" that should be politically independent and sovereign, and whose interests and values should take "priority over all other interests and values" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 2). Nationalism therefore involves either the extension of state power over determinate populations and territories, or opposition to the state, but in both cases, political goals are couched in nationalist arguments. In other words, nationalism necessarily entails a "populist" dimension that can operate either as the state's subject or its opposition. As Breuilly (1994) notes, "It is the shift of political conflict away from the core political community of the state and also towards sections of society hitherto excluded from political life which provides the particular conditions for nationalism to develop" (p. 375). To what does Breuilly attribute the emergence of this political dimension?

Breuilly (1994) is clear that nationalist movements and ideology are principally structured around the problem of the state-civil society divide, and the relationship between the state and its subjects (pp. 70, 368). From an analytic standpoint, one must concentrate on "how conflicts within civil society can be translated into nationalist politics" (Breuilly, 1994, p. 386). The issue of concern from an historical standpoint, therefore, is how the state-civil society divide comes to be structured. This can be

accounted for by two related processes: the monarchy's increasing claims to represent public interest and the proliferation of market economies, which contributed to the structuration of the public-private distinction (Breuilly, 1994, p. 374). As a consequence of this dual development, civil society, over which the state increasingly asserted its rule, became the cradle of potentially novel and proliferating political conflicts and solidarities, which could be mobilized in opposition to the state (p. 374). The political community could now utilize these burgeoning political potentials, while claiming to represent the interest of "the nation," in opposition to the state, while the state increasingly laid claims over these subjects (Breuilly, 1994, p. 374). As a result, sovereignty could be increasingly conceptualized as deriving, or claimed to derive, from the consent of the people (Breuilly, 1994, p. 374). And since the state extended and consolidated its power over determinate and bounded territories, the people, over which the state ruled, and which could potentially oppose the state, could be conceptualized as particular and distinct units (Breuilly, 1994, p. 374). In Breuilly's own words,

Once the claim to sovereignty was made on behalf of a particular territorially defined unit of humanity, it was natural to relate the claim to the particular attributes of that unit. At first this was confined to certain political characteristics and did not extend, at least explicitly, to characteristics which did not already have some explicit political meaning. But when the opposition came from outside the core political community the claim to sovereignty had to shift to new ground. To claim to alter the territory as well as the institutions of the state required some notion of particular human group with a different territory. (Breuilly, 1994, p. 374)

To be specific, where political opposition from within the political community was weaker and, therefore, necessitated the participation of groups excluded from political life, politics took on a proper nationalistic form. This is because political mobilization became more effective if it appealed to a common and particular cultural identity (Breuilly, 1994, p. 375). Nationalist ideology was, therefore, deployed so as to potentially unite heterogeneous social groups in a political struggle, on behalf or against the state. It is for

this reason that Breuilly maintains that the function of nationalist ideology is that of co-ordination (within the political community), mobilization (of groups within civil society) and legitimation (by other states). And it is with the confluence of these three factors, and their adulteration by nationalist ideology, that politics takes on a properly nationalist form. It is worth, at this point, quoting Breuilly's (1994) conclusive summary:

So the development of the modern state shaped nationalism in various ways. Only under the modern state system could a political opposition see its objective as possession of sovereign, territorial, state power and justify that objective in the name of the society ruled by the public state. Only in the context of competing territorial sovereign states could this objective be seen as the position of a state like other states on the basis of representing a nation like other nations. Yet this claim was also particular: the state concerned had its own special characteristics, so the particular nation concerned also had special characteristics. The idea of the ruled society which might only be definable in terms of its private character, that is, in terms of its 'culture'; of the sovereign territorial state; of a world made up of such states in competition with one another - these are the essential premises upon which nationalist ideology and nationalist politics build. Their objectives may look beyond that situation, above all when they believe they can abolish the distinction between state and society, but they could arise only in that situation and in many ways are tied to it. These represented the general conditions for the emergence of nationalism. (p. 375)

The argument is clear in that the emergence of nationalism is contingent upon a series of interrelated historical developments. The first is the expansion of state sovereignty, whereby the state made increasing claims of rule over a greater number of subjects and wider territories. The second is the emergence of novel ways of conceptualizing the relationship between sovereignty, territory, and people. The third is the construction of political alliances between heterogeneous political groups that either oppose the state, or that the state utilizes to expand its rule. The fourth is the structuration of the "distinction between state

and society” (Breuilly, 1994, p. 375). This fourth dimension constitutes the crux of Breuilly’s argument, for political opposition will tend to take the form of nationalist arguments that appeal to cultural particularity “Only when the existing state is held to have different boundaries from those of the nation” (Breuilly, 1994, p. 375). Nationalist politics thus emerge when the boundaries between “state” and “society” are *incongruent*. This can take the form of separatist nationalist movements that seek independence from the state or as unification nationalism, whereby the state subsumes heterogeneous populations under its rule. In Breuilly’s (1994) own words, “Nationalism ideology can be related to the distinctively modern concern about the relationship between state and society, between public and private. This is fused with the age-old concern about the relationship between rulers and subjects. The modern feature of this concern centres upon ways of understanding the modern state in order to transform it” (p. 368).

We are now in a position to reveal a theoretical flaw that cuts through the core of Breuilly’s (1994) argument, for according to him, “It is also clear that, in a very general way, capitalism is the major force which both constructs and disrupts ‘civil society’ and that this development can be closely related to the development of the modern state” (p. 368). If nationalism is principally about the relationship between civil society and the state, which is contingent upon economic developments, then we are to conclude that the structuration of the political terrain upon which antagonisms are contingent can be attributed to conditions of possibility that lie beyond “the state.” In this case, the structuration of the political landscape is constituted, in part, through economic processes. The theoretical and historical foundationality attributed to the state is thus immanently weakened by the theory itself. What Breuilly’s own theory is showing us is that the “the political” is not exhausted by the state and, rather, encompasses or is overdetermined by various other domains, i.e., economic. Moreover, if the structuration of political conflict and the general terrain of politics include the realm of civil society, then the structuration of “the political” is contingent upon changes that are immanent to civil society, but that are nonetheless imbricated in and co-constitute state structures (e.g., family, religion, economy, etc.). What I am gradually revealing here is that “*the political,*” *the very terrain through which power relations and conflicts are*

structured, cannot be subsumed by “the state” and, actually, extends beyond the latter. In this sense, any practice that can potentially alter the latter’s power dynamics can be considered to be political in character. The political, thus, does not refer to a determinate institutions but to political practices that institute social and, therefore, power relations (Laclau, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2005). By extension, if nationalism is about politics and, by extension, power, it involves a realm of construction and contestation through and *beyond* the state. *The state-civil society dichotomy therefore cannot be sustained*. It should finally be understood that both “the state” and “civil society,” are constituted by heterogeneous and intersecting elements, and that the unity of each, upon which their difference operates, is contingent on acts of theoretical construction, as they play out in the realm of political contestation.

This brings us to the final part of my critique. Breuilly’s theory is structured, albeit implicitly, around a *fundamental historical opposition* between the state and civil society. It is from the very first chapter that he delineates his six-class typology of nationalist movements: some aim to separate, others to unify, other to reform, either nation-states or non-nation-states. As a consequence of his “imposing” this typology unto actual historical cases, attempt to capture the nuances and plurality of nationalist forms is undermined, since they are aprioristically made to conform to the structure of the theory. This, no doubt, stems from Breuilly’s insistence that power in modern times stems from the state and that nationalist politics presuppose the supposed distinction between state and civil society. In a political terrain that is conceived to be structured around two poles—state and civil society—whereby power stems from the former, contestation can thus only operate on the basis of this fundamental opposition. In both cases, a fundamental opposition between two subject positions is emphasized: between the state and heterogeneous political alliances that operate as a unit and oppose it. Nationalist politics, for Breuilly, thus entail either overtaking state power or utilizing it to broaden rule over larger populaces. Breuilly’s theory thus emphasizes the “populist moment” in nationalist politics, without considering how nationalism comes to crystallize, through plural political constructions, as an attempted totality—in other words, how nationalist ideology crystallizes into a hegemonic bloc.

If the state-civil society dichotomy is dissolved and the political terrain is conceptualized as a terrain of multiple heterogeneous elements that are ordered according to political demands and considerations, then the scope of potential political conflicts broadens. This enables the theorist to identify conflicts that operate “outside” the state and that may *also* be co-imbricated in state processes. This invites us to consider problematics that do not solely revolve around “the populist moment” that materializes in the context of a fundamental opposition. It invites us to consider, not only the heterogeneous forms that nationalist opposition can take (Breuilly’s analysis certainly identifies these), but also how a socio-political community can be stitched together *in light of the heterogeneous elements* and multiple and varied conflicts that are immanent to its socio-political terrain. In this sense, the prime analytic question is precisely how: (a) heterogeneous struggles can come to be “aggregated”; and (b) how these aggregations can assume a distinctively nationalist form. Thus, the principal question of concern is how “the nation,” as well as its associated family resemblances, come to overdetermine a social terrain through which political antagonisms are executed. We thus relinquish, as a key analytical tool, Breuilly’s fundamental opposition between state and civil society. In contradistinction, what is proposed is an understanding of political contestation that emphasizes a plurality of political spaces, without, of course, discounting the fact that under certain historical conditions of possibility, particular (national) narratives may “*tendentally* construct the division of a single political space in two opposed fields” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 137; original emphasis).

This novel conception of politics allows to think beyond fundamental historical oppositions and inquire how plural political conflicts can come to be aggregated, and under specific historical conditions of possibility, totalized, specifically, as a *national bloc*. This involves processes whereby a particularity (i.e., “the nation”), by coming to “contaminate” various sites of political struggle and social organization, through its dispersion, comes to represent the limits of the communal totality. This is what, from the standpoint of the present work, is understood as *hegemony*, and that will be thoroughly explored in forthcoming chapters. It is interesting to note that this process, whereby an identity or a series of ideas achieve hegemony, is touched in passing upon in Breuilly’s (1994) conclusion: “The problem is that as

the word [nationalism] comes to span ideas, sentiments and politics, and includes state policy, international conflict, and supportive public opinion, so there is a danger that the term will lose all specific meaning. That, of course, is an indication of its great success” (p. 380). This moment of profound insight is disrupted by the whims of theoretical necessity. Breuilly regards the polysemy of “nationalism,” which as a consequence subverts its specificity, as being problematic from the standpoint of social and political analysis. Much in line with modernist pretensions of “objectivity,” his analysis is carried out on the basis of supposedly purified analytic categories that cannot be made to conform to actual historic instantiations, which are invariably multidimensional, both in their meaning and consequences. In contradistinction, this very process, whereby an element (i.e., the nation) is “dispersed,” and by virtue of its dispersion acquires a depth of meaning, thereby losing its specificity, is precisely my analysis’ central focus. It parallels Laclau’s notion of *metaphor*, whereby an element, by means of its general and prolific dispersion, comes to represent the community’s absent totality, by coming to be “experienced” as homologous to necessary forms of life.

Chapter 6: Nationalism as Culture

The question of whether nationalism is a political or a cultural phenomenon constitutes one of the principal lines of contention in the modernist literature. While this should not be understood as a rigid theoretical divide, scholars do tend to emphasize one dimension over the other. As already established, the political dimension of nations and nationalism is an undisputed fact. However, even among politically-oriented theorists, what is typically assessed is how, in the context of nation(-state) formation, culture comes to be politicized (Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985; Hobsbawm, 2012, 2013b; Kedourie, 1961). In this sense, the principal line of contention between politically- and culturally-oriented theorists concerns the temporal and causal primacy of either culture or politics. Hutchinson (2005) has captured the main contours of this debate by posing the following question: “How do we explain the formation of the mass nations that we know today? Are they shaped in their formation by earlier ethnic traditions? Or is the development of an inclusive and solidary national society the product of political mobilisation?” (p. 130). And while politically-oriented theorists tend to emphasize political mobilization and the role of the state, in instrumentally incubating a shared national culture (e.g., Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 2013b; Mann, 2010), culture-oriented theorists emphasize the ethnic or cultural base of nations (e.g., Armstrong, 1982; Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1986). In this sense, what is emphasized is the long duree of ethnicity, which may or may not come to assume a distinctively political character in modern times. The school of thought that is most closely associated with this latter perspective are the ethnosymbolists. Their approach has been succinctly articulated by Smith (1986):

In rejecting the claims of both the modernists, who say that there is a radical break between pre-modern units and sentiments and modern nations and nationalism, and equally of the perennialists, who say that the latter are simply larger, updated versions of pre-modern ties and sentiments, we look to the concept of the ethnies or ethnic community and its symbolism, to distance our analysis from the more sweeping claims on either side. (p. 13)

As a follow-up to my previous critique of politically-oriented theorization, the question that I wish to focus on in the present chapter, is whether this distinction between “culture” and “politics” can be sustained. The implications of this distinction, should briefly be delineated. My line of contention mirrors that of the previous chapter, where I demonstrated how political struggles are not delimited to state-centred or state-oriented activities. The same critique can be applied to culture-oriented analysis of nationalism. The ethnosymbolists have effectively demonstrated how political contestation is carried out, and political projects constructed, by deploying ethnic-cultural symbols that are deeply embedded in the populace’s collective consciousness. In doing so, they relegate ethnicity to a determinate domain, that being common: myths of origin, values, memories, sentiments and symbols. This approach begs the question of whether “non-cultural” characteristics that are from their perspective not fundamentally constitutive of ethnic identity can also operate as national building blocks. United States national identity, as an example, entails dimensions that are thoroughly overdetermined by liberal and capitalistic narratives and arrangements, while often being considerably deficient in what the ethnosymbolist would regard as “ethnic characteristics.” Similarly, Post-World War II German national identity, as Muller (2005) has very well demonstrated, is very often accessed through economic self-understandings, where “German national culture” is understood in terms of its economic culture and institutional arrangements.

I do not mean to argue that national identity is not, very often, articulated in reference to its presumed “ethnic dimension.” Indeed, strong arguments that are rich in historical data and that demonstrate the ethnic dimensions of nations, have been advanced by the ethnosymbolists. However, to the extent that ethnic elements are deployed in processes of nation construction, they are invariably co-articulated with narratives and institutional arrangements that do not necessarily adhere to the ethnosymbolists’ understanding of “ethnic culture.” In this sense, ethnicity does not constitute the *core* of nations, as Smith would argue, but one among many “cultural resources” that may be deployed for processes of nation construction.

A most important and related question to consider is the following: where does “culture” end, and where does “politics” begin? Can these distinctions be ontologically grounded or do they merely reflect aprioristic distinctions drawn by the theoretical hand? As I will demonstrate, these theoretical conundrums, which stem from neat analytic separations between “politics” and “ethnic culture,” occur in the absence of a broader interrogation of whether *cultural constructions as such, are invariably political in character*. The argument that I wish to sequentially develop throughout the whole of the present work, is that the construction of “culture” is itself a political act, because it invariably results in uneven processes of subversion that effectuate relations of power. An effectively articulated ethnic self-understanding of nations, is therefore understood as a hegemonic construction, wherein the national communal totality is represented vis-à-vis ethnic characteristics—a process that invariably obfuscates the plurality of forms that co-constitute the nation’s operational terrain.

The theorist I have chosen to focus on for in the present chapter, is the notable Anthony Smith, whose contributions, in my opinion, are among the most comprehensive and multidimensional. He is, moreover, the principal name associated with the ethnosymbolist school and has indeed provided us with a number of laudable works throughout his career that advance the ethnosymbolist argument. Smith’s efforts are predicated on a clear goal. He aims to modify the orthodox modernist paradigm that suggests that nations are distinctively modern political constructs by tracing the ethnic foundations of modern nations (Smith, 1986, p. 15). In this sense, analytic “emphasis is laid upon the cultural forms of sentiments, attitudes and perceptions, as these are expressed and codified in myths, memories, values and symbols” (Smith, 1986, p. 15). From this statement alone, it becomes clear that the notion of “ethnicity” comes to constitute a node upon which Smith’s theoretical structure will be based, and which operates as a synonym-substitute for culture and identity. What I should qualify, however, is that Smith’s theory of nationalism does not lack a political dimension. Rather, what interests Smith is how cultural forms become the basis of polity formation. His overarching argument can be summed up by the following propositions.

A successful construction of national culture requires the incorporation of pre-existing ethnic elements (Smith, 1991, p. 40). In the rare case where they are absent, they have to be constructed or invented so as to forge a common cultural national base. This ethnic-cultural core, which for Smith (1986) is undercut by a “myth-symbol” complex that gives being to the community’s “mythomoteur,” that is, its “constitutive political myth” (pp. 57–58). This political mythology will, in turn, give shape and direction to the community by shaping its goals and ideals (Smith, 1986, p. 58). The essential role that the ethnic myth-symbol complex and mythomoteur play in the formation of communities is true for pre-national ethnic, and modern national, communities, alike. In this sense, Smith, while accepting the proposition that nations are distinctively modern, also distances himself from the pure modernist perspective that holds that ethnonational identity is a modern construct that emerge in the context of nationalist politics. In his own words:

It is ethnies rather than nations, ethnicity rather than nationality, and ethnicism rather than nationalism, that pervades the social and cultural life of antiquity and the early Middle Ages in Europe and the Near East. These ethnies existed within or alongside various polities, and were quite often divorced from politics and the state or, in becoming politicized, acquired dominion, like the Persians and Medes, over many other ethnies. Alternatively they constituted culturally diverse enclaves within the large empires of antiquity and the Middle Ages, persisting independently of any congruent state formation. (Smith, 1986, p. 89)

And while the existence of ethnies is not universal, it is nonetheless “widespread and chronic” (Smith, 1986, p. 32). In modern times, more specifically, these ethnies become a depository of cultural elements that are used in the construction of nations. Ethnic bonds are thus an inextricable part of national identity. In what proceeds, I will outline what, according to Smith, is the relationship between the “ethnie” and “the nation.”

According to Smith (1986) ethnicity can be understood as the shared myths, memories, values and symbols—what he terms the myth-symbol complex—that are transmitted from one generation to the next through various mechanisms of diffusion (p. 15). More specifically, the “dimensions” of ethnies are constituted by the following elements: a collective name, myth of common descent, a shared history, a distinctively shared culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity. It is not clear, except by inference, whether any of these dimensions are essential in the constitution of ethnies. For example, Smith notes that myth of descent constitutes the “*sine qua non*” of ethnicity and that ethnies “always” possess an association with a territory. However, Smith (1986) is clear that these dimensions of ethnies operate at the level of analysis and that

In practice, some of the elements or components vary in degree of clarity, scope and intensity; myths of ancestry may be confused, historical memories may seem sketchy and the lines of cultural difference appear hazy and blurred. Nevertheless, enquiry into these six dimensions will generally reveal the extent to which we are dealing with an ethnies or an ethnic category, or simply some regional variation of an ethnies, or indeed a class or religious community or polity. (pp. 30–31)

The myth-symbol complex, therefore, consists of a number of elements that coalesce in various forms and degrees and that comes to constitute the cultural building blocks of any ethnic community, which in turn may or may not constitute its political mythologies. And since nationality always contains ethnic elements, the myth-symbol complex constitutes the very foundation of national culture and politics. Ethnicity and its myth-symbol complex, in a sense, become the nation’s *sine qua non*. Smith (1986) notes that “not only did many nations and nationalisms spring up on the basis of pre-existing ethnies and their ethnocentrism, but that in order to forge a ‘nation’ today, it is vital to create and crystallize ethnic components, the lack of which is likely to constitute a serious impediment to ‘nation-building’” (p. 17). This, however, is not to doubt the distinctively modern character of nations. Much in line with his

modernist predecessors, Smith (1986) maintains that “Nationalism, both as ideology and movement, is a wholly modern phenomenon, even if [...] the ‘modern nation’ in practice incorporates several features of pre-modern ethnic and owes much to the general model of ethnicity which has survived in many areas until the dawn of the ‘modern era’” (p. 18). So the nation is a modern construct that incorporates pre-modern ethnic elements. What, then, differentiates the nation, as distinctively modern form, from its necessary pre-modern ethnic counterpart? For Smith (1986), it is its constitutive political dimension, which is associated with a series of “revolutions” that were effectuated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the spheres of labour division, administration control and cultural coordination (p. 131).

Owing to increasing economic integration and centralization, single territory-wide occupational systems gradually developed that, in turn, led to state policies that produced “standardized conditions and a single legally recognizable occupational system” (Smith, 1986, p. 131). Closely associated with economic integration imperatives was the increasing centralization of the state through bureaucratization and militarization. The state sought to “maximize resources at minimum cost” by developing expert state personnel via higher education, scientific societies, technical academies, institutes of higher administration and finance (Smith, 1986, p. 132). The increasing territorialization and centralization of the state “went hand in hand with growing cultural standardization,” which, through the institutionalization of cultural organizations, such as education, and the promotion of standard modes of communication, engendered a community of equal citizens (Smith, 1986, p. 133). As Smith (1986) poignantly explains, “The indivisibility of the state entailed the cultural uniformity and homogeneity of its citizens” (p. 134). So, in essence, the historical trend toward nation formation is one of increasing economic and state centralization, a process accompanied by the increasing provision of political rights and the increasing integration and homogenization of populations. This is precisely the reason why Smith (1991) notes that

‘national’ identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong. (p. 9)

The nation is, therefore, defined by Smith (1991) as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (p. 14). The implication, of course, is that nations entail the relative convergence between culture, economy and politics, though it is important to note that it is specifically the political and state dimensions, as defined by Smith, which “elevates” an ethnic group to the status of a nation. Smith (1986) even goes as far as to identify the *necessary* politicization of ethnicity as a key element of modernity (p. 157). We can, therefore, in summation, state that the politicization of ethnicity in modernity is contingent upon: territorial and state centralization, the provision of common legal rights and the expectation of common duties, and the instituting of common institutions, all of which engendered a public culture. But it is important to re-emphasize, should we lose sight of Smith’s original argument that no nation can be instituted in the absence of a core ethnic culture based on a common myth-symbol complex. In his own words,

As a modern formation and conception, the “nation” must accept the legacy of the triple revolution and become a territorially centralized, politicized, legal and economically unified unit bound by a common civic outlook and ideology. But as a solidary, mobilizing force, the ‘nation’ must take over some of the attributes of pre-existing ethnic and assimilate many of their myths, memories and symbols, or invent ones of its own. This dual orientation—to political future and cultural past—is the subject of any examination of the main features and trends in the creation of nations in the modern world. (Smith, 1986, p. 152)

The nation, therefore, entails the convergence between ethnic culture and the specific political dimensions of modernity. The former, with its constitutive “myth-symbol complex,” gives being and legitimizes the latter. On a superficial level, this proposition appears to be a tenable one. But let us examine whether it can be sustained if we are to probe deeper into the content of the concepts at play. How does Smith understand “the political?” There seem to be two answers to this question. In various instances, politics for Smith is understood as a field of antagonisms that concern the distribution of power. In his discussion of the necessary politicization of ethnicity, as an example, Smith (1986) makes the following remark:

To mobilize formerly passive objects of history into citizens and subjects of history requires in turn a new attitude to power. It means forsaking the realm of culture and entering the political arena. But, even more important, it entails the conjunction of culture with politics, a key element of nationalism itself. It no longer suffices for members of the community to conserve their culture; it is no longer possible to tend one’s cultural garden without influencing the distribution of power and making political claims. (p. 156)

But it is important to note that this conception of politics is undermined by a parallel understanding of politics that sees the political dimensions of the nation as its common legal codes, common rights and obligations, a territorial homeland, common regulating institutions, and a common public culture (Smith, 1986, p. 9). Politics is thus simultaneously understood in terms of antagonisms by virtue of differential subject positions, and in terms of common political culture, which essentially bears the implied imprint of state determinations. So a key analytic concept is here split between incompatible meanings. It is, on the one hand, constituted by the notions of “antagonism,” “power,” and “difference”, while on the other, it is riddled by denotations that express “unity,” “consensus,” and “sameness.” Directly related to this assertion is the proposition that nationalism entails the convergence between culture and politics, a proposition that saturates the literature on nationalism through and through (e.g., Gellner, 1983; Giddens,

1985; Habermas, 1996b). *This is a theoretical position that I cannot accept*, however widely it is accepted in the literature. The shortcoming is subtle and hidden, yet has profound theoretical and political consequences.

At the level of theory, the so-called “convergence” between cultural core and politics is without doubt *aporetic*. In other words, the argument is governed by an unresolvable tension between its asserted propositions. *Cultural or ethnic core implies cultural singularity, while politics entails cultural plurality*. If nationality entails an ethnic core that operates as the community’s cultural base, and the basis of its constitutive political mythologies, then how can this converge with a political terrain that *necessarily* entails variable (and antagonistic) subject positions and, by extension, *cultural cleavages*? There can be no politics in the absence of cultural difference as it would render antagonisms obsolete. There can be no politics against the backdrop of a “core culture,” since that “core” would by definition eliminate all difference—the very substance of politics. In light of this realization, the underlying foundation that is attributed to “ethnic culture,” in the formation of nations, is rejected. Clearly, Smith is unable to come to terms with how a national community can be established *in light of its constitutive plurality (of its subject positions)*. In other words, what is missing from Smith’s theory is the hegemonic dimension of politics, where particular forms of representation come to signify the communal totality by coming to be variably and unevenly imbricated in life modalities and heterogeneous subjectivities.

The underlying reason behind this subtle yet important shortcoming is Smith’s failure to adequately theorize the relationship between culture and the political. This is because Smith’s foundational concept—the myth-symbol complex—is largely left untheorized in terms of its discursive function, while being attributed with determinate content (e.g., myth of origin, territorial attachment, etc.). If the myth-symbol complex is conceived as operating as the “base” of the community’s cultural and political life, then the implication is that it is imbricated, through its dispersion, in the social’s multifarious fabric. This dimension is implied in Smith, but not explicitly explored, in addition to the question of whether the myth-symbol complex, in its dispersion, retains its “core” literal content, or whether this extension beyond its particularity produces additional layers of signification that unevenly

subvert its content. Instead, Smith invokes a series of concepts from the social and political canon, whose content is largely left unexamined and assumed to be self-evident: the myth-symbol complex for him consists of the myths, symbols, memories and values that constitute a community's ethnic core.

I find this casual invocation of these analytic concepts to be unwarranted. First, the notion of "symbols" can no longer be understood in terms of any determinate content or effect (i.e., in constituting a key element of ethnicity), following the radicalization of the concept in linguistic, philosophical, sociological, and political canon (Derrida, 1993; Freud, 1955; Lacan, 2006a; Laclau, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Saussure, 1966). All signifiers are understood in terms of their difference and association with other signifiers and are, therefore, symbolic in character (Lacan, 2006a; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Saussure, 1966). Thus, the notion of "the symbol" is an inadequate term in identifying specific cultural elements (e.g., ethnicity, myth of origin etc.) since it operates at all levels of the social and in all cultural contexts and domains. Still, more problematic is the notion of "values," which is deployed with minimal examination of how it relates to myth and, more specifically, politics. This is because Smith understands "values" in the naive sense that it is typically understood in the sociological canon, as "common cultural values," without examining the discursive basis of value as such.

In his most-illuminating essay, "Myth Today" (1972), Roland Barthes reaches a fascinating conclusion about the discursive function of myth. Steering away from understanding myth in terms of determinate content, Barthes suggests that myth is, instead, a semiological form. It consists of a process whereby signifiers are "strung together," in ways that produce second-, third-, fourth-, etc. order significations. In the process, the meaning of the "base" signifiers is subverted by the second-order signification that is produced. For example, a slogan that is pervasively propagated by Greek-Cypriot nationalists is "Cyprus, land that is Greek." The slogan is constituted by three main signifiers: "Cyprus," "land" and "Greek." Each of these signifiers, when taken individually, contains an associated signified. "Cyprus," as an example, among other things, refers to an island, whose history has been riddled with the presence of a huge array of imperial, ethnic and religious groups: Hellenes, Franks, Turks, Venicians, Arabs, Ottomans, Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Armenians, Gypsies, Maronites, Lynovamvakes,

English, etc. But by linking “Cyprus” with “land that is Greek,” I am not merely stating a normative statement of how Cyprus should be. The meaning that emerges out of this construction—the second order signification—is that Cyprus has been, is, always will, and always should be, Greek. It accords a universalism to concepts that are riddled with historical particularities. The particularity of the concepts has been subverted, giving way to an emergent “universalism” that parasitically feeds on them.

The construction of myth therefore entails the very construction of *value* by means of *subversion*. In the aforementioned example, the content of Cyprus’ cultural history is subverted—devalued—making way for the “rise” of a value that is presented as singular: Greekness. The key question for us now is what this process has to do with politics. If politics entails processes of contestation and antagonism and the very instituting and distribution of power then, by extension, it entails *particular orderings of the very value of the signifiers that come to constitute any cultural context and the content of social and political identities*. Let us take, as an example, an idea often advanced by Greek nationalist conservatives that “the proper role of a Greek woman is to bear Greek children, thus sustaining the Greek nation’s glorious ethnic lineage. This (mythical) statement simultaneously affirms the singularity of “the nation” and relegates the woman to the restricted status of “child bearer,” thus promoting her exclusion from public life. What is effectuated is the subordination of the identity of the woman to that of the man. But what is important to note is that the unity of the community is affirmed in light of the differential subject positions and unequal power relations that are articulated through the mythical elocution. The process can only be effective if the said statement comes to occupy, in part, the consciousness of women. This is enabled through the polysemy of the constitutive signifiers—they can receive multiple determinations. In our present example, the category of “woman” retains its historical particularity and the experiences and interests that pertain to that category. This content is nonetheless simultaneously subverted as it receives content from an antagonistic political identity—the man—which generalizes its interests precisely by “infiltrating” the content of antagonistic political identities—the woman—with its own narratives and interests. It does so by appealing to a signifier that, by virtue of its profusely general dispersion in the social fabric, comes to acquire a seemingly absolute status—“the nation.” In regards specifically to the

content of myth, one can therefore deduce that it cannot be reduced to any unwavering “core” that can be replicated from content to content. Rather, the content of any myth comes to be overdetermined by the context of its application, as it comes to receive contested determinations. This means that the “unity” of the content of the mythological fabric can only be characterized by degrees of metonymical contiguity and that any partial fixing of meaning comes to operate through hegemonic relations, *where one identity comes to “infiltrate” or produce other identities.*

Myth, then, does not constitute a determinate “cultural core” upon which a political platform is constructed, as Smith holds. *Myth is the very substance of politics*: the process through which differential subject positions come to be aggregated and simultaneously imbued with unequal value. At the backdrop of this realization also dissolves the distinction between ethnic (myth-symbol complex) and political culture (common political institutions). The state, and its various co-determinants (e.g., education, military, police etc.), are similarly structured by myth complexes and the “independence” that is bestowed upon them as “formal political institutions,” is precisely immanent to such processes of construction. For example, a common legal system, something that Smith regards as a marker of nations, receives its being through a variety of mythological complexes. A common legal system, as an example, may be contingent upon a series of liberal narratives (e.g., equality, liberty, etc.) that are, in turn contingent upon particular conceptions of human nature. This process, whereby a “base” signification enables second-, third-, etc. order significations, is, *in its function*, identical to the examples of “myth” I delineated above. Returning to the example of the U.S., we can very well state that the centrality that is afforded to capitalism, constitutes a mythical dimension of the national identity—one that operates on many levels and that binds together various of the social’s dimensions.

We thus arrive at a conclusion that strips the literature of one of its basic premise: the so-called distinction between culture and politics. If politics is about the distribution of power that is contingent upon acts of cultural construction (e.g., myth) that afford differential values to the plurality of subject positions that constitution the social, then cultural construction is precisely immanent to the political. The political is nothing more than the instituting of the social through cultural construction, which necessarily

entails, as a consequence, dimensions of power, since any ordering of meaning necessarily entails relations of power and subversion. Much in line with Laclau and Mouffe (2001), then, *we use the term “political” to refer to that instance where the various dimensions of the social are instituted, and the term “social” to refer to relatively stable and repetitive patterns of arrangement.* I should also mention, in passing, that this also dissolves the canonical distinction between “Eastern ethnic” and “Western civic/political” nationalism (which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 11).

How are we, then, to re-articulated Smith’s laudable canonical contribution, in light of our theoretical breakthroughs? The “myth-symbol” complex is not discarded but, rather, conceptualized as operating at multiple levels of narratives, in terms of its function—not its precise content. The contents that Smith’s attributes to the myth-symbol complex (e.g., myth of origin, territorial attachment, shared historical memories) are now understood as just some out of many possible narratives that may come to operate as communal binding blocks. This means that narratives that are “non-ethnic” in character can also come to constitute dimensions that bind a community together and that *any sort of foundationality that is attributed to the them is itself a function of mythical construction.* What we have thus revealed through our radicalization of the notion of “myth” is the constitutive plurality of terrains, through which myth operates. Lastly, we should note that if the mythical fabric is the terrain through which differential subject positions are aggregated and through which power is unevenly distributed, then the hegemonic operation, whereby a particularity comes to operate as the (national) communal limits, is immanent to processes of mythical construction. This will be a topic of thorough examination in Chapter 11.

Chapter 7: The Nation-State and Globalization

To my knowledge, there has not yet emerged a prolific theory of “globalization and nationalism” as in the grand theorizing style we have examined in our previous critiques. Rather, recent trends point toward a proliferation of, specifically, theories of globalization, whose subject matter is frequently related to the nation-state. David Held (2003a) and his colleagues have done a remarkable job at capturing the breadth of these debates. Discussions on the relationship between globalization and the nation-state are typically guided by two questions. The first is whether globalization has undermined national sovereignty or nation-state efficacy (Beck, 2009b; Brown, 2010, 2015; Giddens, 1994; Habermas, 1996b, 1999; Holton, 2011; Sassen, 2006). The second is whether they have subverted, revamped, or reactivated nationalist sentiments and identifications (Ariely, 2012; Auer, 2010; Calhoun, 2007; Holton, 2011; Mann, 1997; Pieterse, 2006; Smith, 1990). The normative dimension of these debates concerns the relationship between the nation-state, democracy and globalization. A frequently explored theme in this regard is how globalization is undermining a democracy that has thus far flourished in the context of the nation-state (Brown, 2015; Habermas, 1996b, 1999). The most well-known theorist who has dealt with this matter prolifically is, of course, Jurgen Habermas.

Ever since distancing himself from his earlier Marxist-oriented work, Habermas has devoted the bulk of his writings to the question of democracy. In the present chapter I will assess a series of essays that were written by Habermas during the “peak” of the globalization debate. In these essays, Habermas attempts to resolve what he deems to be the tension between the forces of globalization and liberal democracy. These works mirror Habermas’ (1996a) earlier endeavours in many ways, in the sense that they are guided by an ethical commitment to “democratic deliberation.” The reason why I have chosen Habermas is not least because he is one of the theorists who has pioneered and helped carve the course of this debate. It is my estimation that the various assumptions, upon which Habermas’ theory is constructed, are paradigmatic of broader tendencies encountered in the literature. Two related tendencies are of particular interest: the tendency to posit “globalization” or “global economy” as being external to

“the nation-state” while signifying “the nation-state” in terms of one of its historically-specific instantiations—the post-world war two Keynesian state. As I will show, Habermas’ approach presents us a number of unresolved theoretical problems that at the same time find an impotent counterpart in political struggles. Let us proceed in delineating his theory.

For Habermas, the European nation-state constitutes a unique historical constellation. Its emergence can be traced to the confluence of particular historical developments—and this is key—whose causal efficacy could only materialize with the concomitant development of national consciousness. In other words, modernity, liberalism, capitalism, democracy and republicanism could only come to be aggregated in the “fixed” form of the European nation-state, alongside the emergence of a national consciousness that gave them being. It was two historical transformations that enabled this new form of socio-political organization. The first was the religious wars in Europe that undermined medieval legitimization systems. In the wake of religious pluralism, the King’s divine right to rule lost its political efficacy. Consequently, secular forms of legitimation needed to replace religious forms of legitimation. The second was the thrust of modernization, which supplanted traditional forms of social integration: “Populations that were pulled out of traditional relationships and freed from the corporate ties of early modern societies faced the alienating experience of becoming at the same time mobilized and isolated” (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 128–129). The rise of national self-consciousness, or, nationalism, constituted a solution to both of these historical “problems,” those being, the retraction of political legitimation and social integration, with the transformation from the paternalistic “nation of the nobility,” to the democratic “nation of the people” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 127). But it is important to note that this process of political identity construction “had also borrowed connotations from its older, pre-political, twin concept,” that being the nation “as a concept of origin” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 127). The emergence of national consciousness was governed by a certain bifurcated effect. On the one hand, it exercised an integrative effect in conjoining strangers over broad territorial units as “equals” by virtue of their national origin. On the other, this identity construction was used as a basis for exclusion. This duality is what Habermas characterizes as the tension between republicanism and nationalism (Habermas, 1996b, p. 130).

Paralleling these developments, the construction of the modern state, provided the territorial basis and the rational-bureaucratic and political infrastructure for the ensuing national democratic model of governance. As Habermas (1996b) notes,

From a sociological point of view, one would add that the institutional core of this modern state is formed by a legally constituted and highly differentiated administrative apparatus which monopolizes the legitimate means of violence and obeys an interesting division of labor with a market society set free for economic functions. With the support of police and military, the state maintains its autonomy within and without; sovereignty means that the political authority maintains both law and order within the boundaries of its territory. (p. 126)

Thus, the unique historical constellation of the nation-state materializes at the backdrop of a state claiming sovereignty over a delimited territorial and definitive institutional framework, wherein sovereignty, in the wake of national consciousness, is conceived, specifically, in terms of *national* sovereignty. The state thus came to operate as the community's politico-bureaucratic infrastructure, while "[t]he national self-consciousness of the people provided a cultural context that facilitated the political activation of citizens" (Habermas, 1996b, p. 128). In this way, the nation-state simultaneously solved the problem of social integration, via the dissemination of a broad national consciousness, and, legitimation, via the transference of sovereignty from "the nobility" to "the people" (Habermas, 1996b, p. 128).

The institutional point of convergence of this dual historical development is citizenship, which weaves together the socio-political community: "in the course of the spread of political participation, there emerged a new, legally mediated solidarity among citizens, while the state, in implementing democratic procedures, at the same time tapped a new secular source of legitimation. This innovation is best explained in terms of 'citizenship'" (Habermas, 1996b, p. 129). But Habermas is clear that the "socially integrating substrate for the political identity of the republic" is a particular conception of a common cultural identity (Habermas, 1996b, p. 130). The political movement toward a democratic and

sovereign republic of citizens required a constitutive point of reference, beyond the mere abstract ideas of citizenship, those being human rights or popular sovereignty (Habermas, 1996b, p. 130). “Only the awareness of a national identity crystallized around a common history, language and culture, only the consciousness of belonging to the same nation, made people spread over large territories feel politically responsible for one another” (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 129–130).

But while the nationalist and democratic-republican principle found mutual expression in a shared socio-political space, they often come in conflict with one another. The particularistic perceptions of a nation that is conceived as a pre-political fact, very often results in marginalization and exclusion of populations, while the universalistic conceptions of a constitutional republic are based on the universal principles of human and citizen rights (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 130–131). But according to Habermas (1996b), the republican principles of egalitarianism may place a restraint on particularistic nationalism and penetrate sub-political life-forms, thus operating as forms of social integration (p. 131). But this process can be threatened “when the integrative force of the nation [...] is traced back to a prepolitical fact, the quasi-natural features of a historical community” (p. 131). In this case, the integrative forces of the nation are conceived in terms of a quasi-natural origin that is independent of political opinion and will-formation of citizens (Habermas, 1996b, p. 131).

The key question for Habermas, is whether this tension between nationalism and republicanism can be resolved. The answer is in the affirmative: “This tension can be resolved on the condition that the constitutional principles of human rights and democracy give priority to a cosmopolitan understanding of the nation as a nation of citizens over an ethnocentric interpretation of the nation as a prepolitical entity” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 131). For Habermas (1996b), this move requires a new form of social integration—that of “constitutional patriotism” (p. 133). This is to be achieved with the general diffusion of *social and cultural rights*, in addition to liberal and political rights. This involves transforming a nationalist conception of citizenship into a democratic conception of citizenship that is based on robust values of social welfare “and mutual recognition among existing varieties of forms of life” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 134). Democratic citizenship can only supplant nationalist integration forces if it is experienced beyond

mere legality, if it is recognized “as the very mechanism by which the legal and material infrastructure of actually preferred forms of life is secured” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 134). According to Habermas, this model of democracy had only been implemented successfully, in the context of the welfare state’s expansion, which promoted a broader social egalitarianism and thus added new substance to the notion of citizenship (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 134–135). As Habermas (1996a) concludes,

If the system of rights is elaborated and extended under such favourable circumstances, each citizen can perceive, and come to appreciate, citizenship as the core of what holds people together, of what makes them at once dependent upon, and responsible for each other [...] They learn to conceive citizenship as the frame for that dialectic between legal and actual equality from which fair and preferable living conditions for all of them can emerge (p. 135).

The important thing to note in regards to this argument is that this form of national democracy is contingent upon a particular relationship between the state, the capitalist economy, sovereignty, and citizenship. The integrative capacities of a political citizenship bolstered by social and cultural rights, could only take effect in a context where state, economy and society were co-extensive (Habermas, 1999, p. 48), with the implementation of economic, financial and social policy, meant to offset or ameliorate the undesirable consequences of capitalism (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 135–136, 1999, pp. 46–47). Examples include “industrial promotion,” “credit subsidies,” “tariff protection,” and, of course, direct and indirect “monetary redistribution” vis-à-vis welfare policies and services (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 135–136). Thus, for Habermas (2001a), the relationship between state, economy and democracy, is posed as an issue of social integration:

It is a problem as old as capitalism itself: how to exploit the allocative functions of self-regulating markets effectively without incurring unequal distribution and social costs that undermine the integration of liberal societies. In the West's mixed economies, the state—with much of the

national product at its disposal—had gained a certain latitude for making transfer and subsidy payments and, on the whole, for establishing efficient policies for employment, infrastructure and social security. The state could influence the overall conditions of production and distribution, with the aim of achieving growth, price stability and full employment. In other words, the regulatory state could, through growth inducements on the one hand and social policy on the other hand, simultaneously stimulate the economy and guarantee social integration. (p. 235)

Thus, effective social integration within the nation-state model, is contingent upon the mitigation of capitalism's vices and the institutionalization of processes that bolster economic, social and culture and political egalitarianism. As a direct after-effect, this broad, albeit relative, diffusion of social egalitarianism, finds its expression in a political understanding of democracy: that of equal citizens as "legislators" deliberating acting upon their society for mutual benefit (Habermas, 1999, pp. 46–47). This model of democracy and citizen self-understanding can, therefore, only burgeon in a system *where there is convergence between the political and economic system, and, more specifically, where the latter is subordinated to the former*. It is only by subordinating the economic system to a political system that the nation-state form can be legitimated and experienced as a democracy of citizens, where it represents the will of the people. This is precisely the model of democratic citizenship that has been stripped of its efficacy by the forces of globalization. We can summarize Habermas' (1998) argument by saying that the expansion of economies beyond the confines of the nation-state, renders the state unable to mitigate and offset the former's undesirable consequences (p. 236). This development rests on what Habermas' (1996b) calls the uncoupling of the economic and political system, which results in legitimation and social integration deficits (p. 136). Before we explore the intricacies of this argument, let us proceed in delineating what constellation of events, for Habermas, are characteristic of globalization.

Habermas (2001a) uses the term globalization to describe a process characterized by the "increasing scope and intensity of commercial, communicative, and exchange relations beyond national borders" (p. 66). This possibility is made possible by new forms of technology, such as "satellite

technology, air travel, and digitalized communication,” which “have the effect of expanding and intensifying networks” (Habermas, 2001a, p. 66). And while this process of network expansion has cultural, technological, communicational, environment and (non)governmental dimensions, “the most significant dimension is economic globalization, whose new quality can hardly be doubted” (Habermas, 2001a, p. 66). The economic dimension of globalization refers to: intensification in the trade of industrial goods; increases in the number and influence of transnational corporations; increases in direct foreign investments; the acceleration of capital flows through global electronic financial market networks; and the increasing autonomy of financial circulation, whose dynamic is distinct from the real economy (Habermas, 2001a, p. 66). In order to capture the significance of Habermas’ argument, we need to explore how these global economic developments interact with the political dimensions of the nation-state.

As a reminder, “The nation state did indeed provide a framework in which the republican idea of a community consciously influencing itself could be articulated and institutionalized” but “[n]ow, however, the globalization of the same trends that originally spawned the nation state calls its sovereignty into question” (Habermas, 1996b, p. 135). So the argument is couched on a thematic axis that connects “world economy,” “the state,” “sovereignty,” “democracy,” and “citizenship.” The crux of the argument is that the expansion of capitalist economies beyond the confines of the nation-state renders the latter unable to manage the former and thus off-set the former’s its undesirable consequences. A most-related corollary is the deterioration of the efficacy of democratic citizenship and national sovereignty, the combination of *which results in legitimation and social integration deficits*. How does globalization, then, compromise national sovereignty and citizenship?

Firstly, globalization deteriorates the fiscal basis for the procurement of social rights (Habermas, 2001a, p. 80). The “division” between state and economy, which had been a hallmark of the European nation-state model, was contingent upon a mutually-reciprocal relationship between the two: the state collected taxes for its functioning, while providing the legal guarantees, and the necessary regulation and infrastructure for capital accumulation (Habermas, 1996b, p. 126). The procurement of social rights in the form of welfare provisions and de-commodified services, that is, the very foundation of social and

economic egalitarianism, is, of course, contingent upon a robust taxation and redistributive system. This is the model that has been compromised with the liberation of capital beyond nation-state control. This is due to the fact that the imposition of high taxes renders local businesses less competitive on the global scale. Moreover, capital, having been empowered, now threatens with flight if its demands of low taxation are not met:

The mere threat of capital flight touches off a tax-cutting spiral (and hinders national tax enforcement agencies from imposing valid laws). Taxation at the highest income brackets, capital gains taxes, and corporate taxes have fallen to such a low level in the OECD countries that the proportion of total tax revenues derived from corporate profits has drastically fallen since the end of the 1980s, meaning that the proportion derived from excise taxes and tax on regular wage earners has seen a corresponding rise. (Habermas, 2001a, p. 69)

As a result, the relative social egalitarianism that had been cultivated in the context of welfare redistributive policies is continuously being undermined, owing to the reduction of welfare budgets and social policies (Habermas, 2001a, p. 77). Furthermore, the norms of the global market have undermined the state's capacity to regulate economic cycles and stimulate economic growth through investments (Habermas, 2001a, pp. 50, 77, 79). But according to Habermas, welfare systems are the very "sources of social solidarity" whose reduction results in social integration deficits (Habermas, 1996b, p. 136). The emergence of marginalized groups and the segmentation of minorities, alongside associated social problems, are but a reflection of welfare reductions (Habermas, 1996b, p. 136).

Social integration challenges are further accentuated, owing to the state's incapacity to regulate a common identity in the wake of globalization's cultural pluralism. What is at stake here is the gradual erosion of the "pre-political" basis of national citizenship. The argument holds that all European nations are gradually morphing into multicultural societies and that the imperatives of multiculturalism, which find an expression in policies and regulations, have shaken up the "national basis for social solidarity"

(Habermas, 2001a, pp. 73–74). The cohesiveness of the national community is further compromised by the general diffusion of a mass global culture vis-à-vis global markets, consumption, communication and tourism (Habermas, 2001a, p. 75). This global mass culture not only levels out differences between nations, but also differences within nations, and, furthermore, weakens local traditions (Habermas, 2001a, p. 75). As a reaction against such homogenizing pressures, new cultural differences are created, in the form of novel subcultures and lifestyles, individualized cosmopolitan identities, whether collective or individuals, and sealed-off groups (Habermas, 2001a, pp. 75–76). As a result of this increasing cultural pluralism, civil solidarity may come to be undermined (Habermas, 2001a, p. 76).

These deficits in social integration are accompanied and exacerbated by legitimation deficits. Habermas argues that economic decisions taken by transnational actors, are very often not subjected to state and, therefore, democratic management. But the consequences of such decisions nonetheless impacts national populations. As a consequence, national government are increasingly subjugated to the imperatives of global capital while national populations are increasingly vulnerable to the economic and social volatility brought about by the state's regulatory impotence:

In many European countries, the fact that markets have supplanted politics is reflected in the vicious circle of soaring unemployment, strained social security systems, and shrinking national insurance contributions. The state is on the horns of a dilemma: the greater the need to replenish exhausted state budgets by raising taxes on movable property and enacting measures to boost growth, the harder it becomes to do so within the confines of the nation-state. (Habermas, 1999, p. 50)

This “gap” between global decisions and democratic volition through state management is similarly encountered on issues relating to the environment and technology, whose scope expands beyond the confines of national borders. In other words, while technology and economy are now operating beyond the scope of the nation-state, there are no “functional equivalents” to the oversight capacities of the

nation-state. In this sense, the dislocations brought about by transnational techno-economic exchange cannot be countered by states (Habermas, 2001a, p. 79). Thus, the disruption that has been introduced in the nation-state model, concerns the dislocation of politics by the imperatives of the global economy. No longer is the economy subordinated to a political system that is articulated as a subset of democratic deliberation and national sovereignty (Habermas, 1999, p. 47). The state's loss of autonomy and control over its economy is equivalent to the diminution of democratic national sovereignty, since it is through the state that the citizenry wilfully "acts upon itself." Political decisions are thus withdrawn from the arenas of democratic opinion-formation and will-formation, which are exclusive to national arenas (Habermas, 1999, p. 49).

According to Habermas (1999), democratic legitimation deficits emergence when there is an incongruence between those that are involved in making the decisions and those who are affected by these decisions, especially when these decision compromise prerogatives that have been articulated in the context of the nation-state and that are integral to social and economic egalitarianism—the very premises of a republican understanding of citizenship (p. 49). In the context of globalization, this occurs when "politics" is "uncoupled" from the "economy." States in a globalized world are no longer nodes that constitute a worldwide system of international exchange, but are, rather, embedded within a network of global markets (Habermas, 1999, p. 48). As Habermas (2001a) poignantly asserts:

This shift of power is better grasped with the concepts of a theory of different steering media than with a theory of power: money replaces power. The regulatory power of collectively binding decisions operates according to a different logic than the regulatory mechanisms of the market. Power can be democratized; money cannot. Thus the possibilities for a democratic self-steering of society slip away as the regulation of social spheres is transferred from one medium to another.
(p. 78)

I have several substantive objections to Habermas' argument. The first concerns his treatment of "globalization" in what is reflective of broader tendencies in the literature: the forces of globalization are treated as somehow emanating from *outside* the nation-state or in *opposition* to it. Habermas' assertion that states constitute nodes within networks of global markets, rather than the opposite, is reflective of this reasoning as is, as a related example, Giddens' (1991, 1994) assertion that globalization constitutes "action at a distance" that supplants tradition through the diffusion of "abstract systems of knowledge." To claim that "it is rather states which are embedded within markets than national economies which are embedded within the boundaries of states" (Habermas, 1999, p. 48) is to suggest that there exists a network of markets that extends beyond the constellation or territorial expansion of *all* nation-states, or to claim that that there exists large enough economic networks that operate independently of nation-states. This assertion can only be made through an analytic frame that considers the problematic *from the standpoint of a particular nation-state whose economy is no longer enclosed within its self*. But this claim cannot be substantiated if we are to consider that when economic exchange extends *beyond* national state borders it simultaneously extends *within other* national state borders.

This mistake underlies the frequent tendency of objectifying globalization, perceiving it as an independent force operating beyond the scope of the nation-state. The normative and political failures associated with this tendency will be explored in Chapter 12. We can hardly speak of any economic process that circumvent the operational terrain of nation-states, whether those are legal, bureaucratic, institutional, cultural, etc. (Pickel, 2005, p. 6). Economic processes of most sort, are thoroughly saturated by the presence of the nation-state (Pickel, 2005, p. 6). Moreover, the emergence of the whole series of "disruptive" effects that we term "globalization," were carried out first and foremost as formal nation-state initiatives; are enabled by national-state legislative, bureaucratic and institutional channels; and operate through, and act upon, nation-state terrains (Pickel, 2005, pp. 6–7). So to suggest, even in the most implicit sense, that the global economy somehow works "external" to the nation-state, is fallacious theoretically as it is empirically. "Global" economic processes are thoroughly saturated and overdetermined by the nation-state. How are we to then assess the claim that the nation-state and its

constitutive functions have been compromised by the forces of globalization or that “globalization,” on some levels, operates in opposition to the nation-state?

To the extent that the nation-state system constitutes the very conditions of possibility of “globalization,” and to the extent that the plethora of “global” economic processes operate within the very channels of the nation-state system, such a claim cannot be substantiated. This claim can only be substantiated if we are to essentialize the nation-state by signifying it in terms of one of its particular historical instantiations: in the case of Habermas, the post-world war two Keynesian state. From the standpoint of this theoretical narrative, the “presence” or “power” of the nation-state becomes synonymous with “regulation,” “redistribution,” “social integration,” and “democracy.” It is as if the absence of social-democratic mechanisms of governance entails the absence, the dissolution or the compromising of the nation-state. It becomes clear that the operational terrain of the nation-state is, in this case, being marred and obfuscated by an analysis that is committed to specific ideological considerations. But this misconception is additionally reinforced by underlying theoretical commitments.

What is guiding Habermas’ analysis through and through is the old Weberian conception of power: as an actor’s ability to carry out their will irrespective of resistance. Despite Habermas’ assertion that in globalization “money” replaces “power,” and that the former is subjected to a different logic, his theory is very much guided by the Weberian conception of power, since the problematic is posed in terms of “steering.” In other words, the problematic is posed in terms of who makes decisions and for whom and who is able to impose their will unto others: Is it some form of political organization representing the people or the market representing the imperatives of capital accumulation? Thus, for Habermas, the solution is to subordinate the global economy, which is guided by “the will to accumulate,” to a supranational political governance guided by “the will of the people.” Indeed, Habermas’ solution is to extend the political functions of the nation-state to the supranational level, in the form of constitutional patriotism that is predicated on robust mechanisms of supranational democracy (Habermas, 1996b, pp. 133–134). The problem is ultimately “solved” through a theoretical lens that has essentialized the nation-

state in terms of “social liberal democracy” and “globalization” in terms of “unregulated liberal capitalism,” thus presenting the issue in terms of a dichotomous opposition.

My theoretical perspective is at great odds with this line of analysis. From a theoretical point of view, this tendency to reify the notion of globalization, rather than perceiving it as the proliferation of cross-national discursive channels, is to evade its constitutive *political dimensions* and its constitutive *conditions of possibility*. If we are to assess what enables “globalization” and its constitutive elements to emerge as “objects”—in other words, if we are to inquire about their constitutive conditions of possibility—we are to arrive to the conclusion that the existence of the nation-state system is their very precondition. Caution should be taken here to avoid essentializing the nation-state, by conceptualizing it in terms of a singular force out of which globalization emerges. What is at play here is a *plurality of elements whose rules of interaction and formation enable the emergence of globalization and its constitutive elements*—an object whose emergence nonetheless effectuates a series of dislocating effects into that very structure that engendered them. What we are revealing here is the “generative” or “positive” dimension of power—not as a “will” that is counterposed to another “will” but as the very terrain that enables and constrains possibilities. Perceived as such, power and therefore politics is no longer relegated to a determinate domain (e.g., think of Habermas’ dichotomy between “power” as a subset of state representation and “money” as a subset of liberal capitalism) or to a determinate agent carrying out its will (e.g., “people” versus “globalization”). “The political,” as I understand it, is the terrain through which the social is instituted (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2005).

The question which now follows is this: If the nation-state system is the very structure that enables the emergence and operations of globalization, then to what is the former’s “unity” as a “nation-state system” attributed to. The answer here cannot be ambiguous. The nation-state system is itself a theoretical construction, not an absolute and fully-constituted entity. It entails myriad processes whose interaction generates particular sets of arrangements. What allows us to even speak of a “nation-state system” is not an underlying positivity which governs the workings of the whole system, but rather, the relative but prolific dispersion of the signifier of “the nation,” alongside its related “family resemblances,”

which, by instituting certain privileged nodes that tie a plurality of identities and (global) social processes, afford the “system” some sort of regularity. “Globalization,” again perceived in terms of family resemblances, is not external to this “system” but is immanent to it, operating within relationships of mutual contamination. Perceived as such, normative questions about the nation-state and globalization are afforded an array of alternative and increasingly diverse possibilities for political action, since the question is not posed in terms of a nation-state that either needs to “catch up to,” or “subordinate,” the forces of globalization. Rather, the political dynamics of these normative questions assume a broader, more prolific and more pluralistic form. These normative and political dimensions will be elaborated in the concluding chapter.

I will preliminarily state that what enables Habermas to execute an argument on the basis of the aforementioned—and in my opinion unwarranted—dichotomies, is the absence of a theory of hegemony. What Habermas fails to consider, on a diachronic basis, is that the democratic subject is itself produced hegemonically. Democratic deliberation is thus invariably guided by particularistic content that tends it toward certain directions (hegemony). This means that a mere shift to “supranational” forms of governance and democracy are not *themselves* the solutions to the problem of democracy (i.e., equality), but would merely constitute novel terrains of political articulation. One only need to mention that the neoliberal developments that Habermas so adamantly critiques, burgeoned in, and were globally promoted by, nation-states that were “democratic.” As we will explore later, a radical democratic project can only ensue on the basis of an effectuated hegemony that institutionalizes relations that, through their interaction, put limits on the structuration of high value differentials.

Chapter 8: Power, Discourse, Articulation

Having concluded our survey of the theoretical history of the concepts of the nation and nationalism, having invaded this space with theoretical tools that allowed us to reveal its recurrent but permuted limitations, having administered a series of lesions on the very elisions that have obfuscated the nation's terrain of operation, having provisionally introduced a series of concepts that foreshadowed our theoretical orientation, we are finally in a position to intervene more radically into this theoretical space, and generatively re-construct the concept of the nation.

I have thus far paradigmatically critiqued the literature's positivistic tendencies by looking at the work of the most prolific theorists of nationalism, in an attempt to demonstrate how positivistic reasoning has obfuscated the *plurality* of processes through which nationalism operates. The culprits were identified and could be summarized in terms of two general co-operative theoretical tendencies: *monism* and *cause-and-effect logic*. I have, for example, shown how even the most prolific theories of nationalism explain the phenomenon in terms of a singular underlying premise that is thought to engender the nation. In the case of Anderson, it was the homogeneity of language, albeit awkwardly transformed into "representation through media" in the latter part of his book. In the case of Gellner, it was the imperatives of industrial culture. In the case of Nairn, it was the materiality of global uneven development. Even in the case of a more complex exposition that were highly sensitive to historical specificity, such as that of Breuilly, explanations were subordinated to "state politics."

What was highly underemphasized in many of these theories, with the exception of Breuilly's, was the *articulated* process through which the nation and nationalism are constructed. Instead, the emergence of the nation or nationalism appeared to conform to "automatic" historical effects. Theoretical arguments were generally executed through an obscure cause-and-effect logic that could only yield historical inaccuracies and theoretical impasses. It was as if a certain historical cause, to which the theorist granted a certain analytic "privilege," automatically engendered the novel and highly complex phenomenon that we now call "the nation" or "nationalism." Thus, for Anderson, the diffusion of

standardized languages through print-capital, “automatically” resulted in the emergence of a broader national consciousness. What his analysis underemphasizes is the highly complex and politically-riddled construction of national consciousness that was effected over the course of decades and centuries, in the context of plural political battles and competing ideologies. If “national” was elevated to the status of “consciousness,” it was precisely because the political vehicles of the nationalist ideology, were more effective in contaminating the emerging terrain of homogenized language. To say that the nation is a historical construct, as the modernists hold, is precisely to state that it is an articulated process of construction.

We can thus conclude that *theories of nationalism are governed by two predominant substantive shortcomings*. Firstly, they are unable to effectively account for the plurality of forms that, through their aggregation, enable the formation and on-going construction of the nation. Secondly, they lack a proper and comprehensive theory of politics that can illuminate how plural forms can be effectively aggregated (into meaningful communal totalities). Our task in the present section is to sequentially delineate the various theoretical planes that will allow us to expunge the final vestiges of positivism, thus enabling: (a) a novel theoretical understanding of “the social” that illuminates its constitutive plurality; and (b) a comprehensive understanding of “the political,” that will allow us to properly account for the articulated construction of the nation.

This task does not involve constructing another theory of “society,” but, rather, involves taking a series of theoretical steps that will allow us to radicalize, and perhaps discard, the concept altogether. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) have unapologetically asserted, society does not constitute a valid object of analysis (p. 111). The concept has been, since its inception, thoroughly saturated by positivistic orthodoxy, and thought to inhere to presumed “static laws” or “laws of motion.” In other words, the dimensions of “social order” and “social change” were similarly explained through the lens of essentialist conception of either “society” or “history.” Sociology derived its very status, and legitimized itself as a science, on the basis of the “underlying” social laws it had presumably discovered. That this very logic would come into conflict with sociology’s emphasis on historical contingency and “social construction,”

was inevitable. As a result, the aporetic field within our discipline proliferated. The question of how order could emerge despite the absence of underlying laws and how particularities incommensurate with one another could be fused into a “totality,” were questions left unanswered. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) maintain,

If social objectivity, through its internal laws, determined whatever structural arrangement exists (as in a purely sociologicistic conception of society), there would be no room for contingent hegemonic rearticulations — nor, indeed, for politics as an autonomous activity. In order to have hegemony, the requirement is that elements whose own nature does not predetermine them to enter into one type of arrangement rather than another, nevertheless coalesce, as a result of an external or articulating practice. The visibility of the acts of originary institution—in their specific contingency—is, in this respect, the requirement of any hegemonic formation. But to say *contingent articulation* is to enounce a central dimension of politics. This privileging of the political moment in the structuration of society is an essential aspect of our approach. (p. xii)

Let me reiterate that the predominant questions that have guided the literature on nationalism are: *what the nation is and how it came to be*. In re-articulating this problematic from a Post-Marxist standpoint, we can say that our principal foci are the *conditions of possibility* and *dislocating effects* that enable “the nation” to appear as a *total operation*. This duality between *dislocation* and *possibility* constitutes my theory’s organizing framework. However, an important caveat is in order. Dislocation and possibility should not be conceived as being antithetical to stability. Why is this so?

Any process of dislocation enables a range of novel possibilities, since it disrupts the fixity of the social. This terrain of burgeoning possibility is where potential political battles are fought out. The political act consists of ordering meaning, within that indeterminate terrain of possibility. A successful political articulation results in two related outcomes. It generates a new precarious communitarian “space”—indeterminacy has been reduced to stable social arrangements. But new dislocating effects may

potentially “bleed out” from the newly-constructed communitarian space, and outflow into other domains. As I will argue, “stability” and “dislocation,” far from being antithetical, constitute a necessary relationship, albeit one that is always characterized by tension. Two related arguments will be developed. The first is that the structuration of all communitarian space and, by extension, identities, is always incomplete. As such, the ever-presence of a terrain of indeterminacy disrupts the fixity of relations. The second is that this terrain of indeterminacy is the very possibility of social change (and therefore politics), since it subverts the principle of absolute determination and, therefore, repetition (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 134). The terrain of indeterminacy is precisely where “the political” receives its being—understood here as the process whereby subjects, by means of articulated constructions, institute social (and therefore power) relations.

Our endeavours are therefore situated between two levels of analysis. The task consists of, on the one hand, delineating the ontological terrain through which communitarian totalities as such, are constructed. And in light of the insights reached from this discussion we want to answer how a communitarian totality—specifically represented as a *national totality*—comes to be. I have already alluded to the answer. A communal totality, far from being predicated on any underlying *a priori* cause, is constructed through dispersed processes of political articulation that operate on plural levels and that come to be aggregated through common points of reference (i.e., “the nation,” “the state,” “military,” “national economy” etc.). In this sense, the challenge is to identify the discursive mechanisms, through which various sites of articulation and differential subject positions are aggregated and through which a (national) totality is represented.

In the following section, I proceed in introducing a series of theoretical concepts that aim to dispose of all positivistic reasoning, thus allowing us to account for: (a) the plurality of forms and dislocating effects that coalesced into “the formation of nations;” and (b) the plurality of forms that granted this novel phenomenon relative stability over time. Our principle theoretical question is how the totality of “the nation” is simultaneously constituted by a plurality of forms and dislocating effects. But if plurality and dislocation are to be understood as radically relational concepts; if they are to be understood

as historically-contingent process devoid of historical teleologisms; if they are to be understood as operating in a field of meaningful totalities that is, nonetheless, not subjected to an underlying *a priori* principle of unity; they have to simultaneously be tied to the notions of *contingency and articulation*. It is the invariably contingent character of the social, which is undercut by a constitutive field of dislocation, that breathes life into the articulating practice that is characteristic of all political constructions.

Social Relations and Power

I have already stated clearly that there have not been any effective attempts in the literature on nationalism to come to terms with how a “totality” can emerge in light of the plurality of its constitutive subject positions—on how identities or elements that may, to a large extent, be incommensurable with one another, come to occupy a common social terrain or communitarian space. But while attempts have been ineffective in solving the riddle, attempts have certainly been made to move away from cruder forms of positivism. Giddens’ notable critique of evolutionary and functionalist perspectives in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981) should be noted, as should Michael Mann’s *The Sources of Social Power* (2009, 2010). Mann’s work, which is particularly sensitive to historical complexity and specificity, has, since its publication, become a stable point of reference in the nationalist literature.

Mann affords us a socio-historic exposition that explores how, in what way and to what extent, what he considers to be “the four sources of social power”—the economy, the state, ideology and the military—contributed to the emergence of the nation. He confronts our question of interest explicitly: “Of all the issues raised by sociological theory over the last two centuries, the most basic yet elusive is that of ultimate primacy or determinacy” (Mann, 2009, p. 3). He proceeds in outlining his epistemological position. Being highly skeptical of the purely inductive approach to theory, which merely seeks to discover facts without subordinating them to general concepts or laws, Mann (2009) makes the correct observation that “[a]nalysis cannot merely reflect the ‘facts’; our perception of the facts is ordered by

mental concepts and theories. The average empirical historical study contains many implicit assumptions about human nature and society, and commonsense concepts derived from our own social experience - such as ‘the nation,’ ‘social class,’ ‘status,’ ‘political power,’ ‘the economy’” (Mann, 2009, pp. 3–4). On this, we are in full agreement. What I do take issue with, however, is whether deductive analytic categories impinge on underlying social laws. Mann (2009) clearly endorses this idea, since his work is ultimately reliant on a theory of power, where power is thought to inhere to individual drives: “Let us start with human nature. Human beings are restless, purposive, and rational, striving to increase their enjoyment of the good things of life and capable of choosing and pursuing appropriate means for doing so [...] These human characteristics are the source of everything described in this book. They are the original source of power” (p. 15). Easy as it is to critique this proposition, it is actually Mann’s more nuanced and complex theoretical position on society that I am interested in engaging with, owing to him explicitly rejecting the idea of society as a sutured space:

Societies are not unitary. They are not social systems (closed or open); they are not totalities [...] Because there is no system, no totality, there cannot be ‘subsystems,’ ‘dimensions,’ or ‘levels’ of such a totality. Because there is no whole, social relations cannot be reduced ‘ultimately,’ ‘in the last instance,’ to some systemic property of it [...] Because there is no social system, there is no ‘evolutionary’ process within it [...] Because there is no totality, individuals are not constrained in their behavior by ‘social structure as a whole,’ and so it is not helpful to make a distinction between ‘social action’ and ‘social structure.’ (Mann, 2009, pp. 1–2)

Little do I need to comment on how this excerpt mirrors what I have been continuously stressing throughout the present work: societies do not constitute closed systems that are determined by an underlying essence and there is always an element of indeterminacy that operates between the interstices of what has conventionally been called “structure” and “action.” Laudable as Mann’s attempt to dissolve

the positivistic logic that has marred our discipline, are, he nonetheless reverts back to an essentialist logic by stating that:

A general account of societies, their structure, and their history can best be given in terms of the interrelations of what I will call the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political (IEMP) relationships. These are (1) overlapping networks of social interaction [...] (2) They are also organizations, institutional means of attaining human goals. Their primacy comes [...] from the particular organizational means each possesses to attain human goals, whatever these may be. (Mann, 2009, p. 2)

This statement is entirely incompatible with the one that preceded it. Two issues are at stake here. The first is that certain elements of the social are, at the level of theoretical analysis, granted a near-ontological status, since they are seen as accounting for the structure and history of societies across time and space. These elements are then ascribed a presumed unity. To embark on a historical analysis on the basis of “the economy,” as an example, one has to identify precisely what constitutes its unity across time and space—and it is on the basis of that unity that the category of “the economy” can be legitimized as a viable category of pan-historical analysis. The pitfalls of attributing an underlying unity to any category of analysis, and especially “the economy,” have been thoroughly discussed in contemporary social, philosophical and political theory (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, 2001). The “economy,” as an example, does not constitute a determinate whole, but a range of heterogeneous activities to which *we attribute* a unity by means of formalistic representation vis-à-vis a conceptual category.

What, moreover, concerns me about Mann’s theory is that he treats “the four sources of social power” with a formalistic purity, despite his qualification that “Real institutionalized networks of interaction do not have a simple one-to-one relationship to the ideal-typical sources of social power from which I started” and that this will lead him “to break down the equation of functions and organizations and to recognize their “promiscuity” (Mann, 2009, p. 17). I do find the term “promiscuity” to be

exceptionally suiting for a type of analysis that seeks to pound out an approach devoid of theoretical “orthodoxy” and conceptual “purity.” It mirrors my insistent reference to the notion of *contamination or overdermination*—the idea that the constitutive elements of any social space do not operate as isolated monads. Still, Mann’s view that the elements of the social are promiscuous is incompatible with his insistence that:

It remains true that a broad division of function between ideological, economic, military, and political organizations is ubiquitous, popping up again and again through the interstices of more merged power organizations. We must hang onto this as a simplifying tool of analysis in terms either of the interrelations of a number of autonomous dimensional functions/organizations or of the ultimate primacy of one of them. (Mann, 2009, p. 10)

The aporetic tensions are once again blooming in the midst of a conviction that simultaneously asserts an ultimate primacy of determination and the overdetermination of the causal elements. Let us take, as an example, Mann’s treatment of military power. Military power, according to Mann, is itself promiscuous, since it requires “ideological and economic support” as well as “military traditions and development” (Mann, 2009, p. 19). If the constitutive promiscuity of the social is affirmed, then military power cannot be reduced to a pure and intelligible core. Thus, military power’s “ideological” and “economic” dimensions are not mere adornments. They consist of dimensions through which military power is constituted. We are once again encountering what Laclau and Mouffe vehemently critiqued in the Marxist literature: the logical incompatibility between *necessity* and *externality*, for if an element is “autonomous” or “external” (i.e., pure and literal) to another, it cannot, at the same time, constitute its necessary component. This tension recurs throughout Mann’s work, which at times confronts the impurity of historical causes, while reverting back to the explanatory logic of ultimate primacy.

The apex of this tension is found in Mann’s conclusive results (which are, nonetheless, deduced from a highly complex historical study). In tracing the historical development of nations, Mann

distinguishes between four sequential periods of nation formation. The early “religious period” and the “commercial capitalist-statist period,” which engendered “protonations” (Mann, 2010, p. 730). The third “militaristic period,” which saw the heightened state intrusion into social life, through conscription and the levying of taxes, and which consequently yielded demands of representation (Mann, 2010, p. 730). Finally, the fourth phase saw the state’s yield to, primarily, industrial imperatives. This phase saw the increased construction of technological infrastructure and the control/homogenization of social behavior (Mann, 2010, p. 730). State activity “enhanced the density of social interaction” and “furthered the nation as an experienced community, linking the intensive and emotional organizations of family and neighborhood with more extensive and instrumental power organizations” (Mann, 2010, p. 730). Mann’s (2010) findings are then qualified with the following statement:

Although I have simplified ‘ultimacy’ into two phases of (roughly) dual determinism, I must also add caveats. The other sources of social power also added their weights, more particularistically and erratically. Ideological power relations, very significant at the beginning of the period, remained a force especially where religious and linguistic communities (the latter given more collective power over the period by the other power sources) did not coincide with existing state boundaries. Ideological power also made decisive contributions to classes and nations in the ‘world-historical moment’ of the French Revolution. (p. 738)

The wagon of sociological reasoning is again coming up against insurmountable barriers, as a result of *a priori* and unwarranted distinctions between assumed objective “sources.” It is unnecessary to be exhaustive in, at this stage of my critique, in my attempts to demonstrate how “state,” “economy,” “military,” and “ideology” inhere to one another. I will, however, dissolve, as a paradigmatic endeavour, the supposed separation between “ideology” and the other sources of social power. What is, then, unique about “ideology” that distinguishes it from the other sources of social power? According to Mann (2009), ideological power ensues when a certain group “monopolizes” claims to knowledge, meaning and norms,

and the content of aesthetics and rituals (p. 22). All these dimensions are considered to be necessary components for sustained social cooperation. But how can *that* be distinguished from “economy,” “military” and “state,” all of which are invariably constituted by fields of knowledge, meanings, norms, aesthetics, and rituals.

Coming back full circle to Mann’s own argument, we can ask what the economy, state, and military are, besides promiscuous and co-contaminated entities whose identity necessitates the presence of others. The boundaries separating the neatly crafted “sources of social power” collapse in light of this realization:

What we find, then, is not an interaction or determination between fully constituted areas of the social, but a field of relational semi-identities in which 'political', 'economic' and 'ideological' elements will enter into unstable relations of imbrication without ever managing to constitute themselves as separate objects. The boundary of essence between the latter will be permanently displaced. (Laclau, 1990, p. 24)

This, of course, is not to suggest that under specific historical conditions, particular domains of the social cannot establish a relative and precarious “autonomy” through which certain claims are monopolized. But this “autonomization, like everything else, has specific conditions of existence,” which operate “outside” its domain, but which nonetheless give it its being and establish its limits (Laclau, 1990, p. 24). The autonomy of that domain therefore necessitates a *constitutive outside* that enables its institutionalization. “Autonomy” is, therefore, invariably *relative* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 140). Strictly speaking, “self-determination” entails the absence of autonomy, because to be autonomous is to be autonomous from something else. Conversely, a social domain’s subsumption by an underlying determinant would entail that domain’s complete saturation by the latter’s principles. Both would be characterized by a relationship of complete equivalence, in which case, both would be indistinguishable. We thus reaffirm that it is the presence of a constitutive outside that enables a domain’s intelligibility—and it is this constitutive outside

that not only demarcates the limits of its autonomy but also the limits of identity. Autonomy, therefore, entails the presence of an antagonism.

My critique here can be similarly directed toward Breuilly's belief that in modern times, power principally stems from the state. "What is not possible is to begin by accepting this separate identity as an unconditional assumption and then go on to explain its interaction and articulation with other identities on that basis" (Laclau, 1990, p. 24). As we have seen in critiquing Breuilly, his analysis could only establish the state as an object of examination to the extent that he simultaneously asserted its constitutive outsides, that is, civil society and the economy. To the extent that the emergence of the state presupposes the presence of other domains, it cannot, strictly speaking, be presumed to be the principal source of power. Any power or potential that emanates from the state necessitates processes operating "outside" of it but that nonetheless constitutes its conditions of existence. Power, therefore, invariably manifests through co-constitutive relations.

There is no "source" of power, as Mann and Breuilly would have it. Power is effectuated through the assymetric co-constitution of variable elements (Castells, 2009; Foucault, 1978, 2002, Laclau, 1990, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The problem here is that despite Mann's meaningful and well-intended efforts to step outside positivism by affirming the "promiscuity" of the social, he lacks the necessary theoretical tools that would have enabled him to seal the coffin for good. Can we, in light of this realization, proceed by generatively reconstructing theoretical conceptions of "the social" that will allow us to do so?

Discourse

We proceed by introducing a concept that has been profusely subjected to theoretical inaccuracy, casual invocation, unwarranted critiques and misunderstanding. I deploy the term discourse in the same way that it is deployed in the works of Laclau (1990, 2005b, 2007a, 2014) and Laclau and Mouffe (1987, 2001).

By discourse, I intend to refer to any “complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it. Thus ‘relation’ and ‘objectivity’ are synonymous” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 68). Before proceeding, it is necessary to identify with precision what I intend to refer to with the term “elements,” particularly in light of the fact that the terrain of discursive practices is often incorrectly thought to be delimited to the field of “writing,” or “speech.” By discourse, I intend to refer to a radicalized conception of language that conceives the latter in terms of the general ontological terrain through which intelligibility, and thus objectivity operates (Laclau, 2014, p. 66; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 107–111). Our conception of discourses therefore enlarges the domain of language beyond “speech” and “writing,” since the linguistic fabric is involved in any instance of intelligible perception (Laclau, 2014, pp. 65–66).

Two premises underlie this assertion. The first is that the meaning of ideas/objects can only be understood in terms of their oppositional or associational difference with other ideas/objects (Lacan, 2006a; Laclau, 2014, Chapter 3; Saussure, 1966). The intelligibility of ideas/objects operates within a linguistic field that enables their intelligibility via the interplay between a signifier that names an object and a signified that invokes conceptual form (Saussure, 1966). In other words, an “object” or an “idea” is made intelligible to the extent that it receives “a name” (the signifier) and is attached to conceptual content. “The nation,” as an example is characterized by a constitutive split between the signifier that names it and the content that is attached to it, e.g., political community, common cultural traditions, the national state, etc. The signifier-signified relations, which Saussure (1966) encapsulates with the concept of “the sign,” constitutes the fundamental dimension of language. To the extent that anything that is intelligible operates within this dualistic (but as we shall see unstable) relationship between a signifier and a signified, it is understood as operating within the general domain of language. In this sense, it is possible to generalize the concept of a language beyond the interlocutor or the discursive medium (e.g., writing) to the general fabric of intelligibility that characterizes all human experience (Laclau, 2014, pp. 65, 145).

Lacan (2006b), for instance, has demonstrated how the very emergence of (un)consciousness is contingent upon the whimsical character of the signifier. The signifier's "originary" manifestation in the "mirror stage" of the infant's development, is constitutively split between a primordial representation of "the self," and "the other," both being metonymical extensions of one another. We can thus deduce that the realm of subjectivity, which was traditionally understood by Western philosophy as an autonomous domain that was governed by inherent characteristics or functions, actually emerges and operates within the general terrain of language—a terrain that is radically relational and interdependent. Thus, the subject is characterized in terms of its relative positionality within the general discursive terrain of its operations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 109, 114–115).

We should further add that our understanding of language affirms the latter's extension beyond the "mental" or the purely "ideal" realm. It is to attest to the fact that any "conceptual" process simultaneously and by *necessity* encapsulates a material terrain and vice versa. Wittgenstein, in his notable *Philosophical Investigations* (1967), effectively demonstrates how matter is immanent to the field of language. This premise was later re-affirmed in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) who reject the notion that a field of "objectivity" can exist independent of, and external to, a discursive terrain (p. 108). It is precisely on these premises that I critiqued Nairn who endorses the ultimately causal primacy of "material contradictions" of the global economy. He thus affirmed a field of material objectivity that operated independently of historical contingencies (i.e., ideology) but, nonetheless, exercised its effects unto the latter. My critique illuminated that "matter" cannot be understood as exercising *independent effects* unto ideas because "independence" entails a relation of complete externality. What this revealed was that "ideas" and "matter" operate within co-constitutive relations of mutual disruption. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) so aptly explain, "The linguistic and non-linguistic elements are not merely juxtaposed, but constitute a differential and structured system of positions—that is, a discourse. The differential positions include, therefore, a dispersion of very diverse material elements" (p. 108). From this we can conclude that the networks of meaning that constitute any common space therefore penetrate "the entire

material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 109).

I should, at this point, explicate what I have repeatedly alluded to, namely, that the identity of the elements within a discursive structure is not pre-given, but emerges in terms of its relative and differential position within the totality of elements, whether “material” or “ideal” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 68). To approach this theoretical inquiry from the standpoint of the “totality of elements” is not to regress to the traditionalist logic of “the whole” determining “its parts.” Rather, it is to state that the invocation of an element simultaneously invokes the whole structure within which it is embedded. If I were to invoke, as an example, the signifier of “the nation of England,” I am not only invoking its constitutive differences (e.g., “the nation of France,” “the nation of Germany” etc.) but I am also invoking a whole structure of meanings that afford it conceptual content. Thus, “the nation of England,” may invoke “its history of industry,” “liberalism,” “The British Empire,” “parliamentary democracy,” “humorous irony,” “the Beatles,” “Monty Python,” etc. The invocation of a signifier simultaneously invokes its constitutive terrain of operation—or, its constitutive dispersion in the field of discourse.

Signifiers are, therefore, invariably polysemic and overdetermined by the presence of other elements. In other words, *there are no positive terms in language, but only differences and symbolic associations* (Lacan, 2006a; Laclau, 2014; Saussure, 1966). This is to suggest that the identity of any element cannot be anchored in an ultimate point of reference, i.e., an underlying essence that is thought to find a positive and unadulterated expression in language. Nor can the structure of the discursive terrain be anchored in any transcendental, telic or originary point of reference. No single element can be thought to determinate the structure of the discursive totality precisely because the identity of that element is enabled through its co-constitutive relations that necessitate the presence of myriad other elements. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001), succinctly articulate it

There are not *two* planes, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing an *ultimate* literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and

derived plane of signification. Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order. This analysis seemed to open up the possibility of elaborating a new concept of articulation, which would start from the overdetermined character of social relations. (p. 98; original emphasis)

We thus invert the traditional understanding of “objectivity” which has dominated, albeit with unsatisfying outcomes, Western epistemological discourse. Objectivity is no longer understood in terms of an underlying terrain of essences that can find an expression in language. Objectivity, conceived as the very possibility of meaningful and intelligible “objects,” is precisely the obverse of relationality, in the sense that “objects” are only made intelligible within a co-constitutive terrain of complex and meaningful relationships. This brings us to a most-important junction in our exposition, with the long-due precise delineation of the notion of *overdetermination*.

Overdetermination

The concept of overdetermination represents the most substantive challenge to essentialism and positivism. The concept was primarily introduced by Freud (1955) in his study of the unconscious. For Freud, the identity of the elements constituting the unconscious is always established in terms of its symbolic association with other elements. This means that each element within the unconscious is established through multiple determinations and, in turn, constitutes a determination for a variety of other elements (Freud, 1955, pp. 301–302). Each element is, therefore, constituted by the *traces* of other elements.

The underlying implications are profound. If elements are, essentially, polyvalent, since the constitution of their identity requires the presence of other elements, then no element within the

unconscious is, strictly speaking, pure. The presumption of pure underlying essences that would give being to elements, and which would find a precise corresponding referent within the field of intelligibility, is thus shattered. Moreover, since no element is pure and is, rather, radically co-constituted by, and co-constitutive of, other elements, the structure of the unconscious cannot be reduced to a single underlying determinant. Any “determinant” would itself contain the trace of other elements and would, therefore, be impure. This Freudian discovery represents a pivotal moment in contemporary theoretical discourse, as it opened the gates for an anti-essentialist polemic. But the full realization of this potential would require a particular execution and application of Freud’s contribution, with the creative linguistic input of Lacan.

Lacan’s groundbreaking contribution rests in his insightful examination of the compatibilities between Saussure’s theory of language and Freud’s theory of the unconscious. He convincingly demonstrates how Saussure’s understanding of language can be extended to Freud’s theory of the unconscious, while simultaneously radicalizing Saussurian premises vis-à-vis Freud’s notions of overdetermination, displacement (metonymy) and condensation (metaphor) (Lacan, 2006a). Lacan’s examination deduces a number of insightful principles. Firstly, metonymy and metaphor are constitutive planes of language. Language is, essentially, symbolic in character, since the invocation of a signifier simultaneously references a variety of associated signifiers. But the invocation of a signifier does not merely invoke a series of differential signs but signs that exercise *dislocating effect through metonymy and metaphor*. Signifiers can therefore come to be fused with (metonymy), or replace (metaphor), other signifiers. These two processes result in alterations *and proliferations* of meaning through processes of subversion (i.e., dislocation). Lacan teaches us that the emergence of meaning is invariably refracted by the constitutive intrusion of metonymy and metaphor.

The extension of language beyond mere speech and writing, as well as the affirmation of the impurity of its elements, represents a pivotal point in the contemporary theoretical canon. In my opinion, it was at this very moment that the floodgates, so to speak, for an anti-essentialist attack, were finally open. If “subjectivity” and “objectivity” were seen as operating within a field of language whose elements

were essentiality “promiscuous” (i.e., overdetermined), any attempts to ground a theory or a politics in an essential determination were annihilated. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) so aptly articulate it:

This was the logic of overdetermination. For it, the sense of every identity is overdetermined inasmuch as all literality appears as constitutively subverted and exceeded; far from there being an essentialist *totalization*, or a no less essentialist *separation* among objects, the presence of some objects in the others prevents any of their identities from being fixed. Objects appear articulated not like pieces in a clockwork mechanism, but because the presence of some in the others hinders the suturing of the identity of any of them. (p. 104; original emphasis)

How are we to situate Mann’s discussion in light of these conclusions? If we are to assert the ultimate primacy of any “source” of social power, “at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 99). And if society or history “has a last instance which determines its laws of motion, then *the relations between the overdetermined instances and the last instance must be conceived in terms of simple, one-directional determination by the latter*” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 99). Mann’s affirmation of the interrelatedness and “promiscuity” of the four sources of social power is thus theoretically incompatible with his making recourse to ultimate primacy.

I should be clear that my intention here is not to get wrapped up in a theoretical game but to demonstrate how this (ultimately) positivistic line of reasoning has obfuscated our understanding of nationalism. I have continuously stressed how positivism has hindered our analytic attempts by obfuscating the *profuse presence of the nation through its constitutive plurality*. We have always, so to speak, sought the nation “elsewhere” rather than in its co-constitutive relations. This is the reason why one of the principal theoretical questions of interest in studies of nationalism is what engenders the nation or nationalism. But if the constitution of the object is to be understood in terms of its overdetermined co-constitutive relations, then the identity of the object is sought not in an underlying referent but in the very

dispersion of that object in the field of overdetermination. Thus, the principal question of interest is how the object of “the nation” comes to operate as a multidimensional binding force for differential elements and subjectivities. It involves examining how a discursive formation, under the general representation of “the nation,” was able, through its uneven but generalized dispersion, to contaminate the very terrain of the social. This process whereby a particular identity, alongside co-constitutive related elements, is elevated to the status of “universality” is what I call, following Laclau and Mouffe, *hegemony*. This process emanates not from any one “cause” but through *plural* processes of politically-articulated constructions that are aggregated through a common representational umbrella. The next step is, therefore, to precisely delineate the terrain of political articulations.

Field of Discursivity, Floating Signifiers and Articulation

Our aim in the present section is to delineate the ontological planes that afford the possibility of the articulating practice that inheres to political acts. In the sociological canon, the notion of “social action” has been, in most of its permutations, explained through the prism of the rational free-willed or meaning-giving subject. While a detailed examination of this theoretical practice is outside the scope of the present work, I believe it is sufficient to suggest that the question of meaningful action has been articulated primarily in reference to subject’s inherent faculties, whether explicitly stated by theorists or not. This is generally true of Weber (1978, Chapter 1), as it is of the symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1962), the early phenomenologists (Husserl, 1980; Schutz, 1967), and even systems theorists (Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1987; Parsons, 2005).

Theoretical limits were subsequently and repeatedly encountered when efforts were made to come to terms with the question of how actors could exercise their “agency” in a social context that was deemed to be “structural.” The drawn-out and unresolved “structure-versus-agency debate” was the associate offspring. It is my conviction that, despite their proclaimed differences, both camps ultimately

employ the same epistemological logic. The argument is simple: if a social space is governed by an ultimate principle of unity, whether that is the meaning-giving or free-willed subject or a determinate social institution or social logic, then that very system has to be conceived in terms of a sutured and pre-determined space. An underlying principle or element determines the whole structure of “society,” thus subjugating its workings to its inherent logic. What we are left with is a system where all differences have vanished, since each element is reduced to its presumed underlying source. Alas, the possibility of an articulating practice (e.g., “agency”) is rendered impossible, as is the possibility of a structure, both of which presupposes relations of *differences* between elements (e.g., the relationship between “men” and “women,” between “family” and “economy,” between “state” and “education” etc.). We should also add that the structuralist answer, in all its variants, is equally unsatisfying. If the social were subsumed under *absolute* relations of difference, the system would achieve full-constitution and be submitted to stable and repetitive patterns of arrangement (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 106) . As a result, the possibility for contestation and change would be eliminated as the system would succumb to perfect structural workings and would be internal to its self:

In this sense, no relation can be contingent or external, since the identity of its elements would then be specified outside the relation itself. But this is no more than to affirm that in a discursive-structural formation constituted in this way, the practice of articulation would be impossible: the latter involves working on *elements*, while here we would be confronted only with *moments* of a closed and fully constituted totality where every moment is subsumed from the beginning under the principle of repetition. As we shall see, if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 107)

The only logical deduction that remains is that practices presuppose an ontological plane of *disruption* that prevents the fixing or suturing of the elements within the system. A structure is characteristic of every social order but it is, essentially, an incomplete structure (Laclau, 1990, pp. 44–45). If a socio-political

terrain is not determined by a singular element or purely differential relations but is precisely the product of its overdetermined relations, we can conclude that the identity of the elements is not exhausted by a particular signifier-to-signified relationship. The invocation of a signifier, e.g., “the nation,” simultaneously “slips” into a chain of variable significations, which consist of additional realms of signifiers and signifieds, such as “political community,” “common cultural traditions,” “national superiority,” etc. Similarly, the term “nation” may invoke differential meanings depending on either the context of its invocation or the identity that invokes it. The invocation of the term “nation” may emphasize “cultural and military superiority” for the fascist, while, in contrast, emphasize “economic, political and cultural equality” for the progressive. Signifiers are in essence *polysemic* and may reference myriad and in many cases incommensurate signifieds:

When the linguistic model was introduced into the general field of human sciences, it was this effect of systematicity that predominated, so that structuralism became a new form of essentialism: a search for the underlying structures constituting the inherent law of any possible variation. The critique of structuralism involved a break with this view of a fully constituted structural space; but as it also rejected any return to a conception of unities whose demarcation was given, like a nomenclature, by its reference to an object, the resulting conception was of a relational space unable to constitute itself as such—of a field dominated by the desire for a structure that was always finally absent. The sign is the name of a split, of an impossible suture between signified and signifier. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113)

The signifier-to-signified relationship is, therefore, characterized by an “excess” that cannot be fully-subsumed by the relationship. This means that the signifier and the signified overflow one another and never stand in a stable and fully-constituted relationship (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). Taking the argument a step further, we can state that since the identity of each element is not exhausted by its relations, it therefore cannot be fully subsumed by the discursive totality (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp.

104, 113). Every discursive formation is thus comprised by “floating signifiers” that subvert the former’s structural unity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). Discursive formations, therefore, never fully-constitute themselves (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 111). If the relations of difference that constitute the discursive fabric that binds a community are not fully constituted, then the social is characterized by a partially-open and indeterminate character (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). The indeterminate space that opens up by the “discursive excess”—what the authors term “the field of discursivity”—is what enables *discursive articulations: a process whereby relationships between signifiers and signifieds are established and altered*: (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 105–107). “In the context of this discussion, we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 105; original emphasis).

Let us summarize the argument. Every discursive space is governed by a terrain of indeterminacy by virtue of the fact that the signifier the signified flow in excess of one another. This is tantamount to saying that discursive elements are constitutively overdetermined. They are thus governed by a terrain of indeterminacy, that is, of possibility. This terrain of indeterminacy is what enables the articulatory practice, through which meaning, and therefore social relations, are altered. Thus, “agency” or the possibility of social change inheres to the failed structural determination. In this sense, every social practice can be understood as being articulatory in one of its dimensions, since it invariably involves the (re)production of relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 113–114).

I deem it prudent to follow-up on this discussion with an additional qualification about the relationship between “ideas” and “matter.” We have already established that “ideas” and “matter” constitute differential positions within a discursive space. We should also add that, to the extent that any discursive element is overdetermined, “ideas” and “matter” co-penetrate and co-constitutive one another. This informs us that articulatory practices do not operate solely within the realm of “ideas” but are invariably also constituted within a material terrain. As we shall see, politics is not simply a “war of ideas” and meaning is not restricted to the realm of “thought” but encapsulates and penetrates the material

fabric of our social world. This prepares us to relinquish the vestiges of matured theoretical currents that had privileged the supposed primacy of material (e.g., machine and military technology) over ideal power, and vice versa. Giddens' distinction between "allocative" (i.e., dominion over matter) and "authoritative" (i.e., dominion over the social world) resources, upon which his theory of the nation-state is constructed, is entirely unsatisfactory in this respect. Consider the following extract:

Throughout the book I emphasise the significance of storage capacity to the state, in both non-capitalist and capitalist societies. Storage capacity is a fundamental element in the generation of power through the extension of time-space distanciation. Many accounts of the nature of the state in non-capitalist societies give primacy of place to the storage of 'material' or allocative resources in their analyses, as part of the thesis that the production of a 'surplus' is the key to examining how states come into being. My claim, however, is that storage of authoritative resources is normally of more decisive importance. Storage of authoritative resources is the basis of the surveillance activities of the state, always an undergirding medium of state power. (Giddens, 1981, p. 5)

If "ideas" and "matter" operate in relationship of mutual contamination, furnishing, as it is, the terrain through which intelligibility, and thus social arrangements, emerge, then ultimate primacy cannot be attributed to either one of them. They merely constitute differential positions through which total operations (e.g., nations, empires, institutions etc.) function. In this sense, "allocative" and "authoritative" resources merely constitute each other's condition of possibility, as one cannot operate in the absence of the other. It is a necessary relationship of mutual contamination. None can, therefore, ultimately reduced to the function of ultimate primacy. Let us supplement this assertion by noting that the order of the floating signifier, since it is not solely tied to conceptual form, also consists of a material terrain. As an example, the "materiality" of a "war tank" (signifier) may be in certain instances articulatively connected

to narratives that afford it democratic legitimacy, but its floating excess make it vulnerable to differential possible articulations that may, at some point, connect it with fascist discourses.

Where do all these deductions lead us in regards to our overarching goal of constructing a theory of nationalism? Our objective is to examine how the floating signifier of “the nation” comes to articulatively contaminate the plural terrain of the social and the political, and, under certain conditions of possibility, elevated to the status of the “transcendent.” By no doubt, the plurality that had marked “the nation,” is something that has been recognized in the literature, and which periodically pops up. Smith (1986), for example, has noted that because the administrative, cultural and military revolutions of the nineteenth century “were highly discontinuous” and

because their effects were felt at different times in different areas, and because they arose within very varied social and cultural milieux, the ‘nation’ that was gradually ‘formed’ revealed differences in both content and form. Not only were there religious and secular, bourgeois, aristocratic and proletarian, conservative and socialist, bureaucratic and populist nationalisms and nations; there were also two quite distinctive forms and concepts of the ‘nation’, territorial and ethnic. (Smith, 1986, pp. 134–135)

But as I have already demonstrated, Smith’s analysis came short of answering how these plural forms could aggregate to produce a totalizing effect, since he ultimately effaces the plurality that governs the national form by replacing it with a presumed fully-constituted “ethnic core. This discussion illuminates that the “floatedness” of “the nation” is immanent to the sociological discipline itself. As the historical trajectory of our discipline has shown, scholarly studies of nationalism have attempted to fix the meaning of “the nation,” by means of operational definitions. It is in this respect that our ontological insights shatter the theoretical space that has imprisoned our understanding of nationalism by inverting the content of the problematic. If I have effectively demonstrated what I intended to, it should by now be clear that I am led—not to discover an answer (i.e., “What is the nation?”)—but to invert the question. The question

now asks: *how does the nation, through articulated practices, come to be?* The field of analysis immediately broadens. If the nation is seen as an articulated construction that is not subjected to a privileged principle of unity, then the terrain of its construction widens, since it is not located in a determinate “topography.” The questions that the proceeding chapters will answer is how, in light of our ontological premises, a plurality of political struggles and articulations can “aggregate” into a precarious totality (i.e., the nation) that exercises social and political effects.

Hegemony and the Unevenness of the Social

The argument that I will sequentially develop in the proceeding sections is that a national totality is signified through processes of nominal circumscription (i.e., naming), wherein a privileged signifier (i.e., the nation), comes to represent the communal totality. This signifier assumes a privileged status through its general and uneven dispersion in the social and political fields. In other words, it comes to “contaminate” and therefore subvert associated and competing ideas and social arrangements. It thus comes to operate as a privileged node upon which institutional arrangements and political antagonisms converge. This means that what comes to mark the communal limits (i.e., “the nation”) is simultaneously tied to institutional arrangements (e.g., “democracy,” “capitalism,” “state politics,” “rule of law,” etc.) through its dispersion. To the extent that these institutional arrangements come to subvert competing possibilities, they will come to be experienced as inevitable and, therefore, natural. This transition into the realm of seeming inevitability is what I regard as *ideology*. The implication to be drawn from this is that the privileged signifier that comes to mark the communal limits (i.e., “the nation”) will operate through concrete institutional arrangements (i.e., ideology) that are taken for granted. However, I should qualify that the “unity” of the elements at play, far from being a complete one, is governed by a relationship of co-contamination and shifting planes of overlap and negation. This means that the process of aggregation can only be *metonymical* in character. In other words, the referents through which the community is signified

(e.g., the nation, capitalist relations of production, law and order etc.) come to assume a variety of meanings depending on the context of their invocation and application. “The nation,” as an example, comes to mean different things for the political Left and different things for the political Right. But, these different understandings are, however, governed by a degree of *contiguity in meaning* (metonymy), allowing the two factions to operate in a common socio-political space. Thus, any process of “aggregation” is simultaneously governed by a terrain of overlap and negation. “Aggregation” and “antagonism” are two sides of the same coin. This means that privileged nodes of aggregation will invariably receive determinations from plural and heterogeneous identities—they will come to be highly overdetermined. In fact, it is the field of overdetermination that enables processes of aggregation. But will these plural determinations be characterized by a relation of equality? The constitutive unevenness of the social entails the uneven dispersion of these determinations. The conclusion cannot be unambiguous. One identity, more than any other, will saturate these nodes with its own *narratives and interests*, thus infiltrating the content of other identities. The communal fusion is thus characterized by a constitutive unevenness whereby one identity, through processes of contamination, extends its narratives and interests beyond the confines of its own subjectivity.

These precarious conjunctions are what enables a community, which is invariably governed by a pluralistic terrain and constitutive field of indeterminacy, to be represented as a totality. In other words, the community is signified through a process wherein plural, and in many cases incommensurate, subject positions are *metonymically “aggregated” and nominally circumscribed*. The communal totality is represented through the differential and uneven diffusion of *particular* elements (e.g. institutional arrangements, narratives, lifestyles, etc.) through which plural subject positions are bind. This process whereby particular elements (i.e., social arrangements) are identified with the whole (i.e., the national totality) is what I call, following Laclau (1990, 2005b, 2014) and Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), *hegemony*—the political relation through which nationalism, understood here as a variable set of family resemblances, comes to be hegemonized.

Narrative, Temporality, Hegemony

The ontological dimensions of *narrative* are central to our efforts to understand the constitutive workings of (nationalist) hegemony. In this respect, the work Hayden White and his reading of Paul Ricoeur are particularly illuminating. Approaching the matter from the standpoint of the philosophy of history, White comes to the conclusion that narrative, far from being reducible to any substantive content, something that “one does,” or a mode of communication, is in fact a discursive form that inheres to *historicality* in general: “It is a means of symbolizing events without which their historicality cannot be indicated” (White, 1987, p. 53). Why is this so? Following Ricoeur’s argument, White (1987) suggests that narrative is what confers interpretation to successive events, situating them within the totality of human existence (p. 50). Each individual event, what preceded it, and what it effectuates come to be understood in relation to one another and, more broadly, to the totality of human experience. Narrative thus confers a sense of continuity unto events, by weaving them together vis-à-vis meaningful motifs (e.g. a plot), thus attributing unto the individual events the semblance of an *equivalence*. In this sense, narrative attributes a sense of continuity between otherwise “scattered” events by endowing them with *meaningful contiguity* (White, 1987, p. 51), that is, similitude over difference (White, 1980, p. 19)—what is in linguistics understood as *metonymy* (similitude by proximity). Thus, any process whereby individual events (or any sort of elements for that matter) come to be *aggregated*, as parts of a temporal sequence, is understood as being, essentially, metonymical in character. Aggregation is therefore understood as a process whereby a meaningful plane of contiguity is established between otherwise “independent” elements or events vis-à-vis the intervention of narrative.

We are thus led to a fascinating conclusion: *that narrative inheres to the general form of temporality* (White, 1987, p. 51). Narrative is what retrospectively enables endings to be meaningfully linked to beginnings “to form continuity within a difference” (White, 1987, p. 52)—indeed, narrative is what retrospection actually *is*. In situating this argument within the scope of the present work, which has thus far emphasized the synchronic dimension of discursive formations, we can very well state that

narrative is what endows the *diachronic* possibility of structure, since as a mechanism of retrospection, it enables the principle of *repetition* (White, 1987, p. 52). “This repetition is the specific modality of the existence of events in ‘historicality,’ as against their existence ‘in time’” (White, 1987, p. 52). Repetition involves the reproduction of past practices by means of retrospection, where past events are “reactivated,” not mechanistically, but in accordance to particular principles (e.g. narrative motifs) that endow them with meaningful content.

One should further consider that the terrain through which narrative is enabled, much in line with the argument already made, is invariably linguistic in character. As Ricoeur suggests, temporal contiguity is enabled by the symbolic dimension of language, which confers a sense of analogy (or contiguity) between events through figuration (White, 1987, pp. 52–53). “This secondary, or figurative, meaning, is not so much ‘constructed’ as ‘found’ in the universal human experience of a ‘recollection’ that promises a future because it finds a ‘sense’ in every relationship between a past and a present” (White, 1987, p. 53). The emphasis on analogy and figuration here is not accidental, for the reproduction of past events that inheres to the narrativity of being is never determinate in character. As I will emphasize later, any articulated process is necessarily undermined by indeterminate cleavages that partially subvert its content. The past can never be reproduced in absolute. Rather, the past is reproduced analogically in relation to the contextual possibilities of the present and in relation to multiple possible imaginaries and desires. It is for this reason that the notions of temporal and meaningful contiguity are favoured over any sort of mechanistic understandings of human experience, where structure is understood as being reproduced *ad infinitum*.

What is also paramount to note is that narrative is not devoid of political intervention. Indeed, the articulation of narrative, which confers meaningful contiguity upon, and thus comes to structure, human experience, is itself inherently political. If a set of events are to be aggregated as part of a temporal experience that finds its expression in narrative, then they have to be subjected to a “common denominator” that imparts them the appearance of semblance or “equivalence.” Narrative is what “cast its light back over the events originally recorded in order to redistribute the force of a meaning that was

immanent in all of the events from the beginning” (White, 1980, p. 23). To the extent that this process of retrospection can be subjected to *multiple interpretations*, it follows that any process of narrativization will necessarily lead to dimensions of *exclusion and subversion*. Events will come to be aggregated under the domination of particular narratives, if they are successful in subverting, or excluding, competing narratives. In this sense, historicity can be understood as inhering to the *antagonistic* dimension of the political. White (1980) is thus perfectly justified in stating that “In order to qualify as ‘historical,’ an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence” (p. 23). Any process of historicization confers a sense of certainty unto events that are inherently ambiguous in character: “Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened” (White, 1980, p. 23).

Pushing the argument further, we can very well suggest that such process of narrative contestation, between alternative interpretations, which invariably results in dimensions of exclusion and subversion, will be unfolded by the uneven play of *value*. It is value differentials, as they are inscribed in discourse by complex processes of displacement and subversion that will tend to benefit one interpretation over another, all considerations being entirely contextual. This is the reason why White (1980) insists that history and narrative are invariably undercut by the *moral dimension of existence* (p. 26). And if, as established, interpretations and articulations of meaning invariably operate within discursive totalities, historicity and narrativity can be understood as being bound up with broader structures of power. Thus, “The events that are actually recorded in the narrative appear ‘real’ precisely insofar as they belong to an order of moral existence, just as they derive their meaning from their placement in this order” (White, 1980, p. 26). Narrative can thus be understood as one constitute dimension of power as it materializes through multi-tier articulations of *order and regularity*: “It is because the events described conduce to the establishment of social order or fail to do so that they find a place in the narrative attesting to their reality” (White, 1980, p. 26).

We are thus led to conclude that the question of narrative coincides with the question of hegemony. If, as according to the present work, hegemony is understood as the elevation in value of a

particularity in the context of plurality, where that particularity comes to “contaminate” the pluralistic social fabric, thus exercising power effects, then narrative, as it comes to be articulated within the multifarious material fabric of the social, inheres to any hegemonic operation. Why is this so? A principal dimension of narrativity concerns its “capacity to envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning” vis-à-vis the intervention of a “metaphysical principle” that translates “difference into similarity” (White, 1980, p. 19). Narrativity thus entails the presence of a subject “common to all of the referents of the various sentences that register events as having occurred” (White, 1980, p. 19). In the context of the present work, this metaphysical subject, whose intervention imparts a relative but nonetheless hegemonic spatiotemporal contiguity is *the nation*—that privileged particularity that in modern times comes to mark the limits of human communities and emerges as the privileged societal organizing principle as it comes to be imbricated in a diverse fashion in the social fabric and as it *comes to represent difference as equivalence*. Under the all-encompassing umbrella of “the nation,” men, women, the rich, the poor, etc. are all translated into equivalential subjects: they all come to appear as *nationals*. But does the national narrative that “weaves” these subjects into a chain of equivalence confer equal power unto each and every one of them? The answer cannot be ambiguous. The articulation of narratives, as they inhere to the articulation of the social totality, i.e. the nation, will tend to unevenly benefit its constitutive subjectivities. In this sense, what is of key interest to the present work is how the various narratives that are articulated in reference to “the nation,” come to: (a) operate as societal organizing principles by coming to be imbricated in diverse life modalities; and (b) enable uneven forms of power distribution. As White (1980) notes, “The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable, imposing upon its processes the formal coherency that only stories possess” (p. 23). The temporality of being, as it unfolds in narrative is thus undercut but the uneven play of power distribution and, therefore, hegemony.

Care should be taken not to conceive of narrative in a purely formalistic manner. One should note that the hegemony of any principle of “closure” (e.g. “the nation”) hinges on its capacity to radically overdetermine the social, as it finds expression in plural life modalities. Narrative is not simply something

that one “says” or “thinks” but should be understood as a symbolic fabric that is both consciously and unconsciously institutionalized in the temporality of human existence. Narrative is thus diversely co-imbricated in institutionalized practices—it pierces the material terrain of being. In this sense, narrative, understood as one constitutive dimension of discourse, can be thought as that which *animates and puts into motion* the material terrain of social life by incorporating matter into the temporal dimension of social life (Butler, 2011). If matter, as according to Aristotle, is understood as potential, then potential is put into effect, that is, temporalized, through the whims of discursive narratives (Butler, 2011, p. 7). One can thus very well see how our *corporeal subjectivity* is itself animated and dominated by the narratives that come to diversely constitute our social universe:

In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names [...] In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect. (Butler, 2011, p. xii)

A number of principles can be deduced. Firstly, the hegemonic dimension of the social, as it is effectuated through the articulation of uneven power relations, materializes through the production of bodily subjectivities (Butler, 2011, p. xii, 9). Secondly, narrative, as a constitutive dimension of the hegemonic operation, will *produce*, and operate through, the corporeal subject. Thirdly, as narrative operates through the corporeal subject, it will come to be co-imbricated with the *affective* dimension of being. As various theorists have argued (e.g. Laclau, 2005b; Stavrakakis, 2010; Žižek, 1993), affect constitutes a principal dimension of social and political life and should in no way be understood as either an epiphenomenon or as something that can be disentangled from volitional action. “Rationality,” in the classical sense, is an outdated term. As I will demonstrate later on, the possibility of decision and therefore volitional action is enabled by the indeterminate dimension of discourse and, linking this with the present discussion, is

undercut by the affective dimension of being. There can be no choice, no action, no politics, in the absence of emotions.

Chapter 9: The Emergence of Nations

A long-standing and unresolved issue with regards to social historical analyses of nations concerns the various assumptions that penetrate the field of analysis (Mann, 2009, pp. 3–4; Reynolds, 1997, Chapter 8; Smith, 1998, Chapter 1, Chapter 8). One should consider, for instance, that a broad range of historical accounts of nations were written in the aftermath of the consolidation of nation-states and the generalization of the nationalist ideology. Where the modernist sensibility to the historical specificity of the nation is absent, and where the novelty of the nation is not tied to “modernity,” historical analysis is carried out on the basis of operative assumptions that are immanent to the nationalist ideology (Reynolds, 1997, pp. 251–252; Smith, 1998, pp. 9–11, 16–18). Thus, nations were thought to have existed perennially, and politically “awakened” during the nineteenth and twentieth century (Reynolds, 1997, pp. 252–253; Smith, 1998, p. 18). The so-called “national revolutions” are assumed to be the associated off-springs, where nations asserted their right to self-determination. I will not be engaging with such perennialist approaches, as they have already been subject to thorough critique by the modernists (Smith, 1998, pp. 18–24). However, I should note that certain presuppositions that guided these analyses, namely, the presumption of the unitary character of the nation, have penetrated even modernist historical accounts of nations. Perennialist accounts of the nation project the nation’s unity to an eternal past. The modernist narrative, on the other hand, suggests that the consolidation of nation-states effaced or undermined the cultural pluralism of pre-modern Europe, through processes of cultural homogenization (Anderson, 2006; Brass, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985; Kedourie, 1961; Smith, 1986).

What typically nurtures this modernist (and other) assumption(s) is the pronounced presence of gaps in social and historical analysis. These gaps may be symptomatic of inherent limitations in historical analysis, but they may also be by-products of theoretical or epistemological convictions or assumptions. In regards to the former, it should by no means be surprising that historical analyses of the emergence of nations are particularly challenging, in light of the fact that appropriate historical data are often absent and, when available, are often unreliable. Miroslav Hroch (1993), the notable historian of national

movements, has noted that “[e]very historian of national movements agrees there are numerous data gaps in our understanding of them. In this sense, all defensible conclusions still remain no more than partial findings, and all ‘theories’ should be taken as projects for further research” (p. 4). Eugene Weber, similarly cautions us to be cognizant of the limitations of historical analysis. In his historical survey of French linguistic diversity, he notes,

Documentation is hard to find at best. But beyond that, many documents are deceptive—unintentionally as a rule—because they render in French what actually took place in another language. Even some local scholars sin in this way, reporting a song or phrase of their region in their own French. Particularly troublesome are the reports of priests, police, and gendarmes, where only the occasional hint intimates that the exchanges rendered in (of tenstilted) French actually took place in a local tongue. (Weber, 1976, p. 74)

Historical analysis may therefore be particularly vulnerable to eschewed interpretations and unwarranted assumptions. One can note further challenges when one considers that historical data are often written from the perspective of literates:

Most of the subjects of historical investigation have been literate and articulate themselves; many have left clear and often deliberate records or have been described by witnesses who were well acquainted with them. The acts, thoughts, and words of the illiterate (and most of my subjects were illiterate, or as nearly so as makes no difference) remain largely unrecorded. Such records as exist are the work of outsiders who observed and recorded what they saw for purposes of their own. Police, bureaucrats, folklorists, priests, teachers, agronomists, and men of letters looked on, even probed, but whether critical or sympathetic they cannot tell us what went on as true participants. (Weber, 1976, p. xi)

We thus very often encounter a historical blind spot, devoid of the mentalities and perspectives of lay groups (Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 78–79), such as those of peasants, who, prior to modern times and the consolidation of nation-states, comprised the majority of European populations. What we are left with is a history written by and for the literate and the powerful. Consequently, the analytic field is radically reduced and theoretical conclusions are invariably vulnerable to unwarranted assumptions when (often inadvertent) attempts are made to “fill in the gaps.” And it is very often the case that theoretical presuppositions of a positivistic nature are what is deployed to “fill in the gaps.” In other words, gaps in historical analysis are substituted by universalistic presumptions about “historical motion” or “social laws.”

We also encounter situations where theory may inadvertently exclude evidence, events or objects that do not neatly conform to the former’s internal logic. If the stream of historical events is thought to conform to either an essential, positive or determinate historical logic that can be conceptually grasped, then anything escaping that logic may be discarded (Laclau, 2014, p. 71). Let us consider Eugene Weber’s findings about how peasants were gradually transformed into “Frenchmen.” Weber (1976) notes that, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, French spread faster through printed media and “the barracks” than it did through schools (p. 84). This poses a serious challenge for Gellner’s (1983) most-influential theory, which aprioristically conforms his findings to theoretical imperatives—that national cultural homogenization was a state-led processes vis-à-vis public education.

Finally, there are also exclusions that outpour from the interstitial depths of epistemological operative assumptions. Cause-and-effect reasoning is the identifiable culprit here. The deployment of cause-and-effect reasoning typically leads one to describe the cause(s) that engendered nations. From then on, analysis typically “jumps” to the *“fact” of the unitary nation*. What has been excluded is the precise delineation of the process whereby nations are on-goingly constructed, typically through highly-complex and politically-riddled processes. In other words, it is the *articulating practice*, as it is executed through *plural* political sites and battles, that has been, save some exceptions, *absent* from historical analyses of the emergence of nations. This is the reason why Eugene Weber’s (1976) historical examination of

nineteenth century rural France is such a substantive challenge to macro-theoretical perspectives on nationalism. What Weber's analysis reveals is *how* national construction was effectuated through a pluralistic terrain (e.g., education, military, administration, language etc.). This undermines theories of nationalism that tend toward mono-causal or "ultimate" explanations of nationalism, such as those of Anderson ("print-capital") and Gellner ("industrial culture"). Weber's account, moreover, shows us that French nationhood was on-goingly executed over the course of over a century. This sensitizes us to the dynamism of nation construction, thus sheltering us against premature assertions of ethnic or national "unity" and "homogenization." We thus see a dualistic theoretical logic at work here. Positivism, by relying on an essential and primary cause of historical determination, results in both monistic and "static" understandings of nation construction. A privileged historical "cause" that is thought to underlie nation construction is identified. It is then thought to engender the "effect," that is, "the nation," as an objective and, in some cases, fully-constituted fact.

My aim in this section is to delineate an appropriate theoretical framework that can properly account for the plural political dimensions of the nation's construction; to account, not for what the nation *is* or what *causes* underlie its emergence, but *how it comes to be*. This will involve the construction of a theoretical framework that will enable us to: (a) account for the plurality of the nation's conditions of possibility; and (b) account for the discursive mechanisms through which plural "sites" and identities are aggregated under the general form of "the nation."

We have already inverted the relationship between the political and the social by showing how the articulating practice that is immanent to all political processes is precisely what institutes the dimensions of the social. Articulations are, therefore, "not the superstructure of anything but the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity." The implication to be drawn is, therefore, that articulated constructions are contingent in character, "for they consist of relational ensembles that obey no inner logic other than that of their factually being together" (Laclau, 2014, p. 169). Sensitivity to this premise radically broadens theoretical possibilities. The terrain of possible political constructions (i.e., articulations) is no longer aprioristically guided by the "invisible hand" of theoretical convictions. As I

will demonstrate, nation formation ensued from a broad and diverse field of articulated practices and political struggles, many of which were “topographically” diverse. These political struggles/constructions were not exhausted by any unitary principle (e.g., nationalist ideology). Rather, these plural sites were, over the course of time, *metonymically aggregated* in reference to “the nation” whose content was invariably *polysemic*. It is the polysemic potential of “the nation” that constitutes the primary terrain of aggregation. In simple terms, what “the nation” comes to mean is entirely contingent depending on the context of its invocation. It can come to mean different things in different political “sites” and to different identities. These sites and identities are “aggregated” to the extent that an equivalential symbolic connection is articulated between them. Their aggregation therefore operates within a terrain of *meaningful contiguity*. By extension, any process of nation construction should be examined in terms of how heterogeneous political projects and institutional processes were articulated in reference to “the nation.” Thus, our principle theoretical concern is how “the nation,” through its dispersion, comes to overdetermine the social and the political.

Historical Analysis and Analytic Caveats

Before I begin my analysis, it is necessary to situate my work relative to the limitations of historical analysis that I have thus far outlined. In preparing for this chapter, having read a number of historical accounts of nation construction—both general and specific—one thing became apparent. Historical studies are not only replete with gaps and inaccuracies but also deeply penetrated and adulterated by theoretical and epistemological assumptions. While my efforts here are not geared toward the application of a genealogical analysis fashioned in the erudition of Foucault, I do mirror his overarching critique of the assumptions that very often invade the field of historical analysis, whether those stem from “ideal significations” or “indefinite teleologies.” Thus, historical analysis should exercise

an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 139–140)

And while I hope that my efforts in historical analysis will display a commitment and sensibility to this approach, I should stress the following. My goal here is *not* to provide a comprehensive historical account replete with historical “facts.” My task involves a particular interrogation of history through the prism of contemporary political and theoretical issues. The following passage from Laclau and Mouffe’s “Post Marxism Without Apologies” (1987) speaks to the spirit of my efforts:

any history that deserves its name and is not a mere chronicle must proceed in the way we have proceeded—in Foucault’s terms, history is always history of the present. If today I have the category ‘income distribution’, for instance, I can inquire about the distribution of income in ancient times or in the Middle Ages, even if that category did not exist then. It is by questioning the past from the perspective of the present that history is constructed. Historical reconstruction is impossible without *interrogating* the past. This means that there is not an *in-itself* of history, but rather a multiple refraction of it, depending on the traditions from which it is interrogated. (p. 99)

If I may inject an added dose of audacity to this statement, I could very well say that even the most “accurate” historical accounts of the emergence of nations do little in helping us address contemporary political issues: if they are not effectively connected to a theory of politics, they would essentially amount to an amalgamation of “empty” facts. In Chapter 1, I stated that I considered the present work to be an intervention operating halfway between ethico-normative and theoretical understandings of “the nation,”

a space that was characterized by the constitutive absence of “the nation.” Substitutions operated in its stead, largely obfuscating the terrain of nationalism’s operative terrain. The present work can thusly be read as a genealogical analysis of the conceptual history of the nation within the terrain of “formal” knowledge, which, by disrupting the theoretical space through which “the nation” is read, reveals the breadths of nationalism’s actual profuse operations—that is, its plurality.

Past events are, therefore, deployed and examined in a fashion that can paradigmatically help us make sense of contemporary political challenges (these will be addressed in the concluding chapter). The inversion of the question of “what the nation *is*” to “*how* the nation *comes* to be” is reflective of these endeavours. The question of “how it comes to be” injects a dynamism into the analysis and implies processual dynamics. In contrast, the task of delineating what the nation *is*, cannot but engender an objectified and static understanding of “the nation” that would simply amount to an empty and useless fact. Nation formation is an ongoing process that is constantly emerging through myriad vicissitudes and antagonisms. This realization of the dynamic character of the nation at once cautions us against objectified understandings of the latter—understandings that can only render potential politic actions impotent, by subsuming them under nationalism’s hegemonic logic. The nation disappears as soon as it is “discovered.” As Baumann (1992) so aptly articulates it,

The effort to arrive at an ‘objective definition’ of the nation or at an inventory of traits which a group must possess ‘to be a nation’ [...] takes off from the acceptance of the ‘objective reality’ of the nation, de-problematizing thereby the very elusiveness and contingency of the nation's precarious existence which nationalisms try hard to conceal [...] The search for an ‘objective definition’ obliquely legitimizes the nationalistic claims that it is the sharing of certain attributes that ‘makes a nation’, that integrates a certain number of people into a spatial and temporal unity, rather than exposing the fact that the ‘commonality’ itself (of land, of language, of tradition) is always an artefact of boundary-drawing activity: always contentious and contested, glossing over

some (potentially disruptive) differentiations and representing some other (objectively minor) differences as powerful and decisive separating factors. (pp. 676–678)

Thus, our analysis looks to the present, as it looks to the future and the past. Our task is not to discover the truth about the emergence of nations, but to sketch the conditions of possibility that enable the ongoing appearance of “the nation,” as well as the social and political terrain through which it comes to be profusely diffused. As such, we are interested in the process through which a hegemony was constructed—a hegemony which is still being constructed—in order to broaden the scope of possible political action in a hegemony that is yet to be constructed. In this sense, while a sensitivity to historical “facticity,” in all its inherent limitations will be attempted, we have to be aware that our efforts here are not to exhaust the object of our knowledge, but to sketch out its conditions of possibility and the terrain of its constitutive operations.

Now, does this mean that my own historical analysis is theoretically pure and disposed of any theoretical assumptions? Absolutely not, as this would amount to an operative impossibility. We need not get into a detailed discussion about the underlying presumptions of “scientific objectivity.” A number of critiques have shown that the alleged objectivism of the scientific method is itself invariably subjected to particular rules of formations and operative assumptions (Derrida, 1997; Foucault, 1978, 2002; Khun, 1996; Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). “Objectivity,” in the sense conventionally deployed by the naïve scientist, is an ontological impossibility. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, objectivity is invariably threatened and enabled by a constitutive outside that simultaneously disrupts it and becomes its condition of possibility.

Does this mean that all historical analyses are therefore “equal,” since they all deploy operative assumptions? As a reminder, what is of issue in the context of my overarching argument is the essentialism that accompanies historical studies of nationalism. To accept that any object of historical observation emerges in references to a constitutive outside that threatens its being but simultaneously becomes its condition of possibility is to recognize that “objectivity has a merely relational identity with

its conditions of existence” (Laclau, 1990, p. 22). This means that “the ‘essential identity’ of the entity in question will always be transgressed and redefined” (Laclau, 1990, p. 22). As an example, the various national, liberal or democratic revolutions and movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century, that are objects of recurring interest in historical analyses of nations, far from being objects “to be identified in different latitudes (France, England, Italy)” that “would therefore establish relations of exteriority with” their “specific conditions of existence in different contexts—would instead” be objects that are “deformed and redefined by each of its contingent contexts” (Laclau, 1990, p. 22). Their “unity” across time and space could only be observed in terms of their “family resemblances” (Laclau, 1990, p. 22). The formulation of historical questions would therefore not be, whether particular historical revolutions or movements *were* national, but *to what extent they were so*:

There is thus a historicization of the categories of social analysis which, on linking the unity between the components of an object to contingent and specific conditions of existence, introduces an essential instability into the relations between such components. While the first – objectivist – kind of question of the social looks for essential characters behind historical specificity, the second moves in the opposite direction; weakening the boundary of essence through the radical contextualization of any object. (Laclau, 1990, pp. 22–23)

Limits to Objectivity and the Terrain of Antagonisms

I would like to begin this discussion by echoing Laclau and Mouffe’s observation about historical and sociological accounts of “antagonisms.” It is the case that “[f]rom Marxism to the various forms of ‘conflict theory’, a whole range of explanations have been given as to how and why antagonisms emerge in society” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 122). And while this body of work displays a rich theoretical diversity, it nonetheless, also displays, regrettably, a common feature. “The discussion has centred almost

exclusively on the description of antagonisms and their original causes” with limited attempts to understand what an antagonistic relationship is, or “[w]hat type of relation among identities it supposes (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 122). In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe are wholly justified in their critique, namely, that “[t]he usual descriptions of antagonisms in the sociological or historical literature [...] explain the *conditions* which made antagonisms possible, but not the antagonisms as such” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 124; original emphasis). In the present exposition, my aim is to delineate the ontological conditions that enable the possibility of antagonisms. This will afford us the theoretical tools that will allow us to approach the question of “the emergence of nations,” not only with an added degree of specificity, but from a different standpoint altogether, allowing us to account for the articulated dimension of nation construction.

In the preceding chapter, I delineated certain epistemological premises, concluding that discursive objects and therefore discursive totalities are invariably characterized by an “excess” that cannot be subsumed by the “rules” of their formation. The argument runs as follows. A discursive formation—the very terrain of socio-political configurations—is constituted by a plurality of elements that acquire their identity in terms of their symbolic association to each other. The discursive formation is, moreover, overdetermined, in the sense that each element contains the traces of the myriad relationships that it constitutes and that, in turn, constitute it. Discursive elements are thus invariably polysemic, as they can reference, constitute, and be constituted by, an array of meanings. What enables this possibility is the “floatedness” of discursive signifiers that cannot succumb to full structural determination. The “floatedness” or “excess” of the signifier is what enables the articulating practice, a process whereby social agents alter the meaning of signifiers by “connecting” them with differential content. Meaning is, therefore, only partially fixed. The term “Democracy,” as an example, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, came to be articulatively connected, through a varied range of political battles, to the notion of the self-enclosed sovereign “nation.” However, following the profuse displacement of the “democratic imaginary,” it came to be extended to a variety of proliferating narratives concerning “universal human rights.” “Democracy,” consequently acquired universalistic “post-national” undertones.

In this sense, the notion of “democracy,” is no mere descriptive signifier, but a site upon which a variety of political antagonisms converge. The varied outcomes of these antagonisms result in the instituting of novel social relations. A “nationalistic” articulation of “democracy,” as an example, may result in social arrangements of an exclusive character. The opposite may hold in a successful “pluralistic” articulation of “democracy.” Again, what enables these articulating practices, which may operate within an antagonistic terrain, is the impossibility of fixing meaning. Let us proceed in delineating the logic of antagonisms, in greater detail, through an historical example, by considering the case of “Cypriot” identities under Ottoman rule and their subsequent transformation under the British. The Ottoman Empire was organized according to the millet system, which hierarchized the diversity of its subjects according to their religious identity (Clogg, 1992, p. 10). The hierarchized strata, moreover, were tied to particular obligations and rights. “The millet, or religious group,” notes Constantinou (2007), “operated as a civil unit that was semi-autonomous, allowing the separate exercise of legal, fiscal and educational functions, though final authority rested with the Sultan and his government” (p. 254). The predominant identities in the island of Cyprus, during the nineteenth century, were the Christians and the Muslims. The identity of each group was comprised by various associated elements: a common religion, a common language, a particular dress code, specific rights, and obligations to the Sultan, etc. Thus, the Christian identity, was constituted by, among others, the following elements: “Orthodox religiosity,” “Greek-Cypriot dialect,” and “additional taxes to the Sultan.” Similarly, the Muslim identity was constituted by “Islamic religiosity,” “Turkish-Cypriot dialect,” and “mandatory military conscription.”

Now, what is important to note is that, while the content of each identity (e.g., Christian) differentiates it from “the Other” identity (e.g., Muslim), its internal content is characterized by a relation of *equivalence*. “Greek Orthodox religiosity,” “Greek-Cypriot dialect,” and “additional taxes to the Sultan,” become internal particularities of a “supplementary” identity that “unifies” their content: being “Christian.” Does the unifying identity (i.e., “Christian”) exhaust the content of its “internal” particularities, thus subsuming them under the general umbrella of “the Christian?” If this were the case, then the identity of “the Christian” would be devoid of content, since all internal elements would come to

be exhausted by the category of “Christianity.” Thus, “The dimension of differential particularity [...] would have vanished, and equivalence would have collapsed into simple identity. And in that case there would be no group at all” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 82). We now ask the question in the reverse: Do the particularities that constitute the general identity of “the Christian” retain their full content, following their aggregation? Were that the case, the particular elements of the identity would be unable to signify an identity that extends beyond their particularity that necessarily encapsulates a plurality of other elements. The invocation of the identity of “the Christian,” therefore, involves the partial retention of the meaning of its particularities as a necessary component of their subversion, following their aggregation, and it is their very subversion that enables the “universality” of the category of “the Christian” to emerge in the field of signification. We can be very “practical” here and simply state that the invocation of the identity of “the Christian” may involve the invocation of some but not all of the meaningful dimensions of its particularities. Which particularities it invokes, is, of course, context-specific.

We are thus led to a fascinating conclusion: the construction of an identity necessarily entails the *articulated connection of its differential elements in the form of a symbolic equivalence* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 127–129). This process simultaneously instantiates the signifying category of the identity, while partially subverting the specific content of its particularities (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 127–129). The relationship between particularity and universality and of difference and equivalence is, therefore, co-constitutive mechanisms of the same discursive movement (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 128–129). But what of the difference between “the Christian” and “the Muslim?” Is this difference a fully-constituted difference, based on pure negation? If that were the case, we would be unable to speak of a hierarchy, a relation, or even an antagonism, for if their difference was fully-constituted, each identity would operate in complete externality to one another (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 128). In our example, “millet system,” entails an articulated equivalence between “Christians” and “Muslims,” as internal elements of that system. Thus, while the “Christian” and “Muslim” identities are constructed on the basis of differentiation, they are at once connected through a chain of equivalence. It is this ambiguous and *necessary* relationship between equivalence and difference that gives being to the structuration of

identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 128–129). Again, this is because any relationship of pure difference, *à la* Saussure, would entail the operation of elements completely independent of one another, as each element would simply be internal to itself (Laclau, 2014, p. 162). “Equivalences can weaken, but they cannot domesticate differences [...] it is clear that equivalence *does not attempt* to eliminate differences” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 79). If the particularity of the elements disappears, “there is no ground for the equivalence either. So difference continues to operate within equivalence, both as its ground and in a relation of tension with it” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 79).

No doubt, the interplay between equivalences and differences produces a variety of power effects. The difference between “Christian” and “Muslim,” vis-à-vis their equivalence to the “millet system,” entails uneven paths of access to political, cultural and legal rights. Thus, the principles of the millet system contributes to the structuration of the terrain through which power is differentially distributed to “the Christians” and “the Muslims.” The (power) structure of socio-political systems and identities is thus predicated upon a precise discursive logic, which involves the ordering of equivalences and differences within meaningful totalities (Laclau, 2007b, p. 38). As Laclau (2014) so succinctly articulates it,

Antagonism presupposes the incompatibility between opposed elements, while the coherence within a structure involves the complementarity between its internal moments. So if the structure is constituted by antagonistic opposites, it can only retain its internal coherence if the antagonistic dimension is a purely fictitious one – that is, a surface phenomenon behind which, and through which, a substantial structural unity operates. (p. 101)

At this point of the analysis, one is encountered with a very challenging question. If the various relational modalities that constitute a common discursive space operate within a structural unity, then what can account for the antagonistic dimensions of such system? If “unity” was to be conceived in terms of a perfect structural unity, then the possibility of antagonisms would dissipate. The various relations comprising the system would succumb to the principle of absolute repetition. The dimension of change

that political antagonisms afford would dissolve. This is the reason why no social system can be understood as being determined, in the last instance, by any underlying process or element. This is, moreover, the reason why historical analyses of nationalism that relegate the phenomenon to its “social bases,” tend to underemphasize the antagonistic engine that is immanent to nationalist politics. History becomes a collection of static and objective instances that conform to an underlying positive logic. This conception of history that has plagued sociological analysis is, simultaneously understood—and aporetically so—as being invariably vulnerable to “social change.”

The only possible alternative to positivistic understandings of the social involves the recognition that the social is invariably characterized by a constitutive structural disruption. There is a social structure, but it is, in essence, a failed structure. Why is this so? It is at this point that we re-introduce the notion of *the field of discursivity*. The unstable relationship between signifier and signified, that is always characterized by a discursive “excess,” means that any particular meaning, identity, or totality, cannot ultimately be grounded in an absolute and literal point of reference. There is, therefore, an inherent limit to objectivity and, therefore, to the structure of identities. My argument is that failed structural determination—that constitutive disruption to any system’s perfect structural workings—is the *terrain that enables the possibility of antagonisms*.

Let me demonstrate my argument by building on the example I have thus far been utilizing. The remnants of the Ottoman millet system found a related but altered expression when Cyprus’ rule was transferred to the British colonizer. According to Constantinou (2007), “The advent of British rule in 1878 changed the identity politics game. The British colonial authorities sought to ‘modernize’ rather than abolish the millet system. They retained the religious divisions of the Ottoman administration, and progressively recharged them as ethnic divisions on the basis of which modern governmentality could be exercised” (p. 256). What followed was the institutionalization of identity differences, according to ethnic criteria. This principally involved a multi-level system of advisory legislative councils that were specific to each, as the British would have it, ethno-religious community. It moreover involved the creation of two separate boards of education:

Whatever the case, the British colonial policy institutionalized biculturalism in ways the Ottoman empire never did; namely, as part of a 'democratic' system of governance that assumed and enhanced the existence of separate homogeneous religious and increasingly ethnic communities with elected representatives. The establishment of two separate Boards of Education, created with the otherwise noble purpose of fighting illiteracy, imported teachers and books from the two 'motherlands', and as Pollis put it, "probably accounts more than any other single factor for the assimilation of notions of Greek versus Turkish nationality among the populace." (Constantinou, 2007, p. 259)

So what we encounter here is the re-articulation and re-ordering of identities, according to an increasingly ethnic criterion, through a variety of institutionalized processes. A moment of close reflection is needed. What gave the British the capacity to "inject" ethnic overtones into the religious identities of "Muslim" and "Christian" was that these identities could not be subordinated to an ultimate unifying principle. The British were political masters, in the sense that their effectivity in articulatively connecting "Muslim" with "Turk," and "Christian" with "Greek," parasitically fed upon the remnants of the millet system. "Muslim" and "Greek" here can be understood as *floating signifiers* that were increasingly articulated in reference to ethnic categories through various institutionalized processes (e.g., advisory legislative councils). This movement toward ethnicization was later exacerbated following the institutionalization of ethnic-specific education and the importation of nationalist ideas from Europe. It was precisely because the "Muslim" could not be a pure and absolute Muslim that the British antagonist was enabled in their effort to alter the content of the colonized subject's identity. And it was precisely because the British colonizer could not be an absolute ruler that the Greek-Cypriots were enabled in their anti-colonial fight against the foreign oppressor. What becomes apparent through this historical example is that one principal dimension of politics involves the re-articulation of identity signifiers (e.g., "Greek," "British") by antagonistic camps. This can only mean that identities are not fixed, and, therefore, subject to processes of

subversion by oppositional identities. *Antagonism therefore materializes and is enabled by the very limits of objectivity, which is enabled by the “excess” of the field of signification.* This means that any identity or social arrangement is invariably incomplete, precarious and vulnerable to alterations. The “engine of history,” then, does not lie in any determinate social location. It materializes within the cleavages of any structure, in a terrain of indeterminacy that is characteristic of any structure and all identities.

Plurality and Heterogeneity as Necessary Starting Points of Historical and Political Analysis

In his “nationalism-engendering” and “nationalism-thwarting” typology, Gellner identifies eight possible historical situations that aim to account for the diversity of nationalism’s manifestations. His typology is organized according to three binary categories: access/lack of access to power, access/lack of access to modern-style education, and cultural homogeneity/cultural divisions (Gellner, 1983, p. 94). He deduces eight possible historical “situations,” five of which are non-nationalist in character and three of which take on a nationalistic character. To re-call Gellner’s argument, nationalism entails the imposition of a high-culture unto a low-culture, vis-à-vis institutionalized education, in the service of industrialism’s imperatives, which require occupational interchangeability through a shared codified communicational medium (“high” literary culture). At the backdrop of this definition, he asserts the following in his discussion of nationalist typologies: “In fact, ethnicity enters the political sphere as ‘nationalism’ at times when cultural homogeneity or continuity (not classlessness) is required by the economic base of social life, and when consequently culture-linked class differences become noxious, while ethnically unmarked, gradual class differences remain tolerable” (Gellner, 1983, p. 94). This statement cements Gellner’s theory. What he is acknowledging (and which was underemphasized in the earlier part of his book) is that nationalism *necessitates political conflict and, therefore, identity plurality.* His remark, however, is preceded by the unsatisfactory assertion that, in cases where there is no cultural

differentiation, “nationalism” has no grip, even if there exist “inequalities of power” or in “access to education” (Gellner, 1983, p. 93).

Consider the logical inconsistency. Nationalism entails the superimposition of a high culture unto a low culture. If this is successfully executed, it would necessarily result in the *dissolution of cultural differences*. But according to Gellner’s own conviction, this would necessarily entail the absence of nationalism, which necessarily requires a plane of conflict and cultural differentiation. Nationalism, in this sense, becomes a mere “instance” of superimposition, as opposed to a model of socio-political organization. Does nationalism dissolve at the moment when its criteria, as according to Gellner—that the political and cultural units are congruent—are fulfilled? We are once again dealing with the theoretical difficulties that surround the relationship between monism and plurality. Cause-and-effect monistic reasoning is precisely what underlies the aporetic impasse I brought to light. Gellner’s theoretical mishaps stem from his rigidly deductive theoretical approach. He conforms what is historically contingent and highly complex and diverse processes of nation construction to neatly crafted categorical binaries. He similarly attributes a theoretical unity to nationalism’s underlying “cause”—the imperatives of industrial culture—and to its “effect”—the superimposition of a unified communicatory culture. In essence, Gellner is resorting to a monistic understanding of power and causality—they are, for him, unidirectional. He is, at once, affirming the necessary pluralistic plane (i.e., political conflict and cultural differentiation) that accompanies nation formation. His reliance on cause-and-effect reasoning renders him unable to account for how plurality is maintained in the aftermath of the “superimposition” of one culture unto another. Nor is he able to account for how a plurality of socio-political effects can incubate a novel system of organization that exercises totalizing effects. One begs the question of why the plurality of historical processes is solely reduced to “those who have power or not,” or “those who have access to modern-style education or not.” Cannot the field of plurality extend beyond these simplistic categorical divisions?

As I have already mentioned, the insidious theoretical trap burgeons from two related approaches to historical analysis. The first is that of relegating the emergence of nations to its supposed underlying “social bases.” The second is that of assuming that the consolidation of nation-states, wiped

earlier traces of particularism, through homogenization processes. And in the midst of this reasoning, what vanishes is the actual process through which the nation-state was politically constructed—that is, *articulated as an ongoing political project that cut through a plurality of social arrangements and a plurality of social and political identities*. I will later argue that the historical “shift,” toward the consolidation of nation-states reflects, not so much the shift from heterogeneity to homogeneity, but to the proliferation of a type of political relationship that is ontologically grounded: the hegemonic political form. This involved the gradual extension of a particular identity (e.g., “the nation”) and a variety of associated social process (e.g., “democracy,” “capitalism,” “citizenship,” etc.) “beyond themselves”—it entailed their gradual dispersion through, and contamination of, the field of overdetermination.

Having thoroughly demonstrated the limitations of monistic epistemology, we are now in a position to delve into a more detailed discussion of heterogeneity and pluralism. The most substantive theoretical and political implication that can be rendered from the ontological centrality I attributed to discourse is the “considerable enlargement of the field of objectivity” and of political antagonisms (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 109). My introducing the category of discourse elevates the notions of “relations,” “overdetermination,” and “polysemy” to the status of general ontology. The principal deduction that follows is that the identity of the elements in the field of objectivity does not outpour from a single unifying principle but by the plurality of its constitutive relations. We have moreover established that these relations were not guided by a “hidden” deterministic logic but were the precise product of articulated political constructions. We are thus led to conclude that

antagonism does not necessarily emerge at a single point: any position in a system of differences, insofar as it is negated, can become the locus of an antagonism. Hence, there are a variety of possible antagonisms in the social, many of them in opposition to each other. The important problem is that the chains of equivalence will vary radically according to which antagonism is involved; and that they may affect and penetrate, in a contradictory way, the identity of the subject itself. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 131)

The implication here is simple. Antagonistic relations may encapsulate a variety of identities and sites of struggle and are not *a priori* determined by singular criteria, as was the case with Gellner's theory. For example, the emergence or configuration of "the nation" may encapsulate political battles between ethnicities, genders, colonizers and subjects, religions, classes, and so on and so forth. And these battles may be fought at a variety of "sites," such as, for example, the institution of education, the legal system, the state, the media, the family, coffee shops, romantic relationships, etc. In this sense, the object of "the nation" may bear its presence at a *plurality* of sites through a *plurality* of identities, all of which may overdetermine one another. And since, as we already established, a socio-political formation cannot be subsumed by a single principle that constitutes its unity, it follows that this pluralism will also be characterized by a constitutive heterogeneity. Nation formation ensued through *heterogeneous* political battles, many of which may even have been unrelated to one another. But what exactly does the term heterogeneity specify?

Let us begin with a preliminary "operational" definition. Heterogeneity entails a relation existing between "elements that do not belong to the same space of representation" (Laclau, 2014, p. 161). This dictum has to be substantiated, for what I am referring to here is not mere difference or conceptual or experiential independence between elements. If a system was furnished upon a system of pure differences, it would still be subservient to an underlying principle of unity. As an example,

Saussure's conception of language as a system of differences also presupposes homogeneity, insofar as the identity of each element requires its difference from all the others. Heterogeneity only enters the game if it can be shown that the very logic of totality – being dialectical or semiological – fails at some point as a result of an aporia that cannot be resolved within that totality's structuring principles. (Laclau, 2014, p. 162)

This leads us to a fascinating conclusion about the ontological dimensions of heterogeneity. Heterogeneity, far from describing a purely relational principle between elements (e.g., difference), actually describes a broader ontological terrain that *constitutively disrupts the fixity of all relations* (Laclau, 2014, p. 165). Fixity, as we have seen, is the obverse of homogeneity or pure difference. We are thus confronted here with the same question we addressed in previous sections, but in a different form, as we are once again called upon to answer the question of the limits of objectivity. It is at this point that we re-introduce the notion of the field of discursivity—that nebulous space operating both internally and “externally” to a discursive formation. The capricious character of the signifier which invariably operates within discursive formations, but whose floating excess “slips” into the nebulous field of discursivity, constitutes the terrain that gives being to heterogeneity and antagonisms, *by constitutively disrupting the fixity of any formation’s constitutive elements*. If the limits of objectivity as such is the ontological terrain that enables heterogeneity and antagonism, then heterogeneity and antagonism bear an ontological status. Heterogeneity and antagonism are, therefore, invariably constitutive of discursive and, therefore, socio-political formations (Laclau, 2014, p. 165).

The presumed “unity” of socio-political spaces, as governed by any sort of monistic logic, is now a thing of the past, as we are led to a new theoretical terrain that, far from providing unequivocal answers, re-articulates the content of the question: the question was never was the nation *is*, but *how* it comes to be. It is at the backdrop of this realization that I had consciously made an effort to avoid phrasing the question in terms of “unifying principles” or “ultimate causes,” and instead steered the discussion toward “totalizing effects”—a discussion that is progressively acquiring content. We now proceed in delineating the terrain through which heterogeneous spaces of representation can come to be aggregated.

Identity, Antagonism, and Aggregation

Our task now in attempting to provide a framework that can “track” the emergence of nations is to delineate how a plurality of political battles or social arrangements could come to be aggregated in various forms and combinations. A number of fundamental conclusions were reached throughout the course of the present discussion. The first is that heterogeneity and plurality are the primary terrain of social and political operations, bearing, as is it, an ontological status (Laclau, 2014, p. 169). These ontological dimensions will, therefore, find an expression in the very structuration of identities (Laclau, 2014, p. 169). This has already been demonstrated in our discussion of the inter-penetrating planes of “equivalences” and “differences,” which compromise the terrain through which identities are structured. There is no pure difference, or pure equivalence between objects, but equivalence and difference operate concurrently, exercising disruptive effects that prevent the ultimate fixity of identities. The partial fixation of identities is, moreover, operant within multifarious articulated totalities, and against a field of discursivity that subverts their structuration. The whimsical character of the signifier is what is at play here. The signifier’s “slip” into the field of discursivity enables social actors to articulatively tie it to a variety of other signifiers and signifieds. Signifiers are, in essence, polysemic and it is their polysemic potential that enables the field of overdetermined networks of meanings, which operate in highly complex relationships of equivalence and differences.

Now, the key question that we need to answer is whether and how the heterogeneous elements that constitute any social space can come to be aggregated. The answer, in a sense, has already been given, but it is paramount to delineate it with precision. What enables the potential for the aggregation of heterogeneous spaces of representation is the polysemic potential of the signifier, which can at once, vis-à-vis symbolic equivalences, connect two “independent” spaces of representation. It is here that the field of discursivity illuminates its ontological centrality. For the field of discursivity is that ontological “space” that enables the content of one space of representation to be articulatively linked with another.

The “floating excess” of the signifier, therefore operates as a *node*, within the field of discursivity, connecting, as it is, heterogeneous spaces of representation. In this sense, the field of discursivity is precisely where order and regularity—between what would have otherwise been independent elements—operates.

Thus, the question of prime importance is the following: what sort of relationship does the aggregation of elements, within the field of discursivity, presuppose? We have already laid the groundwork for this answer with our discussion of equivalences and differences, but it is now necessary to specify those relational planes with more precision. I have demonstrated that the fixity of discursive elements is constitutively disrupted by the field of overdetermination (operating, in part, through the field of discursivity) that subverts their *literality*. The meaning of the elements is never pure—or positive. Meaning emerges within complexes of overdetermined relationships that are themselves a product of contingent acts of articulation. The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is clear: the aggregation between elements cannot be based on a pure, unadulterated and literal meaning. The ontological plane of aggregation is thus essentially *metonymic and nominal*.

In the case of metonymic aggregation, the relationship between *combined* elements is characterized by a relationship of *contiguity*. The plane of contiguity is enabled by the field of overdetermination: a relation entails the presence of its constitutive elements within each other, furnishing, as it is, a contiguous meaningful space. And I should stress again that the relationship between elements is exhausted by neither difference nor equivalence—both are constitutive of the relation. In the case of nominal aggregation, a node operating in the field of discursivity, becomes a common point of reference that encapsulates heterogeneous elements. We can say that in the case of metonymic aggregation, it is the *signified* content that is at play, whereas in the case of nominal aggregation, it is the *signifier* that exercises aggregative effects.

Should the relationship between the two be conceived as being mutually exclusive? Far from being the case, both planes are operative in any instance of aggregation (though as we shall see, certain configurations between discursive elements will privilege one plane over the other). In the absence of any

relations of contiguity, what we encounter is a heterogeneous space “without common measure between the elements” (Laclau, 2014, p. 90), whereas in the absence of nominal aggregation, we encounter a situation of a contiguity that absorbs differential positions, in the absence of any sort of *limits* to that aggregation. It would amount to a situation where meaning would be deferred *ad infinitum*. Surely, this would also render impossible the construction of the necessary *frontiers* that are characteristic of the structuration of any identity. This leads us to a critical conclusion: *the necessity of naming outpours from the very limits of objectivity*: “the impossibility of fixing the unity of a social formation in any *conceptually* graspable object leads to the centrality of naming in constituting that unity” (Laclau, 2005b, p. x).

Let us apply the premises thusfar established by considering a brief example. As various historians have noted, prior to the Greek War of Independence and the formation of the Greek state, Greek social and political life was, by and large, devoid of nationalistic ideas (Clogg, 1992, pp. 1, 47; Frangos, 1973, p. 90; Jusdanis, 2001, pp. 117–118). Nationalistic ideas were, essentially, Western imports that were initially diffused in the Greek world by individuals who had travelled abroad, either for economic, political, educational, or military purposes (Clogg, 1992, p. 1; Dakin, 1973a, pp. 22–23; Koumarianou, 1973, p. 74). It is during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that we begin seeing the first articulated instances of “the Greek nation.” The intelligentsia were amongst the first to begin articulating a nationalist imaginary (Jusdanis, 2001, p. 118). These first executions of Greek nationhood were articulated in reference to two predominant imaginaries. Some of these intellectuals, being inspired by the success of the French Revolution and Western European statehood, espoused an imaginary of a modern Hellenic state (Clogg, 1973, p. 26; Jusdanis, 2001, p. 123; Koumarianou, 1973, pp. 72, 75). But this republican vision would come to be articulatively connected to a presumed past ethnic glory, whose ultimate point of reference would be ancient Athens (Dakin, 1973b, p. 24). A few creative metonymical articulations breathed life into this national vision.

The first was the elision of the ancient Athenian city-state and “Hellenism” at large. What was essentially aggregated was a territoriality where Greeks-speakers had historically roamed, with the notion

of “the Athenian city-state” whose elevation to the status of “Ancient Hellas” established a presumed contiguity between: a territory, the culture achievements of ancient Athenians, the ancient Greek-speaking world at large, and modern Greeks. What was essentially articulated was a field of contiguity between culturally and temporally heterogeneous groups. These metonymical aggregations were then injected with a hefty dose of future political imaginary, as they became common points of reference in an overarching vision of constructing a modern Greek state (Jusdanis, 2001, p. 129). The metonymical chain thus came to equivalentially connect a supposed Greek territorial unit, Athenian cultural heritage, contemporary European political ideas, and a political vision of a modern Greek state. In this sense, the nominal category of *Hellinismos*—“Greekness,” that is—encapsulated this broader chain of metonymical equivalences. Nonetheless, this particular articulation of *Hellinismos* was in the preliminary stages of its articulation and delimited to narrow social circles. For it was, in fact, the case, that at the time, the vast majority of Greek-speakers were largely ignorant of this cultural “heritage” that intellectuals like Adamantios Korais had articulated (Dakin, 1973a, pp. 11–12). Most Greeks, owing largely to the Ottoman experience, and the Orthodox Church’s stronghold over civic affairs, could hardly trace their history past the “near” Byzantine Empire (Dakin, 1973a, pp. 11–13; Jusdanis, 2001, p. 116). The question of prime analytic importance is exactly how the ideas that came to be articulatively associated with *Hellenismos* (i.e. the Greek nation), came to contaminate the social and political fabric, through the *extension of the metonymical chain*. Let us illuminate just one dimension of this process by exploring how the political efforts and ambitions of the intelligentsia were assisted through a differential subjectivity: the merchant class.

During the eighteenth century, a highly successful Greek merchant class had emerged both within the Ottoman Empire and in diaspora communities (Clogg, 1973, p. 10; Dakin, 1973a, pp. 21–23). Their trading houses “had formed links with foreign traders [...] which although initially economic, soon began to influence social and intellectual life and to stimulate social change” (Koumariou, 1973, p. 76). What is more, this class of Greeks (along with the intelligentsia) had also travelled to, or had lived, in modern European states. Many of these states, owing to their commitment to rationalism, liberalism, and

capitalism, implemented policies that protected private property and assisted in capital accumulation (Clogg, 1992, p. 27). The political successes in Europe and the social and political grievances in the “Greek” world thus came to operate as symbolic counterparts. The seeming fulfillment of political imaginaries in the European world, was metonymically extended to the political grievances of the Greek world under the Ottoman Empire (Jusdanis, 2001, p. 126). In this sense, the modernizing vision of intellectuals was symbolically compatible, on a certain level, with that of the merchant class, though each group had different political visions. While the merchant class was predominantly interested in the implementation of state policies that protected private property and assisted in capital accumulation (Clogg, 1992, p. 27), the intelligentsia’s vision corresponded more closely with the romantic ideas of nationalism (see Jusdanis, 2001, pp. 118–131). The ideas of the Enlightenment (e.g., liberalism, modern state, rationalism etc.) came to operate as points of *convergence and divergence* between these two groups—a terrain of metonymical contiguity was established. “Liberty” and “rationality” as examples, evokes a range of associated meanings, but *which* meanings are evoked more *pronouncedly* is contingent upon *which* identity invokes it (polysemy).

The merchants, having established themselves as member of an up-and-coming stratum, and owing to their general appreciation of education (Clogg, 1973, p. 14), began funding schools and libraries in their communities (Clogg, 1973, p. 14). What was significant about these libraries is that they housed classic (Greek and non-Greek) works, many of which were written in (demotic) Greek. The most notable related project was Korais’ *Elliniki Vivliothiki*, a multi-volume publishing program “which aimed to familiarise the Greek public with the ancient writers” (Koumarianou, 1973, p. 81). It is important to note that in the *Prolegomena* of these volumes, Korais often embarked on an analysis of contemporary social and political issues and “set out his own attitude towards them, and proposed ways and means of overcoming the problems” (Koumarianou, 1973, p. 81). What is more, these commentaries were often laden with nationalistic overtones, often using the esteemed “Greek past” to make sense of contemporary political challenges. From an analytic standpoint, Korais’ project engendered certain articulated effects. The fact that these books were written and read in the Greek language is not trivial, as that operated as a

“grounding” for a series of metonymical injunctions. An ancient text, which now received the metaphor of *Hellenismos*, was read in the language of the modern *Hellene*, and was articulatively connected with the contemporary grievances of *Hellene* Ottoman subjects. What we are witnessing is not only the construction of a symbolical chain of equivalence between heterogeneous “worlds” but also the increasing displacement of the category of *Hellenismos*, which would come to increasingly “contaminate” the social and political fabric.

Let us conclude by tracing the metonymical connection between the events thus far described. The merchants, having developed an appreciation for education, had funded schools, libraries and publications, all of which were instrumental in engendering a sense of “Greekness.” However, their commitment to nationalist ideas and, especially, a national revolutionary struggle, were equivocal. The “nationalist intelligentsia,” on the other hand, was heavily vested in “awakening” national consciousness and, come the right time, revolutionary struggle. For them, education was the means through which they could fulfill their revolutionary desires (Koumariou, 1973, p. 77). In this sense, communication media and the sites (e.g., schools and libraries) through which nationalist ideas were disseminated, signified different things for each group (i.e., the merchants and the intelligentsia). But at the same time, “education”—in its combined “ideal” and “material” manifestation—represented a plane of contiguity between the goals and efforts of each group. The conclusion cannot be ambiguous. The combined aggregated effects of the sum of these processes can only be understood as being metonymical, in essence, being characterized by planes of overlap and negation.

National Movements and Populist Aggregation

The topic of popular national mobilization, in all its obscure and incomplete articulations, has received a moderate degree of attention in the modernist literature on nationalism (Breuilly, 1994; Hobsbawm, 2012; Hroch, 1985, 1993, 1996; Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Nairn, 1975; Smith, 1986). We can recall Nairn’s

(1975) conviction that nationalism is “invariably populist” (p. 11), as it typically involves a liberation struggle where intellectuals “invite the masses into history” (p. 12). This idea would find a subdued and more reasonable expression in Smith’s (1986) theory of nation formation, where he identifies two paths to nationhood, those being “bureaucratic incorporation” and “vernacular mobilization,” the latter of which “emphasized elements like [...] genealogy, populism, customs and dialects, and nativism” (p. 137). Studies of nations have also examined the significance of historical events that are conventionally adorned with the crown of “national mobilization” or the halo of “the people.” These case study analyses are incorporated into broader theoretical questions about nation formation (Breuilly, 1994; Hobsbawm, 2012; Jusdanis, 2001). The French Revolution is, of course, the classical example, stereotypically considered to be a pivotal historical moment of popular revolt, from which the blooming echo of a nascent nation, asserted its sovereignty. It came to be edged unto history as an imaginary that would be appropriated by burgeoning peoples, igniting national mobilizations throughout the globe (Anderson, 2006, pp. 67, 80, 156).

What one can clearly deduce in examining the aforementioned works is that the topic of national mobilization, as such, typically constitutes an auxiliary and not central focus of analysis. Miroslav Hroch (1985, 1993, 1996) is among the few that has focused explicitly and comprehensively on the question of national movements. For Hroch (1993), national movements are defined in terms of their goals of: (a) developing a national culture; (b) achieving political self-determination, and (c) creating a differentiated social culture with a common ethnic base (p. 6). National movements are, moreover, teleologically understood, since “the trajectory of any national movement was only consumed when all [three goals] were fulfilled” (Hroch, 1993, p. 6). Hroch’s analysis is conducted by examining the most potent historical causes that underlie national movements’ success. He identifies three principal causes, those being “a memory of some common past [...] a density of linguistic or cultural ties” and “a conception of the equality of all members of the group organized as a civil society” (Hroch, 1993, p. 5).

What I suggest, is that none of these accounts display anything that even closely amounts to a theory of popular (national) mobilization, as such. It is most often the case that popular mobilization, in

all its metonymical variants (e.g., popular movement, national movement, people's movement, vernacular mobilization etc.) is deployed as an empty category whose content is assumed to be self-evident. Two general trends can thus be observed. Historical examples of popular mobilization become subservient to aprioristic theoretical convictions, or they are examined in terms of their "facticity." In both cases, the emphasis is laid on what national movements are or where their underlying causes lie, as exemplified by Hroch's approach. What I want to question is whether the question of national movements should be approached in this fashion. As I will demonstrate, what is most substantive about popular (national) movements, in helping us understand nationalism, is how, as particular political configurations (i.e., popular "national" aggregation), they exercise certain *political effects*. Their operational logic as popular movements engender novel terrains of political articulations by catalyzing planes of identification.

My intention in the present section, then, is to delineate a framework that can help us understand the *political logic* of popular mobilization. In keeping with our overarching efforts, our goal is to delineate the various planes that, through their interpenetrative interaction, enable the diachronic manifestation of the "object" of the nation—how the nation comes to be, through its general but uneven dispersion. In this sense, what we want to examine is how popular mobilization—understood here as a precise political relation—through its disruptive operations, may result in, or contribute to, performative executions of "nationhood." My argument is that populist movements result in the profuse displacement and proliferation of the nominal category of "the nation" in the field of discursivity. Those novel subject positions bear the potential of two related operations. Firstly, as aggregations characterized by a clear-cut frontier, they can threaten extant hegemonic formations and thus behold the embryo of new communitarian potentials. The French Revolution, as an example, can be interpreted as a novel event whose subsequent outcome was the abolition of feudalism. Secondly, these novel subject positions can operate as nodes through which future political struggles converge, thusly beholding the embryo of future hegemonic articulations. The aggregation of heterogeneous subject positions in the Greek War of Independence under the halo of *Hellenismos*, as an example, resulted not only in the precarious totalization of the *Hellene* identity, but in the proliferation of future political battles centering upon the

normative content of the emergent *Hellene ethnos*. The question to be answered is, therefore, not what a national movement *is*, but how popular mobilization, as a political logic, may become part of an on-going process of constructing “the people.”

I will begin the discussion by examining Hobsbawm’s discussion of “popular proto-nationalism,” being indicative of several of the concerns that I have raised throughout the present chapter. Hobsbawm’s discussion of national movements is ensnared in a broader problematic. His principal inquiry is whether “national movements could mobilize certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 46). These common feelings of collective belonging are what Hobsbawm (2012) calls “proto-national” bonds (p. 46). From then on, Hobsbawm engages in a mindful historical analysis, adorned with plethora relevant examples, which seek to illustrate which proto-national elements were the most efficacious in yielding *effective* national movements. What does Hobsbawm conclude?

Firstly, that “there is no reason to suppose that language was more than one among several criteria by which people indicated belonging to a human collectivity” and that it “is absolutely certain that language had as yet no political potential” (Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 62–63). An examination of the causal efficacy of ethnicity in engendering states and nations, similarly yields ambiguous findings. Heterogeneity here is what disrupts clear analytic assertions, since “the populations of large territorial nation-states are almost invariably too heterogeneous to claim a common ethnicity” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 63) and “insofar as ‘the people’ was identified with a particular polity, even when seen from below it cut across ethnic (and linguistic) divides within it” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 65). Ethnicity, therefore, cannot be generally understood as having an absolute empirical correspondence with either “the nation” or “the state.” It is not, therefore, the determining element of proto-nationalism, as it consists of one element among many. In a similar fashion, “religion is not a necessary mark of proto-nationality” but can be “a crucial component of it, as they are of modern nationalism” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 71).

It is, rather, “the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity” that is the “most decisive criterion of proto-nationalism” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 73). This is especially the case “if the state which formed the framework of the later ‘nation’ was associated with a special *Staatsvolk* or state-people such as the Great Russians, the English or the Castilians.” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 73). But even here caution should be exercised because in most cases, the historical political nation that formulates the vision of the nation of the people typically included only a small percentage of the state inhabitants, those being principally the elite or the nobility and gentry (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 73). But is proto-national consciousness essential for the formation of national movements and nations? Hobsbawm (2012), suggests that

while a proto-national base may be desirable, perhaps even essential, for the formation of serious state aspiring national movements - though in itself not sufficient to create them - it is *not* essential for the formation of national patriotism and loyalty once a state has been founded. As has been often observed, nations are more often the consequence of setting up a state than they are its foundation. (p. 78)

Historical evidence, therefore, does not enable us to impart a conclusive theoretical conviction. To put it in lay terms, what Hobsbawm is saying is that it all depends on the context. I suggest that these sort of ambivalent conclusions regarding the causal efficacy of historical variables, is indicative of theorists’ inability to deal with the problem of plurality and heterogeneity. For what in essence is always the case is that historical “causes” can come to be “aggregated” and interact, in diverse ways, yielding differential outcomes, depending on the context.

I should, moreover, note that Hobsbawm’s analysis is carried out in terms of a logic that seeks to identify the “base causes” behind the formation of national movements and nations. Nationalism for Hobsbawm is understood in the Gellnerian sense, as being “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 9). So he endeavours to identify

whether nationalism, understood as such, derives from “proto-national consciousness,” the latter analyzed in terms of either its linguistic, ethnic, religious or political base. Somewhere in the midst of these analytic complexes, the notion of “national movements” pops up, although it is never accorded the theoretical weight it deserves. Its meaning is simply assumed to be self-evident. Historical analysis then, is executed on the basis of aprioristic convictions (i.e., fulfillment of “the nationalist principle”), examining whether historical events came to conform to such convictions.

One should, nonetheless, give merit to Hobsbawm’s cautionary approach, as one has to be especially mindful of sweeping generalizations when conducting historical analysis. Hobsbawm’s examination is accurate, measured and devoid of theoretical enthusiasm. In fact, Hobsbawm is so mindful of historical and analytic accuracy that he refrains from reaching any ultimate conclusions. The following passage from his closing paragraph is indicative of his cautionary approach:

One formulates such fairly absurd questions not to elicit answers or stimulate research theses, but to indicate the denseness of the fog which surrounds questions about the national consciousness of common men and women, especially in the period before modern nationalism unquestionably became a mass political force. For most nations even in western Europe this did not happen until rather late in the nineteenth century. Then, at least, the choice became clear even though, as we shall see, its content was not. (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 79)

While I do share Hobsbawm’s reservations regarding sweeping and universalistic convictions about the significance of historical variables and events, I believe that something much more important is missed if the analysis is halted at this junction, without probing further into the *political logic* surrounding the formation of national movements and nations. I pose the following questions. May Hobsbawm’s conclusion be symptomatic of the fact that historical specificity does not conform to aprioristic definitions of nationalism? And might this approach to historical analysis preclude a proper analysis of national movements? We return to my original critique. National movements are examined in terms of what they

are. What is excluded from the analysis are *the political effects and potentials that national movements enable*. Consider, as an example, Hobsbawm's (2012) remarks about the Greek War of Independence: "if we were to suppose that the Greek mountaineers who rose against the Turks in Byron's day were nationalists, which is admittedly improbable, we cannot fail to note that some of their most formidable fighters were not Hellenes but Albanians (the Suliotes)" (p. 65). Hobsbawm's analysis is significant in the sense that it dissolves universalistic claims by revealing the constitutive plurality of historical events, but his analysis is halted without examining the relevant political implications. For even if I agree with Hobsbawm's remark that many early conventionally thought-to-be national movements were in fact devoid of "mature" nationalistic content and were constituted by a plurality of identities, perhaps there was something about the political effects that such movements produced that may have enabled novel aggregating processes and novel articulation of "the people." Our journey has once again led us to the work of Ernesto Laclau.

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau introduces a groundbreaking theory of populism that does not rely on any aprioristic prejudices on what constitutes the phenomenon of interest. For Laclau, populism is not governed by any unifying principle but is the product of a particular *political relation* constructed around heterogeneous social *demands*. For Laclau, a demand operates in a two-fold logic between its initial manifestation as a *request* to its transformation into a *claim*, if the request is not satisfied. He then differentiates between *democratic demands*, which can be satisfied in isolation, from *popular demands*, which refers to the equivalential aggregation of unsatisfied demands. Popular demands come to be aggregated when a range of *heterogeneous* unsatisfied demands come to be symbolically associated. In other words, an *equivalence* is articulatively established between them. But at this stage, the construction of a popular movement is still in its embryonic form. For what a developed populist movement entails is the crystallization of these equivalences into a stable system of signification "beyond a feeling of vague solidarity" (Laclau, 2005b, p. 74). This entails a two-pronged movement. On the one hand, the chain of equivalence expands, integrating a broader range of unsatisfied demands, and, on the other, it comes to be symbolically "unified" (Laclau, 2005b, p. 74).

We have already examined how, prior to the Greek war of independence, a field of contiguity was articulated between the interests of the Greek merchant class and the intelligentsia. While the former's demands principally concerned state policies conducive to capital accumulation, the latter's principally concerned the formation of a national state of politically equal citizens. But with the outbreak of the war of independence, a plurality of groups, such as peasants, artisans, the *klefts* (runaway bandits), the *proestoi* (Christian landed elite) etc., were drawn into the struggle (Dakin, 1973a, p. 60). These groups were characterized not only by particularistic grievances, but also by differential allegiances and identifications (see Dakin, 1973a, pp. 9–16). Let us examine some of their differences. There is a virtually unanimous consensus from observers of rural Greece during the pre-independent period, that the peasantry lived in dire conditions, being the principal victims of excessive land rent and labour service obligations (Clogg, 1973, p. 23). This group's prime allegiances were their family and their village (Frangos, 1973, p. 90). In terms of cultural heritage, the peasants identified most closely with their Christian Orthodox heritage (Clogg, 1992, pp. 28–29; Dakin, 1973a, pp. 11–13). Conversely, the intelligentsia, typically despised the Orthodox Church, rejected any claims of Byzantine lineage, and instead identified with the ancient Hellenic tradition (Dakin, 1973a, p. 24). The position of the *proestoi* was more ambiguous. This was a group that identified its interest so closely with the Ottoman Empire, that they received the name of "Christian Turks" (Dakin, 1973a, p. 60). However, in the wake of the revolution, they necessarily "had to join in, for fear that if they remained aloof they would be confounded with the tyrant" (Dakin, 1973a, p. 60). In the case of the *klefts*, we see a partial overlap with the experiences of the peasants, in the sense that the *klefts* had become runaway bandits so as to avoid paying taxes to the Porte. But their demands did not stop there. *Klefts* also sought autonomy, being organized in small autonomous tribes in the mountains (Dakin, 1973a, pp. 17–18). In addition, some *klefts* leaders, envision the creation of a Greek centralized (monarchical) state, whose merits they would reap (Dakin, 1973b). There is no ambiguity in the argument I am making: the terrain of "Greekness," prior to the Greek war of independence, was characterized by an apparent heterogeneity, lacking an enveloping national consciousness (Jusdanis, 2001, pp. 117–118).

The argument I wish to advance is that these plural identifications, experiences, demands and future political imaginaries were aggregated under common forms of representations, i.e., signifiers, that represented their equivalential connection. In this sense, these heterogeneous subject positions were nominally aggregated under such references as “Hellenismos,” “liberty,” “resurrection,” etc. A clear distinction needs to be drawn at this point between the actual content of the heterogeneous demands and the symbolic terrain through which they are unified. If demands are heterogeneous, it follows that their aggregation cannot ensue from the specific *conceptual* content of any one of those demands (Laclau, 2014, p. 167). The conceptual particularity of demands would come into conflict with one another—they are invariably incommensurate. Thus, the populist task consists of articulating a mode of representation that represents not the particularity of demands but their very aggregation. What needs to be signified is precisely the chain of equivalence that connects them as grievances. Thus, in order for a symbol to be deployed successfully in this process of aggregation, it cannot, strictly speaking, appeal to a specific content, since it will be attached to the most diverse social demands (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 76, 98). These aggregating symbols are what Laclau calls *empty signifiers*.

What is paramount to note is that the “emptiness” of these signifiers outpours from the very logic of discourse and of the structuration of identities. We have already established that identities are constructed vis-à-vis the articulation of equivalences between differential elements, and that this process, if it is to signify itself, has to construct a border that differentiates it from what it opposes. This very logic, no doubt, characterizes popular movements to the largest degree, since they involve a frontal and antagonistic frontier which clearly divides the social, internally, between “the people” and its presumed pure negation, the “institutional power.” But this poses a very important theoretical issue: if the identity of “the people” is to signify itself, as an ensemble of equivalential differences, it has to signify the limits of its frontier. Now, since that frontier embodies an ensemble of differential demands and identity, it cannot have a *signified* content of its own, since a specified content may very well be incommensurate with differential subject positions and political demands (Laclau, 2007b, p. 42). But if this frontal division between two bodies is to be achieved, the popular body has to, in some way, come to be *incarnated*. In

this sense, a mode of representing the “body” of the people has to emerge, representing, not the specificity of the demands, but the chain of equivalence that unites them (Laclau, 2005b, p. 97). Thus, the incarnation of the body of the populous can only receive a *name* that is devoid of content—a signifier without a signified. Nominal aggregation, taken to its extreme, is the very logic that underpins populist mobilization. It is in this respect that categories such as “Hellenismos,” “liberty,” “resurrection,” operated during the Greek war of independence, if only tendentially, as we will see. Hatzopoulos (2009), as an example, has noted that during the Greek War of Independence

[t]he [secularly] reinterpreted discourse of resurrection provided the traditional sections of society with a comforting matrix for coming to terms not only with the idea of insurrection but also with one of its prerequisites that underpinned the agenda of the revolutionaries: the myth of Hellenic descent. Even if the programme of the nationalists had essentially been formalized along secular and neoclassical lines, those provincial primates, military chieftains, village clergymen, monks, and peasants who had a vague idea about—or even reasons to detest—the line of revolutionary Hellenism found a frame of reference that did not compel them to relinquish their religious identity in favour of a secular one. For these people, instead, the reinterpreted discourse of resurrection furnished an ideological basis which facilitated an acculturation between the myth of Hellenic descent that nationalists upheld and the sense of belonging to a religious collectivity. From this point of view, in the nascent Greek nation state the pre-modern imagined community based on common faith had never been closer to the emerging community of common ancestry, in the terms used by Kitromilides (1990). Within the popular mind, the belief in a God-revived moral community of the faithful could now be transmuted, after conceptual adjustment to conform with the teaching of intellectuals, into the conviction that a moral community of Hellenic ancestry was to be regenerated by the grace of God. (p. 88)

The naïve eye might interpret these events as a successful articulation of a narrative that was, on the basis of a unifying content, able to subsume a diversity of political logics. This argument, however, fails to explain how heterogeneity and the Greek community's internal contradictions, were overcome. Clearly, the totalization of the national movement could not ensue from any specific conceptual content, seeing how the Greek community was divided along a rigid frontier between, among others (see Clogg, 1992, pp. 37–46), the seculars and the religious (Clogg, 1992, pp. 2–3, 13; Koumarianou, 1973, p. 18). The secular re-articulation of the discourse of resurrection, does not dissolve this frontier, but bridges the two subject positions, vis-à-vis the injection of added content. “Resurrection,” came to mean something different for the seculars and something different for the religious, as did the overarching categories of “Hellenismos” and “liberty.” The polysemic potential of the signifier which flows in excess of its signified content is what enables this possibility. The two oppositional subject positions’ (seculars and religious) fusion, therefore, is more so enabled *by the signifier and not its signified* (nominal aggregation).

We are now confronted with a question that is central to the development of our argument: from where, exactly, are these aggregating signifiers drawn from? Since this discursive movement of pure equivalence involves the collapse of all differences, it “cannot have a signifier of its own—for in that case, the ‘beyond all differences’ would be one more difference and not the result of the equivalential collapse of all differential identities” (Laclau, 2007b, p. 42). We are thus led to conclude that it has to borrow its name from an entity “constituted within the equivalential space” (Laclau, 2007b, p. 42). An identity constituted within the system of equivalence (e.g., “Hellene”) will, therefore, assume this principal role of representing the communitarian space as a whole, by extending its identity beyond itself (Laclau, 2005b, p. 95). But in doing so, this privileged signifier that is drawn from a particular identity, and which assumes the function of total representation, will have to impoverish its content, so as to subsume the plurality of differential demands. The identity from which this signifier is drawn will therefore be constitutively split between the particular identity it represents and the populist totality it comes to incarnate. This process, whereby a particular identity assumes the role of incarnating a totality is here understood as the hegemonic operation (Laclau, 2005b, p. 95). In the case of the Greeks, Dakin

(1973a) makes the most interesting observation that the word “Hellene” “did not come into common use until the Greek War of Independence,” noting that the term was initially employed to denote “only the fighting men” (p. 22). This is a clear example how a signifier that had initially signified a particular identity had come to be generalized, thus representing: (a) the national movement totality, and (b) subsequently, the communal totality.

But I should add a substantive remark at this point, for fear of transgressing into an objectified understanding of populism. Populism does not entail a pure and absolute manifestation, but an operational political logic running on a continuum. As we have already noted, the construction of equivalences between discursive elements leads to their partial subversion. They are, nonetheless, maintained in the chain of equivalences as difference. As Laclau notes, “The chain can live only within the unstable tension between these two extremes, and disintegrates if one of them entirely imposes itself over the other” (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 129–130). At one extreme of the spectrum, “unilateralization of the moment of subordination transforms the popular signifiers into an inoperative entelechy incapable of acting as a ground for the democratic demands” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 130). At the other end of the spectrum the chain of equivalence collapses into autonomized differences and the populist chain consequently disappears (Laclau, 2005b, p. 130). So popular mobilization entails an inherent tension between equivalence and difference, between particularity and universality, which entail a plethora of internal contestations between the plurality of its constitutive subject positions (Laclau, 2005b, p. 97). This is precisely the reason why I have chosen to talk about “populist aggregation” as opposed to “populism” as such. What is relevant to the present argument is not merely the moment whereby “the people” or “the nation” crystallize into a totality, but the diversity that populism, as a type of political relation, can assume. Understood as such, the notion of populist aggregation can be exceptionally useful in studies of nationalism.

We are thus led to a clear deduction. The (historical) success or efficacy of national movements is predicated on their ability to aggregate heterogeneous social demands and is not contingent on an underlying historical “variable.” In this sense, I am distancing myself from how the question of national

movements is typically addressed in the literature. In the case of Hobsbawm's analysis, as a paradigmatic example, the efficacy of proto-national movements was assessed in terms of their underlying constitutive variable (religion, ethnicity, language etc.) and their objective potential in engendering the national form. But I pose the problematic in the reverse. It is not a matter of identifying the unifying principle of national movements but of identifying how a national aggregation of any sort can materialize in the *absence of any objective unifying principle*. A national movement that has failed to articulatively connect its demands with those of other groups will likely remain particularistic, with limited political efficacy. Conversely, its political influence extends if it is able to articulatively link its demands to a variety of other demands. The most "successful" instance of aggregation will entail a frontal opposition against an "alien" regime in the form of a national struggle that subsumes a broad range of heterogeneous subject positions and social demands. In this case, intra-national equivalence will have reigned, if only ephemerally, over internal differences. This instance of extreme "aggregation," which enables the signification of "the people," vis-à-vis the temporary disappearance of differences, is what is here understood as a *totalizing effect*.

At this point I would like to raise a further issue, which connects directly with the concerns I raised earlier about Hobsbawm's analysis. For Hobsbawm, the question was whether "popular proto-national" bonds entail a sufficient cause for the generation of effective national movements. But if we invert the very content of the question, a new analytic terrain becomes available: Do certain instances of popular (national) aggregation, as such, allow for the possibility of novel constructions of "the people" or "the nation" and of novel socio-political configurations, which in certain historical instances can be injected, albeit unevenly, with nationalist content? The construction of the equivalential chain vis-à-vis the privileged signifier that comes to incarnate the community's "fullness" (e.g., "Hellenismos), invariably results in the signifier's profuse *displacement and proliferation*. "What was simply a mediation between demands now acquires a consistency of its own. Although the link was originally ancillary to the demands, it now reacts over them and, through an inversion of the relationship, starts behaving as their ground" (Laclau, 2005b, p. 93). A most-relevant potential follows. This profuse displacement of the privileged signifier (e.g., "the nation") can lead to potentially novel articulations of its *content*. Thus, the

tendentially empty signifier is reduced to the status of a floating signifier, since it starts receiving particularistic conceptual determinations. In other words, the privileged “empty” signifier, which retains its privileged status by virtue of its profuse presence in the structuration of the communitarian space, becomes the site of novel political struggles and competing hegemonic projects (Laclau, 2005b, p. 131). Thus, the privileged signifier is never empty in the strict sense of the term. The specificity of its content and its tendential emptiness run on a continuum, oscillating between “floating” and “empty” content. As Laclau notes (2005b),

the categories of ‘empty’ and ‘floating’ signifiers are structurally different. The first concerns the construction of a popular identity once the presence of a stable frontier is taken for granted; the second tries conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacements of that frontier. In practice, however, the distance between the two is not that great. Both are hegemonic operations and, most importantly, the referents largely overlap. A situation where only the category of empty signifier was relevant, with total exclusion of the floating moment, would be one in which we would have an entirely immobile frontier—something that is hardly imaginable. Conversely, a purely psychotic universe, where we would have a pure floating without any partial fixation, is not thinkable either. So floating and empty signifiers should be conceived as partial dimensions - and so as analytically distinguishable—in any process of hegemonic construction of the ‘people’. (p. 133)

During the Greek war of independence, as an example, the outbreak of the war was enabled by the construction of a frontier that separated a heterogeneous space incarnated under the label of “Hellenismos,” “liberty,” “resurrection,” etc., and its presumed negation, “the Turk.” But we very well know that prior to this moment of eruptive assertion of the Hellene frontier, “Greek identity” was characterized not only by ambiguity, but it was not even the most dominant form of identification amongst the Greek-speaking population. Owing to the aggregating success of the Greek War of

Independence, “Hellenismos” came to operate as privileged symbolic point of reference. It would come to constitute one of the primary terrains of political articulation. It would, moreover, come to envelope the social terrain of an emergent Hellene nation. This is reflective in the fact that, in the aftermath of the Greek War of Independence, one of the prime political tasks that were undertaken by a plurality of political actors, was the incubation of a shared Hellene identity, and the construction of a centralized Hellene state (Clogg, 1992, p. 47). But the terrain of “Hellenismos” would come to feel the vicissitudes of competing political articulations between a variety of actors. The principle lines of division were articulated in reference to questions of language, the political role of religion, Hellene ancestry, modernization, and the distribution of political privileges (Clogg, 1992, pp. 37–51). In this sense, “Hellenismos” came to be injected with plural meanings, some of which came to operate as equivalents, while others exercised subversive effects. And while this process was governed by apparent and often violent divisions, it is the *political effects and enabled potentials* that are of interest to us: “Hellenismos” came to be increasingly dispersed in the social and political fabric, imparting the two-fold potential of (a) incorporating plural subject positions and (b) furnishing a terrain of novel political articulations.

This leads us to a clear conclusion: to the extent the proliferating dispersion of “Hellenismos” came to increasingly cut through social and political processes, to the extent that it became a privilege site upon which political battles converged, to the extent that it increasingly became the site of novel political articulations, it therefore came to operate as a privileged node through which hegemonic projects came to be constructed. Indeed, modern Greek history, can be interpreted as a sequence of altering hegemonic formations, all of which, in their effective execution, were heavily articulated in reference to the *Hellene ethnos*. We thus return to my original argument concerning the lens through which the historical significance of national movements should be read. The question is not *what*, i.e., language, religion, etc., underlies national movements’ success. The question is *how* national movements were and can be effectively articulated as aggregations of heterogeneous groups, and what political effects and potentials, such articulations engender. In this sense, we are introducing a contemporary relevance into

the question of national movements. No longer are national movements treated as relics from the past, but as events that can breathe life into future political imaginaries and hegemonic projects.

Our conclusions regarding the emergence of nations has taught us that the articulation of nations was successful to the extent that plural identities and “social topographies” came to be increasingly marked by the signifier of “the nation.” The aggregation of these plural elements concerned the establishment of metonymical planes of meaningful contiguity (e.g., between romantic nationalism and liberal capitalism) and processes of nominal circumscription (e.g., “Hellenismos”), the confluence of which led to certain totalizing effects. Perhaps the most politically significant operation that we explored concerned processes of popular aggregation. This process concerned the aggregation of a number of heterogeneous demands and subject positions under common umbrellas of representation (e.g., “the Hellene nation”), which were articulated in reference to an “enemy” (e.g., “the Ottoman Turk”). We saw how the sum total of these processes resulted in the increasing proliferation of the signifier of “the nation,” which came to operate as a proliferating site upon which processes of fusion and negation would come to converge. In this sense, we started probing into the logic of how hegemonic formations, that is, socio-political blocs that are constituted by a plurality of elements and subject positions, came to emerge. Continuing this line of inquiry, our task now consists of prodding deeper into the hegemonic logic, so as to explore, in greater detail, the operational dimensions of nationalist hegemony. We proceed by first addressing the so-called question of “modernity” so as to prepare the analytic path for a more detailed discussion about the hegemony of nations.

Chapter 10: Modernity, Technology, Indeterminacy

If the previous chapter was primarily focused on the study of the history of nations, the present chapter confronts that constitutive point of reference between the “before” and “after” of nations—that is, what is conventionally assumed to be the historical point of rupture, from which the nation form burgeons.

Despite the theoretical diversity found in the modernist literature on nationalism, there is one premise which circumscribes it. That is the presumption that nationalism and the nation constitute distinctively modern phenomena (Billig, 1995, p. 19; Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 191). The emergence of nations cannot, save some controversial cases, be traced earlier than the late eighteenth century (Connor, 1990; Giddens, 1985, pp. 119, 135; Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 79; Kohn, 1965, p. 9). This premise is largely unchallenged and widely accepted within our line of work, and for substantive reasons. The wide array of historical evidence that is available to us, following a number of in-depth historical studies of nations, attest to the modernity of nations (Breuilly, 1994; Hobsbawm, 2012; Kohn, 1965; Mann, 2010; Smith, 1986). The associated political implications, moreover, should not go unnoticed: by revealing the historical contingency of “the nation,” what is simultaneously challenged is its presumed monolithic and eternal character. No sound scholarly approach can, at this juncture, challenge the modernity of nations. What can be challenged, however, is the content of the category of “modernity.” And it is on this issue that an array of disagreements converge.

I have already mentioned that it is typically the case that modernist theories of nationalism rely on an underlying theory of modernity and social change. The general presumption is that the modernity of nations is not only a chronological fact but a *substantive* one as well. Modernity is understood in terms of objective historical developments that engendered novel forms of social interaction and organization, the nation being one of them. This belief, no doubt, is reflective of broader trends in sociological thinking, which tends to attribute the rise of modernity to a presumed underlying social determinants (e.g. Durkheim, 1984; Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1987; Marx, 1978c; Touraine, 2009; Weber, 1946). Modernity is, moreover, to be distinguished from its c, that is, tradition. These assumptions should be

contextualized. It is indeed the case that the modern theoretical canon—and especially sociology—has been organized as a field of knowledge by means of distinguishing between “modernity” and “tradition.” Both notions are principally understood in terms of fully-constituted objective milieus predicated on underlying social determinants. Modernist accounts of nationalism typically seek to identify these social determinants, which, in turn, become theoretical organizing principles. Let us consider the work of some prominent authors in our field. Benedict Anderson (2006), as an example, traces the emergence of nations to the advent of print-capitalism; for Gellner (1983), nationalism is born out of the imperatives of industrial culture; for Giddens (1985), the nation-state is effectuated through processes of space-time distancing; for Smith (1986), what is distinctively modern about the nation, is its constitutive modern political, economic and public culture, which “feeds” upon pre-existing ethnic kernels; for Nairn (1975), nationalism ensues out of the cleavages of uneven global capitalist economic development. In every single case, the “the nation” or “nationalism” is “traced back” to an entity that is thought to have preceded them, and operate independently of them. In other words, this entity is accorded causal and temporal primacy.

I have thus far directed my critique toward questions concerning plurality and heterogeneity, demonstrating, as it is, that modernist theories of nationalism have been unable to come to terms with how nations or national movements can emerge as total operations, in light of their constitutive plurality. In this sense, I have, albeit obliquely, demonstrated how the modernist presumptions that underlie these theories, result in theoretical impasses. In the present chapter, I want to engage the issue of the modernity of nations more explicitly. I should be clear from the outset. My aim is not to dispute the modernity of nations but to scrutinize the notion of modernity itself. In this sense, what I will be critiquing are the positivistic undertones that saturate this elusive notion.

My critique proceeds from an aporia that blooms from the certainties of the literature itself. For there are two general, but in my opinion highly incompatible premises that are widely accepted by modernist theorists of nations and nationalism. The first is that the consolidation of nation-states wiped out the earlier particularisms of Europe through processes of cultural homogenization (Anderson, 2006;

Brass, 1991, p. 20; Gellner, 1983, p. 57; Habermas, 1996b, pp. 128–130; Mann, 2010, p. 730; Smith, 1986, pp. 133–134). The second is that the emergence of nations was accompanied by the increasing politicization of culture (Brass, 1991, p. 20; Breuilly, 1994, p. 375; Gellner, 1983, pp. 93–97; Habermas, 1996b, pp. 128–130; Mann, 2010, pp. 730–735; Nairn, 1975; Smith, 1986, pp. 154–157).

“Homogenization” and “politicization,” as far as I am concerned, are incompatible notions. The former is characterized by cultural *singularity*, while the latter is characterized by cultural *plurality*. I maintain that these theoretically incompatible assertions stem from improper theorizations of modernity and the political. The conventional assumption is that modernity, understood in terms of a *particular determinant*, generates a new stage in history. This novel historical stage is, moreover, fashioned in accordance with this determinant’s identity. The presumed singularity of modernity is thus projected unto the new historical stage it supposedly engenders, thus homogenizing the social, according to its own character. What is excluded from such propositions is any possibility that “modernity” and its “effects” may be constitutively accompanied by a terrain of *indeterminacy*. Can a theoretical openness to this possibility help us better explain the homogenizing efforts and increasing politicization that ensued following the dislocating effects of modern times?

Conditions of Possibility and Social Indeterminacy

Let us begin this discussion by delineating the premises that were established in the previous two chapters. First and foremost, the social is constitutively characterized by a terrain of heterogeneity and plurality. To the extent that the social is inherently pluralistic, its unity cannot be attributed to any underlying literal principle. Thus, any process of aggregation is to be understood in terms of metonymical contiguity and nominal aggregation. Finally, the constitutive disruption of the fixity of the social is enabled by the field of overdetermination, which places limits on objectivity. Social elements are contaminated by the presence of other elements that prevent their fixity but also become its condition of

possibility. The partial fixity of identities and elements, which is also their *raison d'être*, gives being to a terrain of potential antagonisms—that constitutive point of negation that opens up the possibility for the articulating practice, which inheres to all political acts. In this sense, the political act is to be understood as that very instance whereby social relations and relations of power, by means of altered orderings of meaning, are instituted. Having carved this theoretical path, let us proceed in examining where it leads us in regards to the question of modernity.

In the modernist canon, modernity is understood in two principal ways. It is understood in terms of a singular cause, as in Gellner's (1983) notions of industrial imperatives (Chapter 3). Or, it is understood in terms of a structure of differential and interactive causes, that temporally preceded nations and nationalism, as in the case of Smith's "triple revolution" (Smith, 1986, pp. 131–133). In contradistinction to both approaches, modernity is here understood in terms of an *overdetermined cluster of family resemblances that manifests differentially according to their contextual application and execution* (Wittgenstein, 1967). An important set of implications that disrupt the modernists' narratives outpours from this proposition.

Firstly, any sort of events or processes that are thought to contribute to either the emergence of nationalism or its continuity across time should be understood as being co-constitutive. This means that not only do they operate in tandem but as overdetermined processes within discursive totalities, they comprise necessary components of each other. In this sense, no one "modern cause" can be identified as being principally responsible for either the emergence or continuity of nations—each element is understood as being another element's condition of possibility.

Secondly, to the extent that identified "modern" elements are thought to be the nation's condition of possibility, the nation or its constitutive elements, are, in turn, understood as being *their* condition of possibility. Let us consider a frequently encountered theme in the literature. It is often suggested that increasing state penetration into the everyday lives of subjects, gradually engendered national citizens (Giddens, 1985, pp. 210, 219; Habermas, 1996b, pp. 128–130; Mann, 2010, p. 730). Mann (2010), for example, suggests that:

The military and industrial capitalist phases of state expansion intensified both representative and national issues. The late eighteenth century fiscal and conscription consequences of increased militarism resulted in greater representative pressures but very different crystallizations on the national issue, ranging from the centralization attempted by Jacobin revolutionaries to the confederalism of most Austrian dissidents. Yet the later industrial capitalist phase intensified pressures toward both more representative and more national societies. “Naturalization” was especially effective because it was unconscious, unintended, interstitial, and so unopposed. It involved the emotions as well as instrumental reason, subtly changing conceptions of communities of attachment. (p. 731)

A naïve reading of this passage may suggest that state expansion, as a privileged historical cause, gave rise to pressures of representation while politicizing national issues. Obversely, one can assert that it was because there were *also* pressures of political representation, articulated as national issues, that the state was able to sustain its penetrative tendencies. To take the discussion a step further, one can, moreover, note that the causal variables identified by Mann were themselves made possible by a broader range of conditions. Firstly, military conscription was articulated within a total system of inter-state rivalries. Secondly, industrial capitalist expansion was propelled by the rising political prominence of the bourgeoisie as well as novel scientific and technological developments. Thirdly, pressures of representation were overdetermined by the proliferation of liberal discourses, which emphasized political equality through national citizenship. As a cluster of emergent social arrangements, the total sum of these conditions of possibilities, enabled the appearance of “the nation,” in its nascent form. Conversely, this nascent nation form, in its yet limited diffusion, became the condition of possibility for the state’s political ambitions.

The broader implications of this discussion should be clear. Our efforts here are propelling us toward a non-essentialized understanding of “modernity” itself—a notion whose presumed unity is

pervasively and un-problematically accepted by modernist theorists. By accepting the co-constitutive character of “modernity’s” elements, we accept that they are invariably adulterated and distorted by their historical context and conditions of possibility. And it is this realization that requires us to import Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblances when conducting comparative analyses, whether historical or contemporary. By family resemblances, we want to designate that the congruence between aggregated elements is characterized by a series of overlapping similarities—congruence is not attributed to one single underlying element. This means that when comparing instances of aggregation, e.g., “nations” or “modernity,” one may not be able to identify a single element that is common to all its instantiations. Even when comparing two instances that appear to be surprisingly similar and where common elements are found in both, one has to be analytically cautious. Those elements, precisely because they are overdetermined by the totality of their constitutive relations may only bear the *semblance* of “sameness,” as no two social spaces can be constructed identically. I believe that this realization, far from tempting us to discard the work of the modernists, renders their work more illuminating. Let us consider the following passage from Anderson (2006):

In much the same way, the independence movements in the Americas became, as soon as they were printed about, “concepts,” “models,” and indeed “blueprints” [...] Out of the American welter came these imagined realities: nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems, etc., and the liquidation of their conceptual opposites: dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, absolutisms, subjecthoods, inherited nobilities, serfdoms, ghettos, and so forth [...] Furthermore, the validity and generalizability of the blueprint were undoubtedly confirmed by the plurality of the independent states. In effect, by the second decade of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, a “model” of “the” independent national state was available for pirating [...] But precisely because it was by then a known model, it imposed certain “standards” from which too-marked deviations were impermissible. (p. 81)

A historical eye that is sensitive to historical contingency reads this passage with an added dose of caution. What Anderson is saying here, is not without merit. But what it does lack is that important qualifier that the present work has adamantly emphasized: these national “blueprints” can only be understood as family resemblances that were implemented according to specific conditions of possibility, which varied from context to context. Chatterjee (1993a), whose work deals specifically with anticolonial nationalisms, has critiqued Anderson on this very point, stating that Anderson’s argument cannot be reconciled “with the evidence on anticolonial nationalism” (p. 5). He maintains that “[t]he most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated by the modern West” (p. 5). Anderson’s above-noted assertion can thus only be regarded as a preliminary plane of examination upon which studies that are sensible to contextual specificity can be constructed.

A similar critique can be applied to the work of Smith. Smith maintains that nations are constructed on the basis of pre-existing ethnic kernels. His thorough historical analysis demonstrates how certain named ethnic, or ethnic elements, that persisted historically, consequently became a pool of memories, values and symbols that were utilized for the construction of national cultures. He is clear that “the relationship of modern nations to any ethnic core is problematic and uncertain” and that “not every modern nation can point back to an ethnic base” but he insists that “the origins of the nation” should be sought “in pre-modern ethnic ties” for three reasons (Smith, 1991, p. 41).

The first is that, historically, the first nations were, as we shall see, formed on the basis of pre-modern ethnic cores; and, being powerful and culturally influential, they provided models for subsequent cases of the formation of nations in many parts of the globe. The second reason is that the ethnic model of the nation became increasingly popular and widespread not only for the foregoing reason, but also because it sat so easily on the pre-modern “demotic” kind of community that had survived into the modern era in so many parts of the world. In other words the ethnic model was sociologically fertile. And third, even where a nation-to-be could boast no

ethnic antecedents of importance and where any ethnic ties were shadowy or fabricated, the need to forge out of whatever cultural components were available a coherent mythology and symbolism of a community of history and culture became everywhere paramount as a condition of national survival and unity. Without some ethnic lineage the nation-to-be could fall apart. (pp. 41-42)

What I find unsettling about Smith's approach is his tendency to essentialize ethnicity. Ethnicity for Smith becomes nations' *raison d'être*, being principally understood in terms of its substantive content: common myths of origin, values, sentiments, and symbols, and association with a territory. But as Baumann (1992) following Barths (1969) notes, ethnicity is solely contingent upon the maintenance of a drawn boundary that separates the ethnic group from "the others." In this sense, it is "the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1969, p. 15). In other words, "ethnicity" as such is devoid of substance. It is simply a category that designates the construction of "the people," which can assume a diversity of forms in the absence of a social determinant that unites the diversity of its instantiations. And while a comparative historical study on the basis of this category is not altogether illegitimate, one has to be cautious not to conceive of this category as a transcendental one, which represents the essence of communities whose historically differentiated cultures "would merely constitute empirical variations" (Laclau, 1990, p. 25). A socio-historical examination of ethnicity should be understood as "a history of the referent which constitutes an object which only has validity, for a number of comparative purposes, as part of a historian's discourse" (Laclau, 1990, p. 25).

The same statement could be applied to the category of "modernity." The category is certainly imbued with utility for a social scientific discourse and politics more broadly. But essentializing modernity can only lead to aporetic theoretical analyses or restrict political praxis. "Modernity" should at last be understood for what it is: a nominal category that attempts to capture a diversity of historical trends that manifest differently according to their context of application. What this realization compels us to confront is that these "trends" are accompanied by a constitutive terrain of dislocation—and this is

exactly what enables the diversity of their application. It is the non-fixity, i.e., dislocation, of the elements that enables them to be applied according to contextual considerations.

Discursive elements, whether “modern” or not, are invariably accompanied by a “constitutive outside,” that is, the presence of other elements, that prevents their full-constitution. This constitutive outside is, at the same time, their condition of possibility. To the extent that the co-contamination between elements constitutes the terrain of identity construction, we can assert that discursive elements are constitutively *dislocated and characterized by a terrain of indeterminacy, that is, by a discursive “excess” that eludes grounding*. The non-fixity of discursive elements, by virtue of their overdetermined character, is what enables possible alterations of meaning. And this is the ground upon which politics play out. The political act, here understood as the instituting of power relations vis-à-vis alterations/orderings of meaning, emerges within this terrain of indeterminacy. Our theoretical journey has led us to a very important juncture, where we are called upon to confront the question of the subject.

The Question of the Subject

Let me initiate this discussion in reference to my overarching argument about the ontology of the social: the social, far from being determined by any element that is external to the structure and therefore governed by an unadulterated purity, is the product of its overdetermined relations. Thus, by virtue of the structure’s dislocated character, a field of indeterminacy opens up. A discursive excess of floating signifiers that does not succumb to the structural determinacy of the discursive formation, is always in operation. But what exactly does it mean for a field to be indeterminate? The first answer to this question, elementary as it is, needs to be stated as a starting point: a field is indeterminate to the extent that it is not fully-determined by the rules—conceived in the broadest sense—of the structure. But the underlying implications are far more complex. A field of indeterminacy can only be made intelligible or experienced in reference to the determination of the structure (Laclau, 1990, p. 43). Strictly speaking, it cannot operate

externally, as nebulous no-man's land, as an "indeterminate whatever," nor completely subsume any "experience." In fact, the notion of "experience" or subjectivity is entirely incompatible with such a scenario, as a situation of pure indeterminacy would render itself unintelligible. Conversely, a completely determined situation would entail automated patterns of arrangements subsumed under the principle of repetition (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 134). In this fully-constituted situation, in the absence of an indeterminate terrain, the possibility of a decision—and therefore subjectivity, experience and action—would be entirely absent. What transpires from this discussion is that a field of indeterminacy is imbricated as part of the structure, though operating, in a sense, simultaneously "outside" of it. We are, again, invoking the limits of objectivity. Indeterminacy is that "distance" between structural determination and the limit of the structure.

Now, if identities themselves are immanent to discursive formations, it can only mean that the structuration of identities is itself constitutively impure, contingent and only partially fixed. The indeterminacy that characterizes discursive formations finds an expression in the constitution of identities. A very important consideration follows from this proposition. Any identity is, strictly speaking, a *failed* identity—one that is only partially determined and one that operates only as a partial modality of the structure (Laclau, 2005a, p. 57). A fascinating conclusion follows. Confronting the very limits of my fixity, that is, my beings' constitutive field of indeterminacy is tantamount to confronting a field of *choice and possibility*. We are arriving at a critical point in our argument. If, as an identity, I am confronted by a field of indeterminacy and therefore possibility, I am presented with two general possibilities. I can merely stand inert toward the possibilities that are presented to me, or I can make the *decision* to put those possibilities into play. This moment of "confrontation" between the determination of the structure and its constitutive indeterminacy (i.e., the possibility of the decision) is what Laclau calls *the moment of the subject* (Laclau, 2005a, p. 57). It is this constitutive disruption in the structure that allows the subject to emerge—imparting, as it is, the possibility of choice decision and therefore action. But this assertion is not without qualification.

“Choice” or “freedom,” in this context, should not be understood in the classical sense, as inhering to a self-determined subject afforded with absolute volitional capacities that exceed the limitations of the context. “There are inchoated possibilities which are going to be blocked, not because of any logical restriction, but as a result of the historical contexts in which the representative institutions operate” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 52). Indeed, subjectivity and experience, more generally, is furnished by norms—those very limits that enable structured possibilities. And let me repeat. To be a subject is to be *partially determined*. In the absence of partially-structured determinations, “subjectivity” would be fully-subsumed by indeterminacy (i.e., unintelligibility). The moment of decision and therefore of the subject, which confronts it within those indeterminate lacerations in the structure, does not entail a moment of absolute freedom, but a structured freedom. As Laclau (2005a) so aptly notes,

What I meant was that undecidability is a *structured* undecidability, and that what we are always confronted with is a partial deconstruction which makes the decision imperative. A situation of total undecidability would be one in which *any* decision would be valid just because it is *a* decision, but in that case we would not have structural undecidables but total absence of structure, and the decision would be made by the chooser in conditions of total omnipotence. (p. 59)

Two conclusions follow. The first is that freedom and structural determinacy inhere to one another. These two terms that have been classically opposed to each other are in actual fact each other’s conditions of possibility. For exactly the same reasons thus far delineated, power, and emancipation, and structure and agency, are to be understood as co-constitutive planes. The second is that the field of indeterminacy, which enables the moment of the subject—that is the possibility to make a decision—constitutes the very terrain of politics. It is within that indeterminate space that the subject is able to, by means of articulated constructions, alter social and therefore power relations. It is the omni-presence of structural dislocation and indeterminacy that constitutes the terrain of politics. In this sense, *the political operation can manifest at a plurality of possible sites*.

I began this chapter by noting how there is a general tendency in the literature to suggest that homogeneity and increasing politicization followed the consolidation of the nation-state. I have, moreover, noted how in my opinion, these two developments cannot be correlative. To subsume this statement under the current framework, we can state that homogenization entails the radical minimization of the field of indeterminacy, whereas the increased politicization of the social involves its very broadening. In this sense, the consolidation of the nation-state cannot be understood in terms of these two logically incompatible developments. It may be true that under very specific conditions of possibility, homogenization can be “approximated” through the generalized sedimentation of social practices. This, however, cannot be understood as a general characteristic of nations or nation-states.

This realization opens up new terrains for our upcoming explorations. For what we want to examine is precisely how, in light of the absence of homogeneity, in light of the absence of any general unifying principle, the nation can operate and be represented as a consolidated totality. Let us preliminarily say that this operation—whereby particular sets of social arrangements come to bind a plurality of social “sites” and subject positions and come to represent the totality of the social—is what is here understood as *hegemony—the form of politics through which the nation emerges*. The precise dimensions of the national hegemony will be delineated in the proceeding chapter. But for now, it is necessary to lay the theoretical groundwork that will adequately prepare us for that exposition.

Our task is to embark on a more detailed examination of the so-called modernity of the nation. It would be all too convenient to discard this notion altogether on the grounds that it is broadly subjected to essentialisms. It would, moreover, be naïve not to acknowledge the pace and scope of change and disruption that accompanies modern times, as well as the political significance of these developments. My argument is that novel forms of technology, such as automated machines and communication media, whose “productive” capacities exceed those of the corporeal subject, allow the subject to increase its articulated capacities. These technological possibilities thus afford the subject the capacity to either increase the rate of dislocation (i.e., the political) or the scope of structural determination (e.g., over wider territories). These two possibilities were historically executed as an ongoing dialectic. In this sense, the

social, while operating over wider territories, came to be increasingly politicized and subject to novel and constant introductions of dislocations. In this sense, the social came to be increasingly overdetermined, ambiguous, and pluralistic. This emergent terrain of ambiguity enabled the cross-penetration and co-contamination between identities. But the constitutive unevenness of the social entailed that one identity, more than any other, was able to overdetermine this field with a particular sets of narratives that came to operate through concrete social arrangements. In this sense, a hegemony was constructed through forms of representation that cut through the plurality of subject positions that came to be aggregated. Thus, the construction of a national hegemonic bloc operated through the field of overdetermination that was enabled by modern technological potentials.

Time-Space Distanciation and the Nation-State

I would like to begin this discussion by engaging the work of Anthony Giddens. As I will show, his theory of the nation-state can inform our inquiries in a number of respects, although not without some substantive modifications. Giddens' work is governed by certain persistently repeating themes and tendencies, all of which revolve around his clear-cut distinction between modernity and tradition. His theory of the nation-state and nationalism naturally conforms to this underlying logic: the nation-state, Giddens (1985) suggests, is "an expression of the dislocations of modern history" (p. 34). Modernity is characterized by certain "discontinuities," which separate it from traditional social orders (Giddens, 1991, p. 6). What Giddens (1991) is referring to here is the increased "pace of change," the increased "scope of change," and changes in "the nature of modern" institutions (the nation-state and nationalism, as an example, are distinctively modern forms of social organizations) (p. 6). Directly correlated with these developments is what Giddens (1991) calls time-space distanciation, which he defines as "the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space 'zoning' of social life" (pp. 16–17). What this means is that repetitive patterns of arrangement—what Giddens terms

“time”—is not determined by the immediate locale, but by institutional arrangements that extend beyond it (Giddens, 1991, pp. 18–19). The natural corollary of time-space distanciation is the “disembedding” of social relations, that is, their “lifting out [...] from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space (Giddens, 1991, p. 21). Finally, time-space distanciation is also facilitated by increasing institutional “reflexivity,” which refers to the perpetual monitoring and re-organization of social life “in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups” (Giddens, 1991, pp. 15–16).

Giddens’ argument thus revolves around a privileged theoretical axis, that being the separation of time from space. The question of key importance is precisely what enables the possibility for this separation. The first is the creation of *symbolic tokens*, defined as “media of interchange which can be ‘passed around’ without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any particular juncture” (Giddens, 1991, p. 22). The second is the development of *expert systems* defined as “systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today” (Giddens, 1991, p. 27). The effects of symbolic tokens and expert systems are similar in that they both enabled social relations to be removed from immediate contexts, because they provide guarantees of “expectations across distanciated time-space” (Giddens, 1991, p. 28).

The emergence of the modern nation-state is, for Giddens, closely associated with symbolic tokens that enable the storage, coding, and control of information. The proliferation of these types of symbolic tokens enable more effective coordination of people and objects across time and space (Giddens, 1985, pp. 44–45). Historically, this possibility is initially made possible by the invention of writing, affording the pre-modern state the capacity to extend the scope of its surveillance and the density of its authoritative resources, by storing information resources (Giddens, 1981, p. 5, 1985, pp. 44, 181). The decisive shift, however, toward the modern state form was made possible with the invention of printing:

So far as the state is concerned, the most important consequence of the easy and cheap availability of printed materials was an enlargement of the sphere of the 'political'. The growth of a 'public sphere' of state administration is inseparable from textually mediated organization [...] It is not primarily speech which is at issue, however important debating chambers might become. Rather it is the 'intertextuality' of the exchange of opinions and observations via texts that are 'freely available' — in Ricoeur's terms, distanced from their authors — that marks the decisive shift in the lurch towards a new form of state. [...] What printing made possible, and what it was increasingly used for during the phase of the consolidation of absolutism, was a very profound furtherance of the surveillance operations of the state. (Giddens, 1985, pp. 178–179)

We are gradually revealing the crux of the argument, for what we need to consider here is that the extension of the state's administrative power necessitates the *reflexive application* of stored information in the form of supervision that is *detached from tradition and local life* (Giddens, 1985, pp. 47, 210). This involves the displacement of modes of organization that were previously associated with traditional life. It is in this sense that printed writing and the reflexive application of stored information results in time-space distancing and the disembedding of social relations. And, of course, it is easy to see how the reflexive application of expert systems is intimately bound up with the very medium of their diffusion, that is, printed writing. As Giddens (1985) suggests,

Printing vastly expands not only the capabilities of reflexive monitoring of the state, but the distancing of communication from oral contexts. Not until the period of the emergence of the nation-state, however, do the potentialities of printing become fully recognized and utilized. The epoch at which the regularized collection of official statistics becomes established is the same as that in which a flurry of journals, gazettes, newspapers and pamphlets appear, reaching mass audiences. (1985, pp. 210–211)

The final and decisive steps toward the consolidation of the modern state's administrative power and the increase of the breadth of its "documentary activities" were enabled by the mechanization of transportation and "the severance of communication from transportation by the invention of electronic media" (Giddens, 1985, pp. 172–173). This is because electronic media enables the instant transference of information across wide territorial networks. To the extent that the transference of information can enable forms of control, the application of state power is rendered immediate. Time-space distancing and the disembedding of social relations are thus exacerbated as localities could be effectively controlled by "absent" power centres. It is in this sense that modernity and its corollary, the nation-state, are characterized as the dominance of "absence" over "presence." It is worth quoting the highlight of Giddens' (1985) argument:

My point is to emphasize the significance to the consolidation of the nation-state in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the separation of the communication of information from transportation. The initial leap forward in the administrative power generated by the nation-state was accomplished prior to the development of electronic communication. But modern societies have been "electronic societies" longer than we ordinarily imagine and 'information societies' since their inception. There is a fundamental sense, as I have argued, in which *all* states have been "information societies", since the generation of state power presumes reflexively monitored system reproduction, involving the regularized gathering, storage, and control of information applied to administrative ends. But in the nation-state, with its peculiarly high degree of administrative unity, this is brought to a much higher pitch than ever before nation-state. (1985, pp. 177–178)

I find Giddens' theory of the nation-state to be illuminating in a number of respects. Giddens' theory prods deeper into the *how* of state power. For what he is identifying here are historical developments that come to be necessary components of nation-state formation. What Giddens is emphasizing—that is

largely absent in modernist theories of the nation-state—is the possibilities of control that are enabled by technological advancements that involve mechanized transportation and instant communication. In doing so, he is able to answer the question of how, in modern times, larger territorial networks can come to be socially aggregated. I use the term socially here deliberately, much in contrast with conventional claims that nationalism entails political consolidation over wider territories. As I will show in forthcoming discussions, the regularized patterns of arrangement that are characteristic of national communities, are a product of sedimented social practices, whose originary political instantiation has been forgotten. It is the instantaneity of communication and the efficiency of mechanized transportation that enables social relations to “stretch” over wider territory. The historical significance of mechanical and automated activity, whether we are talking about the telegraph, the telephone, television, the railway etc., is something that is consistently underemphasized in the literature on nationalism. The importance of “modern technology” is typically overshadowed by cultural variables (think of Gellner’s “imperatives of industrial culture,” which pays minimal importance to the impact of industrial mechanization and automation, and communicational instantaneity). Even theorists that have emphasized the importance of communication media, tend to underemphasize the importance of the instantaneity of “automated” communication and how it relates or may alter the exercising of power. The work of Anderson (2006), as an example, comes to mind.

Having examined the merits of Giddens’ approach, let us proceed in examining exactly how nationalism fits into his theoretical framework. Nationalism, for Giddens, is not mere ideology but principally constitutes a psychological phenomenon with an inherent political dimension. He defines it as “symbols or beliefs which attribute a communality of experience to the members of a particular regional, ethnic or linguistic category”—which may or may not be convergent with the demarcation of a nation-state (Giddens, 1981, p. 13). It basically operates as a mechanism that compensates for the loss of ontological security that traditional morality once offered (Giddens, 1981, p. 13, 1985, pp. 196–197, 1994, p. 65). The disembedding processes associated with modernity, empty out the moral content of

everyday routines, rendering them casual without any logical connection with the past (Giddens, 1985, p. 218, 1994, pp. 70–71). As the author suggests,

In the contexts of the modern state, the routinized character of most day-to-day life is not grounded in the moral schemes of tradition. In such circumstances ontological security is tenuously founded psychologically, depending upon the enactment of “morally meaningless” routines [...] Where “moral meaning” has retreated to the margins of the private and the public, the communality supplied by national symbols (including in particular a common language, as perhaps the most potent carrier of communal experience) supplies one means of support for ontological security, particularly where there is a perceived threat from outside the state.

(Giddens, 1985, p. 218)

But why is it specifically nationalism that compensates for the loss of traditionalism? For Giddens, it is because nationalism is compatible with the administrative expansion and consolidation of the modern state (Giddens, 1985, p. 219). “Nationalism,” Giddens (1985) notes, “is the cultural sensibility of sovereignty, the concomitant of the co-ordination of administrative power within the bounded nation-state” (p. 219). This is precisely the reason why Giddens believes that modern states, as if by necessity, are nation-states—because communal unity cannot be achieved by administrative means alone, since the co-ordination of social life “presumes elements of cultural homogeneity” (p. 219). In this sense, the nation-state emerges both as an administrative and a “conceptual community,” which involves “the whole community as a knowledgeable citizenry” (Giddens, 1985, p. 219). For Giddens (1985), this is the reason why nationalism is inherently political, because it is comprised by cultural communal symbols and beliefs whose political counterpart is the modern state’s “administrative and territorially ordered unity” (p. 219). Giddens (1985) even goes as far to suggest that “all nationalist movements are political,” even if they are adulterated by symbols of other sorts, because “nationalism is inherently linked to the achievement of administrative autonomy of the modern form” (p. 220).

I believe that I would not be excessive in stating that Giddens considers nationalism to be the *necessary* counterpart of the modern state. Nor would it be an exaggeration to suggest that it is the consolidation of administrative power that effectuates the rise of nationalism, for the argument follows a clear temporal and causal sequence: the administrative expansion of the modern state disembeds social relations, displacing traditional modes of being; tradition thus loses its capacity to impart a sense of morality on everyday routines; ontological security is compromised; nationalism, being symbolically compatible with the administrative and territorially ordered unity of the modern state, emerges so as to fill the void that is left by the displacement of tradition. It is clear that the administrative expansion of the modern state is the *cause* and that nationalism is the *effect*, as well as the former's necessary corollary. The administrative expansion of the modern-state thus determines the rise of nationalism, while saturating the latter with its identity—it is nationalism that *has* to correspond to administrative and territorial unity. This becomes all the more apparent when Giddens (1985) acknowledges that the deployment of nationalism for mobilization purposes may result in “quite discrepant consequences for different sections or classes within that community,” and that nationalist symbols maybe be “deliberately fostered or manipulated by dominant groups to support their sectional interests,” but considered it to be “the least interesting and significant of the ideological ramifications of nationalism” (p. 220). Why should this be so? Because the “more deeply layered ideological implications” of nationalism are to be sought in the fact that it is generated by “the conditions involved in the reflexive monitoring of the modern state, as a surveillance apparatus” (Giddens, 1985, p. 220).

It is on this point that I find myself at odds with Giddens' argument. For what we are re-encountering here is a theory that affirms the contingency of nationalism, while at the same time subordinating it to the logic of a positivity. Nationalism is in essence made to conform to the logic of administrative state expansion as it is facilitated by technologies of time-space distanciation. The identity of the cause saturates the identity of the effect. Technologies of time-space distanciation determine the identity of the modern state, which emerges as a consolidated administrative, sovereign and bounded territorial locality. The modern state, saturates nationalism, which emerges as its cultural counterpart. But

to accept the contingency of interacting historical events is to accept that they are not governed by any necessary logical outcome. It is also to accept that the outcome is a product of articulated constructions that, while restrained by the historical context, are nonetheless subjected to a scope of *indeterminacy throughout the ongoing process of their construction*.

Giddens examines the modern-state as if it is a fully-constituted entity and then suggests that nationalism, again conceived as being fully-constituted is its compatible counterpart. But neither the modern state nor nationalism emerged as singularities at a single point in time. They are both ongoing sequential constructions effectuated over the course of the last two- to three-hundred years. It is easy to dispute Giddens' argument in light of this realization. Weber (1976), as an example, has shown us that the relationship between nationalist sentiments and the penetrative efforts of the state were governed by an apparent negativity that did not resolve into an equivalence, until, generally speaking, the early twentieth century. The relationship between the two, therefore, could not have been necessary but the product of *contingent political practices, which were enacted in those indeterminate cleavages of the social*. It was precisely due to political operations that *hegemonized the content of nationalism* that populations, over the course of time, came to embody nationalist ideals. Representation of "the state" and "the nation" came to be metonymically aggregated, to the extent that this "mirror effect" came to be hegemonized through the very production of national subjects. In this sense, there is nothing inherently compatible between state-penetration and nationalist ideology. It is, rather, their open-endedness—their indeterminacy—that allowed their metamorphosis and their consequent "aggregation." Giddens unwillingness to deal more thoroughly with the politics of nationalism is also made evident when he bypasses the question of whose ideas and interests, nationalism tends to mirror, preferring to focus on nationalism's supposed inherent compatibility with administrative expansion. In other words, the question of hegemony is bypassed, precisely because, for him, it is an underlying social logic that is guiding the course of historical events.

Moreover, what I find problematic about Giddens' theory is the presumption that communal unity is necessary. This is made evident when Giddens suggests that the state's unity "cannot remain purely administrative [...] because the very co-ordination of activities involved presumes elements of cultural

homogeneity” (Giddens, 1985, p. 219). It is interesting to note that what we are witnessing here are the very ideological underpinnings of nationalism penetrating the literature, namely, the assumption that the nation-state necessitates the convergence between “politics” and “culture.” Closely associated with this principle is the *assumption* that culture has to assume a homogenous form. This proposition we encounter in Smith (1986) and Gellner (1983) as well. To be fair, Giddens is more measured in his approach, as he talks about “elements of cultural homogeneity.” But the following question should be posed: to what extent can cultural elements be homogenous if, as we established earlier, meaning cannot be grounded in an underlying literality? Let me pose the following question as a prelude to upcoming discussions: is the nation-state culturally homogenous or *does it come to be represented as such*, and is not that very form of representation a successfully articulated hegemony?

While Giddens’ work is laudable in its own right, it nonetheless operates within the aporetic limits of the modernist narrative. In his work we encounter all the issues that I have identified at the beginning of the chapter: the incompatibility between the supposed homogeneity of the nation and its pronounced political dimension; a theory of modernity that is predominantly based on an identified privileged historical cause that is thought to fashion a novel stage in history in accordance with its own identity; the inability to properly theorize the dislocation of the social and to properly connect it to a theory of politics; the total absence of a theory that can illuminate how a nationalist hegemony, through which the nation-state can be represented as a unified whole, can be stitched together.

I believe that many of these issues stem from Giddens’ incorrect theorization of the political. I cite, as evidence, Giddens (1985) consistent equating of “the state” with “politics” (pp. 178–179, 211–212). Let me reiterate the crux of my argument: the political does not refer to a determinate social domain (i.e., the state) but to articulated practices that result in the alternation of meaning and therefore the ordering of social (and power) relations. The political germinates in the field of indeterminacy. This dimension of the political is what is grossly undertheorized in Giddens.

As a reminder, Giddens’ (1991) argument is structured around the relationship between time and space. The former is broadly defined as repetition, while the latter is defined either in terms of “place [...]

which refers to the physical settings of social activity as situated geographically” or as a representation of place (p. 18). He thus imparts an image of the social that is subsumed by recursive practices (see Giddens, 1984), even though he does suggest that

All forms of rule have their ‘openings’ that can be utilized by those in subordinate positions to influence the activities of those who hold power over them. One consequence of this is that technologies of power — in other words, formalized procedures of rule — rarely if ever work with the ‘fixity’ which on the face of things they might seem to possess. The more a social system is one in which the control exercised by superordinates depends upon a considerable scope of power over subordinates, the more shifting and potentially volatile its organization is likely to be. (Giddens, 1985, p. 11)

Two things should be noted. Firstly, while Giddens, in this passage, affirms the indeterminacy of the social, he does not comprehensively theorize it. Exactly how and why do all forms of rule have their “openings” and how do these “openings” enable novel forms of action? Secondly, there is a remarkable incompatibility between the above statement and Giddens’ theory of the nation-state. If the nation-state is the exemplar form of a “power container” (i.e., proliferated “forms of rule”) as Giddens surely suggests, it should also, according to his own theoretical logic, be characterized by an increasing scope of “openings that can be utilized by those in subordinate positions,” i.e., indeterminacy. This flies in the face of any suggestion that the nation-state is culturally homogenous.

I suggest that this volatility that increasing social control opens up, is none other than the broadening of the field of indeterminacy. It results from an increase in the *rate of dislocation*, which is a product of constant articulated power effects. Can we, in light of this realization, introduce some modifications into Giddens’ theory, so as to deploy it more effectively in our efforts to understand the political dimensions of nationalism? If the nation-state and nationalism is thought to be an effect of the dislocation of modernity, it then has to be conceived as germinating within that very terrain of dislocation,

which cannot, by definition, be conceived in terms of determinate or necessary effects. To say that nationalism is historically contingent is precisely to state that it emerges as an articulated construction in the very indeterminate cleavages of the social. To the extent that we do not acknowledge its constitutive indeterminacy, it becomes a mere outcome of an *a priori* historical logic. And this is precisely why the question of hegemony is underemphasized in his work. It is not necessary for him to explain the pluralistic political terrain through which the nation-state emerges as a totality, precisely because the emergence of nationalism is thought to aprioristically conform to the logic of administrative expansion.

In the proceeding section, I will take a short but necessary detour, so as to examine Laclau's theory of time and space. Laclau's ideas will help us better theorize the relationship between power and indeterminacy. This discussion will provide us with the necessary tools to properly theorize the relationship between technology and the political, in modern times, by radicalizing Giddens' notion of time-space distanciation. As I will suggest, *modern technology increases the articulatory potential of the subject through discursive interlinkages*. This affords the potential of increasing the rate of dislocation, thus resulting in the broadening of the field of overdetermination. Consequently, identities become more overdetermined, more ambiguous, and are thus more vulnerable to processes of political "infiltration," i.e., hegemonic articulations. This field of ambiguity and indeterminacy that the technological potential opens up, is the terrain through which a nation-state hegemony is constructed.

Time, Space and Indeterminacy

Let us begin by distinguishing the authors' perspectives. For Giddens, time is conceived in terms of repetition, while for Laclau, repetition entails spatialization. Why is this so? Let us consider the example of physical space as a starting point. A physical object is spatialized to the extent that it appears to us in stable form, thus rendering it intelligible. An object is not an amalgamation of molecules floating around in random. They are governed by a propertied "togetherness" that follows the principle of a structure—

that is, repetition. Its molecules will aggregate together in a repetitive fashion in the same way. A table is a table because it does not turn into a chair, or a flower, or disintegrate in thin air, from one moment to the next. The principle of repetition, albeit never absolute, is thus what governs space in the physical sense. But we should also note that, to the extent that an object is made intelligible, its physicality merely constitutes a differential position within a symbolic system of signification, through which its identity emerges. This means that the intelligibility of an object *also presupposes a stable system of signification*. And if, as established earlier, the identity of the object is established in terms of its relation to all other elements in a system of signification, it then follows that the signification of an object requires the synchronic succession of each of its co-constitutive elements. Thus,

Symbolization means that the total succession is present in each of its moments. This synchronicity of the successive means that the succession is in fact a *total structure*, a space for symbolic representation and constitution. The spatialization of the event's temporality takes place through repetition, through the reduction of its variation to an invariable nucleus which is an internal moment of a pre-given structure. And note that when we refer to space, we do not do so in a metaphorical sense, out of analogy with physical space. There is no metaphor here. Any repetition that is governed by a structural law of succession is space. (Laclau, 1990, p. 41)

The law of spatialization applies to the social in the same way that it does to the physical world (both, in fact, operate as co-constitutive terrains within discursive totalities). To the extent that social processes are governed by repetition, i.e., structure, we can speak of space. In this sense, Laclau's concept of "space" overlaps with Giddens' notion of "time." But as a reminder, what Giddens is not able to effectively explain is how social agents can disrupt structured forms of action. Indeed, we can very well pose the question of whether one can emerge as a conscious subject if one's activity was governed by an absolute principle of repetition. In that case, one would merely amount to an automaton. Subjectivity, as established, emerges within an undecidable and indeterminate terrain where the subject is confronted with

the possibility of a decision. This necessitates, by ontological fiat, the very disruption of the principle of repetition, structure and objectivity. This is to state, in a different form, what I have been consistently emphasizing throughout the second part of the dissertation: that the objectivity (i.e., absolute repetition) of the social is constitutively disrupted by a plane of indeterminacy and dislocation, by virtue of the social's overdetermination. Signifiers, which are constitutively polysemic and therefore "float" in excess of their corresponding signifieds, allow the subject to articulatively "connect" them with other signifieds. This means that if a temporal dimension, *in the excess of repetitive conduct*, is to be "experienced," synchronicity has to be constitutively disrupted. Thus, "dislocation is the very form of temporality" (Laclau, 1990, p. 41). And this is precisely why dislocation is the moment of the subject, as noted in the discussion earlier. *Dislocation (time) is the very terrain through which the subject emerges*, where it is confronted with a terrain of indeterminacy and thus the possibility of decision. "Time" and "subjectivity" are thus two sides of the same coin. Lastly, "time" and "the political," are co-extensive, for as noted earlier, the political act emerges within those very cleavages of social indeterminacy—that moment where spatialization has failed and where a dimension of possible articulated constructions has opened up.

This discussion allows us to situate Giddens' theory of modernity in a new light. As a reminder, for Giddens, time-space distanciation entails that recursive social arrangements are not determined by the immediate locale, but by institutional arrangements that extend beyond it. To the extent that we can speak of "time-space distanciation," what is necessitated is the very disruption of repetitive conduct. Repetitive conduct, or synchronicity, by definition, entails delimited spatial boundaries, whether in the physical or social sense. If my activity is governed by an absolute principle of repetition, it would only operate within determinate spatial limits. Thus, to speak of a "distanciation," in the sense that Giddens uses it, is to suggest that, at the very least, an originary moment of disruption subjects "space" (structure) to "time" (dislocation).

Let us develop this argument. The example of institutionalized mechanized transportation can serve as a starting point. Let us imagine that an administrative state constructs a railway network. This initial event is an event precisely because it emerges as a possibility within the field of indeterminacy. It

thus emerges out of a temporal dimension that enables its articulated construction as a novel set of arrangements. But the instituting of this novel set of arrangements will potentially disrupt the spatiality of the social, as it potentially introduces a number of dislocating effects into the communities it penetrates: farmers can now use the railway to sell their produce to the nearest town; a village shoemaker may be driven out of business if cheap factory-made shoes are introduced into his community by commercial trains etc. Thus, a social space that was already governed by a terrain of indeterminacy, which enabled the possibility of building the railway, is subjected to the introduction of additional dislocating effects after the railway is built.

Now, there are two general possibilities that may ensue. The railway, as a locus of novel potentials may itself be reduced to space, in the Laclaudian sense, if it is subsumed under the principle of repetition. The rational ordering of train schedules by the state, is one such example. Conversely, the railway, as a locus of novel possibilities, may be utilized in a fashion that results in further dislocating effects. It may, as an example, be utilized by powerful capitalists who may, by flexing their economic muscles, destroy the economic viability of village communities that were once economically self-sustained (see Weber, 1976, pp. 215–216). This could result in migration waves from the countryside to the city, something which could introduce further dislocating effects into both the city and rural communities (see Weber, 1976, p. 216). A chain of dislocation is thus potentially enabled.

What I am describing here is technology's two-fold potential: it can be deployed as a means of social control, i.e., spatialization, or as disruption to extant social processes, i.e., temporality, and most importantly, the site of novel political antagonisms. In this sense, there is nothing determinate about how technological means are used and they should, rather, be conceived as sites of either possible political articulations (time) or sedimented social practices (space). Giddens' argument that modern technology engenders nationalism and saturates the latter with its identity is therefore rejected. His theory of power, much in line with general sociological convention, sees power as a unidirectional process whereby one agent imposes its will unto another. This is why Giddens sees the early phase of modernity as a singular process whereby the modern state subsumes the social through the former's expansion. But as the above

example shows, the attempted institutionalization of social relations (i.e., schedules routes) vis-à-vis novel forms of technology (i.e., the railway), results in unintended consequences and a series of additional dislocations. The dislocations associated with urbanization, as an example, and the varied antagonisms that are associated with them, were not state intentions. The social instability and possible antagonism that very often accompany rapid urbanization may, in fact, result in forms of resistance that challenge state power. The spatialization of social relations (e.g., the construction of railways) therefore necessarily results in new dislocations and potential antagonisms, all of which may result in the alteration of political identities and the terms of political engagement (Laclau, 1990). The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is clear: any process of spatialization is associated with the generation of new indeterminate terrains that enable novel political possibilities (Laclau, 1990, pp. 9–11).

In this sense, power cannot be conceived as a unidirectional process whereby one agent imposes its will unto another. Any process of imposition may enable a range of new political possibilities that may result in the former's (partial) subversion. The proliferation of the provision of democratic and social rights is one such example. It is a reflection of how novel political demands were enabled by a plurality of dislocating effects, following increasing state penetration. The “end” result for many European states was the alteration of their very identity, which had to succumb to democratic demands and thus become more democratic in character. Thus, even the identity of the prime-most “powercontainer,” in Giddens terms—the state—is an ongoing construction relative to pragmatic political challenges. This cautions us against attributing a determinate essence to the state, as if it was governed by an essential content that is not subjected to historical contingency. Strictly speaking, the historical unity of “the state” is solely nominal, while its content should be understood as shifting and related planes of family resemblances that are, by necessity, contingent upon the historical context.

This conclusion further cautions us against the frequently made claim that nationalism or nation-state consolidation entails, broadly speaking, the homogenization of populations vis-à-vis state regulation. I should articulate my position on the subject matter clearly at this point. It is my conviction that any state success in homogenizing its populations necessarily result in the introduction of dislocations that may

potentially subvert its homogenizing efforts in other domains. As very general empirical evidence, I cite Europe's perpetual social and political turmoil following the onslaught of modernization: internal cleavages, the proliferation of political struggles, civil and inter-state wars, and so on and so forth. These realities are, among other things, a reflection of the state's *failure* to homogenize, and the broadening of the political. This does not mean, however, that the state does not exercise a form of control and even dominance over its territorial and social jurisdiction. Our conclusions do not lead us to a naïve theory that sees power as being completely diffuse, in the absence of nodes upon which power concentrates. They, rather, leads us to reconsider the very logic through which a "powercontainer"—or to use our language, a hegemonic formation—is constructed. In modern times, the possibility of homogeneity is disrupted with the introduction of forms of technology that increase the rate of dislocation. In the context of this volatile and ever-shifting social environment, a community is totalized not through homogenizing practices, but *through the proliferation of symbolic nodes that effectively represent difference as equivalent*. Metaphor is modernity's hidden alibi. This is what will be thoroughly explained in the following chapter. For now, it is necessary to continue constructing the necessary theoretical path that will lead us there.

The Rate of Dislocation

Despite the insights reached in the preceding discussion, I believe it would be unsatisfactory to leave the discussion as is. For the question still remains: is there something novel about the forms of modern technology that Giddens is identifying, and if so, how do they relate to nation-state formation? I believe that Giddens is correct in emphasizing the role that the instantaneity of modern communication and the role that mechanized transportation plays in nation-state formation, assuming these dimensions are theorized in the absence of any underlying essentialisms. I should therefore caution the reader that I have thus far used terms such as "modern technology" for heuristic purposes and that do not consider any form of "technology" to be guided by an essence that results in any sort of determinate social effects. In fact, if

there is one thing that can be deduced from the discussion thus far, it is that the forms of technology that Giddens is identifying *necessarily result in indeterminate possibilities*. This is precisely what my argument is and what differentiates my approach from that of Giddens. Any form of “modern technology” is conceived as a site upon which either novel political articulations or sedimented social practices converge. There is no essence to communication media or to automated machinery of any sort. In this sense, nationalism could not have been the necessary cultural derivative of an underlying process of state-power consolidation vis-à-vis modern technology but rather a historical project of ongoing hegemonic construction.

At this point, *we arrive at a most-crucial crossroad in our argument*, being compelled to answer a question that has been hovering over us: does the above critique suggest that the modern forms of technology that Giddens is identifying are on equal par with the forms of technology that preceded them? Is there something distinctively novel about these modern forms of technology? If so, how and why do they come to constitute the nation-state’s conditions of possibility? Let me begin the discussion by clearly stating that there is nothing distinctive, in the strict sense of the term, about “modern technology,” as such, and that clearly separates it from “pre-modern” forms of technology. If one thing should be clear by now, it is that dichotomous divisions of these sort, are epistemologically illegitimate. I should, moreover, state that the very deployment of the term technology implicitly compels us to substantiate it in terms of an essentialized definition. The pitfalls of this approach have already been identified: this would subsume a diversity of human constructs and practices under the singular category of “technology” and its diverse moments would be regarded as mere empirical variations of an underlying essence. How are we, then, to conceive of the impact of modern technology?

Let me begin this discussion by considering the impact of what are typically thought to be “early forms of modern technology.” Weber (1976), as an example, has chronicled, among other things, how “the presence of viable and accessible roads and rails” radically changed people’s lives (p. 217). “It opened possibilities sometimes sighed for but never within reach. The turning wheels on road and railway, even wheelbarrows, meant vastly greater carrying power, more movement and faster movement,

more productivity and more resources, more choice or at least more freedom to choose” (E. Weber, 1976, p. 217). What Weber is identifying here concerns, let us say preliminarily, a “quantitative potential.” The road, the railway and the wheelbarrow, all enable a degree of increased “empirical expedience.” In a certain sense, *they “free” the human body from its constitutive limitations*. As a corporeal subject, my activity is delimited by the productive capacities of my body. The technological medium, however, enlarges the scope of my “productive output” by becoming co-articulated with my corporeal capacities. It seems to me that this is one of the most substantive dimensions of the technological medium. If we were to subsume this statement under our theoretical framework, we could say that technology enables us to increase the *scope* of synchronic social practices (space) or the *rate* of political articulations (time). This remark, however, is not without qualification.

To increase the scope of synchronic activity simply amounts to the possibility of broadening discursive formations. The telegraph can connect, in discourse, the sender and the receiver, as well as the material fabric that is involved in the transference of the message (e.g., electricity, wires, paper, etc.). All elements constitute differential positions in a newly established discursive channel. This is also true of the symbolic dimensions that invariably accompany this process. The same “formula” holds for a number of other forms of technology. The road, the railway and the wheelbarrow, mentioned above, all yield the same possible effect: the capacity to enlarge discursive formations with the inclusion of additional material and symbolic elements. In this sense, what is typically considered to be “modern technology” differs only in degree and not in substance from “pre-modern technology.” The key question now is what the political effects of this unleashed potential are.

The first is the possibility of inter-territorial connectivity. The telegraph, as an example, allows me to engage in discourse with an “absent” other, more expediently than the written letter does. In this sense, a discursive channel can potentially be spatialized, in the Laclaudian sense, over a wider territory. This development follows the “formula” described above. The discursive formation enlarges, as it can now incorporate additional material (e.g., territory) and symbolic elements. What I am describing here is much in line with Giddens’s notion of “time-space distancing.” We should, however, note that nothing

technically “speeds up” if a process of inter-territorial connectivity is *solely* governed by the principle of repetition. Thus, what is very often identified as the “compression of time and space,” or “time-space distanciation” should be understood in terms of social interconnectivity over wider territories. One should further note that there is nothing politically significant about any process that is spatialized over wider territory. That process merely amounts to a sedimented social fact. The political dimension of any process of discursive enlargement (e.g., inter-spatial connectivity) is revealed when considering its dislocating dimensions.

We have already established that temporality (i.e., dislocation) invariably accompanies any process of spatialization. Any process of spatialization involves the aggregation of elements within new relational configurations. This alters the overdetermination of the identities, thus enabling new potential terrains of antagonisms to emerge. Let us consider some examples. A train connecting the city to the countryside enables the efficient movement of populations. This may potentially result in movements of populations from the countryside to the city. It could, moreover, potentially result in novel political conflicts, on a number of levels, between “urbanites” and “villagers.” The “villagers,” as an example, may be subjected to forms of discrimination that may result in an array of disenfranchisements e.g., income, housing, occupational discrimination, etc. As a response, the “villagers” may respond with forms of resistance or violence or make attempts to assimilate in the dominant urban culture. Both paths will necessarily result in the alterations of the social fabric. Forms of resistance or violence may elicit similar responses from the dominant urbanites while assimilation may result in the gradual alteration of the urbanite culture, since that process will invariably entail the (unintended) incorporation of “villager elements” into the dominant culture.

The chain of dislocation that I delineated was enabled by the intrusion of automated forms of technology, i.e., the train, into the countryside. The dislocating capacities of such forms of technology is of particular interest to my argument. Automated forms of technology far exceed the productive capacities of the corporeal subject and, therefore, allow the subject to potentially increase the rate of dislocation or the scope of spatialization, to a larger extent. The “originary” moment of this possibility

presents itself when the machine increases the terrain of its constitutive material relations. In order for the train to move from point “A” to point “B” it has to engage in discourse with a set of material relations (e.g., coal, steam, axons, wheels, rail track) that enable its movement. But since matter is necessarily imbricated in any discursive formation, an increase in its appropriation and processing may enlarge the possibilities of it being co-articulated with other discursive content that may result in a series of dislocating effects. The steam engine, as an example, came to constitute a medium through which multiple “disturbances” were introduced in the discursive structure of 19th century England, such as (semi)automated industrial production, mass transportation, greater efficiency in warfare, etc. These novel potentials could subsequently be co-articulated with a series of other transformative social arrangements, such as social mobility, the capitalist relations of production, scientific rationality, colonial expansion, etc. This is not to suggest that such changes are determined by automated mechanization, but that such changes could not have occurred in the same scope and at the same rate, in the machine’s absence. Automated technology, in the broad sense of the term, therefore comes to constitute a unique type of nodal point: by increasing the breadth of its constitutive material relations, it concomitantly allows the possibility of increasing the rate of dislocation (time), as well as the scope of spatialization. It thus comes to constitute a nodal point of considerable power potential and one that is historically utilized in this capacity. This is precisely the reason why automated technologies become nodal points par excellence in modern times. They become sites of of multiple crisscrossed political antagonisms as well as sedimented social arrangements.

The same could be said about communication media. As objects that can “embody” a discursive articulation, which can be subsequently exposed to and encountered by a number of individuals, communication media may broaden the field and possibilities of spatialization or dislocation. My articulating capacities as a corporeal subject are delimited by my sensuous surroundings and by the productive capacities of my body. Communication media broaden the breadth of my articulating “performance” by potentially exposing my ideas to a broader “audience.” Communication media thus impart the possibility of broadening the rate of articulatory practices, as well as broadening discursive

formations through the construction of novel discursive channels of communication. We should note, however, that the articulating capabilities that are “embodied” in communication media are contingent upon capabilities in “empirical expedience.” In this sense, the dislocating potential that the combination of “automation” and “communication media” imparts, is of particular interest to us. A letter that is transferred on a mule bears much less potential in both discursive integration and political articulation, compared to the telegraph. Thus, what is analytically significant about communication media is how they are co-articulated with elements that increase expediency in communication. As an example, mechanized transportation (e.g., the train) can increase the rate at which communication media can be circulated. Conversely, communication media can be used to increase the efficiency of the railway, for example, through the administrative-bureaucratic institutionalization of scheduled train routes. What increases is either the scope of synchronic activity or the rate of dislocation, depending on how these forms of technology are utilized. The manner by which they are employed is strictly an outcome of political acts that germinate within the field of indeterminacy that these technologies “open up.”

This discussion leads us to a clear conclusion concerning the temporality of modernity. Time “speeds up” to the extent that the rate of dislocation increases through the disruption of synchronic activities. This is a potential that has been unleashed by specific historical conditions of possibility, many of which are conventionally accorded the name of “modern technology.” For our purposes, “modern technology” concerns, broadly speaking, articulated constructions that, by increasing “empirical expediency,” enable the potential of enlarging discursive formations or the scope of social indeterminacy. “Efficiency,” in all its forms, is what interests us here, irrespective of either the material or symbolic constitution of the elements at play. The autonomous machine, science, rationalized bureaucracy, the rationalization of time, automated communication media, etc., all potentially enable the same possibility: they increase the scope of synchronic activity, as well as the rate of dislocation.

Technological media therefore come to occupy a unique ontological status. According to Laclau, the moment of the subject, where it confronts the very possibility of choice and, therefore, articulation, emerges in that indeterminate discursive terrain that has not been fully constituted (Laclau, 2005a, p. 57).

We can think of technology as articulated constructions that, by becoming co-articulated with the articulation process, allow for the broadening of the spectrum of indeterminacy or the scope of sedimented social practices. In this sense, technology can be understood as *discursive interlinkages that allow the subject to either increase the rate of dislocation or the scope of synchronic activity*. There is, if I may say, a chimeric relationship between the subject and technology. If the moment of the subject materializes within that indeterminate space between the determinations of the structure and its constitutive dislocation, then the technological moment operates between that nebulous distance between the constitutive limitations of the corporeal subject and the (actualized) potentials of discursive formations.

An additional theoretical consideration should be added. If “technology” is the distance between corporeal limitations and (actualized) potentials, then what precisely determines whether technological use tends toward spatialization or temporality? I am unequivocal in that this depends *entirely* on the historical conditions of possibility that overdetermine technological use. This holds, regardless of the fact that any process that institutes synchronic activities vis-à-vis technology is accompanied by an originary moment of dislocation and unleashed potential. In contextualizing this discussion historically, a clear conclusion can be deduced: in modern times, “modern technologies” are articulated in the context of cultural arrangements that overdetermine the latter with “efficiency” or “expediency.” To the extent that these efforts are successful, the potentials enabled by technology increase in scope and in degree. For this reason, I am compelled to emphasize the dislocating dimension of modern times, which should not be understood as an automatic outcome of technology, but as a tendency that is enabled by the forces that overdetermine technology, e.g., capitalism, militarism, inter-state competition, institutionalized scientific innovation, etc. Chatterjee (1993a), as an example, has demonstrated how the introduction of novel technological potentials in India did not replace traditional forms of organization, such as the caste system (p. 17). Rather, novel technological potentials came to operate in tandem with the caste system (overdetermination).

These considerations allow us to situate the so-called modernity of nationalism, which is an object of extensive interest in the literature, in a new light. All modernist theorists of nationalism attribute the rise of nationalism to “modernity,” “modern technology,” and “social change,” all of them ambiguous and contested signifiers, floating, so effective in their vagueness! And yet for too long we have been fooled by the “explanatory” powers of these terms, which are invariably understood positivistically: as having a determinate content. For Giddens, it is administrative integration over large territorial units; for Gellner, it is the imperatives of industrial production that require standardized communication; for Anderson, it is the death of linguistic diversity and the invention of the printing press, and so on. In all cases, these positivities are thought to have a “substance” and a *determinate effect* on the social. In contradistinction, the present project sees modern technology as articulated constructions that enable novel “quantitative” potentials, whether spatial or temporal. But because of specific historical conditions of possibility, this potential tends toward dislocation and indeterminacy.

As we shall see, this indeterminate space that opens up is coeval with the hegemonic form of politics, through which nationalism, as a contingent articulation of “family resemblances,” is hegemonized. I should, as prelude to the next discussion, note that the paradoxical character of technology mirrors that of hegemony. On the one hand, technology becomes a point of convergence for multiple identities and practices and thus comes to constitute a nodal point that fixes the chain of signification. In doing so, it affords the social a form of stability. But this site of stability is also the site through which dislocation and, therefore, instability, proliferates. This shifting dialectic—the interplay between spatialization and time, between stability and instability, between synchronicity and dislocation—constitutes the terrain through which the hegemonic form of politics, which gives being to the nation, emerges.

Technology and Hegemony

There is yet one more question that needs to be answered that will help us better situate nationalism historically and better understand its relationship with modernity. As a reminder, the present discussion was prompted by a presumption that has dominated our discipline: that the consolidation of the nation-state entailed the increasing politicization and homogenization of populations. In light of the insights reached in the present chapter, it is paramount to modify this assertion. As far as our theoretical framework is concerned, the notion of “homogeneity,” in the strict sense of the term is entirely illegitimate, as it would virtually entail the elimination of all social difference. “Homogeneity” can therefore *only* be conceived in terms of social relations that are metonymically aggregated, where the terrain of aggregation is characterized by a relatively high degree of contiguity. The technological potential can be utilized in the construction of this terrain of contiguity to the extent that historical conditions of possibility afford this possibility. Technology will be used for spatialization purposes to the extent that the total configuration of the discursive structure is conducive to this possibility. The institutionalization of this possibility is thus only actualized in specific historical contexts. If I could name some “extremely” successful spatialization projects, I would point to the obvious examples of Nazi Germany and present-day North Korea.

The second thing to note is that politicization (temporality) and “homogenization” (spatialization) run on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum we encounter a relatively closed system of differences and of sedimented social practices that are relatively repetitive in character. At the other end of the spectrum we encounter an anomic situation where indeterminacy and therefore possibility reign. Now, we established that in modern times, technological use has tended toward indeterminacy. We are thus faced with the task of having to answer the question of how, in light of the constitutively dislocated and, therefore, *pluralistic and heterogeneous* character of the social, elements can be aggregated into total communities, i.e., nation-states. I am in agreement with Stuart Hall (1996) that,

Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a *discursive device* which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and “unified” only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power. Yet – as in the fantasies of the “whole” self of which Lacanian psychoanalysis speaks – national identities continue to be represented as *unified*. (p. 617; original emphasis)

What Hall is identifying here is a particular socio-political relation *whereby difference is represented as equivalence*. The equivalential chain that connects heterogeneous subject positions overcomes and subverts their differences. The relation between “Christian” and “Muslim” subjects in the Ottoman Empire, as noted earlier, were characterized by dimensions of difference, by virtue of the fact that each millet was “attached” to different privileges and obligations. Yet, a symbolic equivalence connected them as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Now the key question here is whether equivalence or difference dominated this relation, or better yet, to what extent each saturated the relation. To the extent that difference dominated this relation, the hegemonic dimension of the political can only be understood as being limited. Why is this so? Hegemony entails that a particular identity contaminates the content of other identities with its ideas and interests. The hegemonic identity, through this process of infiltration, comes to represent the communal totality. In the present example, a hegemonic relation could only be identified if a subjugated identity, i.e., “Christian,” identified predominantly as Ottoman.

We can therefore distinguish between two forms of politics, which should again be conceived as running on a continuum. Laclau and Mouffe identify a pre-hegemonic form of politics that is characterized by political antagonisms that are based on the demarcation of clearly identifiable empirical frontiers (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 138, 151). In such instances, the discursive “space” that is shared between the two identities is minimal. A political “merger” in the style of a hegemonic bloc whereby one identity, its narratives and particular set of institutional arrangements, come to represent the totality of the community, is therefore impossible. In the absence of a shared discursive “space,” the political moment concerns a frontal confrontation between identities whereby one political camp overpowers the other. In

contrast, a shared discursive space affords identities the possibility of contaminating one another with “their” ideas, narratives, and institutional arrangements. A hegemonic political relation entails a particular identity contaminating, more than any other, the social fabric, and therefore other identities, with a particular set of ideas and institutional arrangements. It therefore requires a shared discursive terrain. “Shared,” here in keeping with our theoretical premises, should be understood in terms of meaningful planes of communication or aggregation that are metonymically contiguous. Ambiguity in meaning is, thus, the necessary ingredient in this relation. The broadening of the terrain of ambiguity, only becomes possible with the “transition towards a new situation, characterized by the essential instability of political space, in which the very identity of the forces in struggle is submitted to constant shifts” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 151). These constantly articulated shifts result in the pluralization of the social, since identities, potentially become “the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 138) . This is why the authors are unequivocal that from a theoretical standpoint, “it is necessary to start from a plurality of political and social spaces which do not refer to any ultimate Unitarian basis” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 140). What, then, accounts for the possibility of the proliferation of plurality and the ambiguity of political identities?

Once again, the authors are clear that “the proliferation of these political spaces, and the complexity and difficulty of their articulation, are a central characteristic of the advanced capitalist social formations” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 137) and that “the hegemonic form of politics only becomes dominant at the beginning of modern times, when the reproduction of the different social areas takes place in permanently changing conditions” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 138). The analysis is thus situated on a schematic nexus that connects the following concepts: plurality, ambiguity of meaning and identities, proliferation, change, modern times, capitalism, and hegemony. But there is an unsatisfactory absence in the analysis: the movement from the pre-hegemonic form of politics to the modern hegemonic form of politics is simply assumed and not explained. The historical and ontological conditions of this possible movement is bypassed. This is evident when the authors state that “[p]lurality is not the phenomenon to be explained, but the starting point of the analysis” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 140). In some of his later

works, Laclau made some attempts at identifying the historical conditions that enable the constant revolutionization of the social, citing the combined effects of commodification, bureaucratic rationalization and increasingly complex forms of division of labour (Laclau, 1990, p. 67). But these identified dimensions are grossly undertheorized in terms of their ontological possibility.

In contrast, the present project has examined the very ontological conditions that *enable* the hegemonic form of politics. If a hegemonic formation is a historical bloc that is constituted by a *plurality* of subject positions governed by *constant and proliferating dislocation*, it is necessary to identify the terrain through which this possibility occurs. The imperative is to explain *the movement* from what the authors identify as pre-modern communities governed by a closed system of differences, to modern political blocs governed by the proliferation of equivalences and plurality and, by extension, constant and proliferating dislocation. What needs to be identified are a series of articulatory practices that, by enabling an increase in the scope and rate of articulation and dislocation, enable interconnectivity between discursive formations, on the one hand, and proliferating dislocation(s) within such formations, on the other. This will help us situate, more effectively, the modernist literature, which defines nationalism as a distinctively modern phenomenon, while simultaneously relegating modernity to privileged positivities. What Laclau and Mouffe's theory cannot account for is the "quantitative" dimension of modernity, which is assumed and not explained. If I was at all successful in my endeavours, what should be clear is that modernity's "quantitatively larger" dimension can best be understood in terms of a theory of technology. Steering away from monistic and essentialized definitions, technology is here understood as the distance between the corporeal capacities of the subject and its (actualized) potentials through discursive interlinkages. In this sense, technology is simply understood in terms of mediating planes that allow the subject to increase the breadth of its articulating capacities. Technology allows us to either increase the scope of spatialized relations or the rate of dislocation.

The quantitative potential that has been unleashed by "modern technology" is coeval with the hegemonic form of politics, to the extent that the utilization of this potential tends towards indeterminacy. If the technological potential, for whatever reason, is directed toward dislocation of the social, meaning

becomes more ambiguous, as the symbolic constitution of elements becomes increasingly overdetermined. This occurs in two general forms. The first is through inter-cultural connectivity, which may result in the integration of heterogeneous populations. In this scenario heterogeneity becomes the terrain of new possible antagonisms. The second is through process of “internal” dislocation, where communities are subjected to constant alterations in the forms of its reproduction. Both developments have been subjected to extensive study and theorization in the contemporary sociological canon (see Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Rosa, 2013). An example can help concretize this argument. In a community where the scope of indeterminacy is delimited, the notion of “community,” is symbolically associated with a restricted range of meanings, such as “religion,” “village,” “traditional practices,” etc. At any given time, these nodal signifiers can become sites of potential conflict—there may be disagreements, as an example, on what constitutes correct religious practices. By extension, the introduction of new meanings in the community, vis-à-vis modern technology, for example, may render the meaning of “community,” highly ambiguous. As a floating signifier “community” may be attached to imported liberal, socialist, democratic, secular ideas etc. “Community,” now encapsulating a broader range of meanings that can potentially be attached to other meanings, can become a site of novel and proliferating political antagonisms. Whereas before the importation of “external” narratives, political contestation concerned a restricted range of issues, e.g., religion and traditional practices, it now proliferates into new domains that may concern individual freedom, equality and justice, political representation etc. Now, these “external” narratives were “imported” through processes of inter-territorial/inter-discursive connectivity, vis-à-vis technological forms and potentials. What I am describing here is technology’s “quantitative potential,” as delineated in the preceding discussion, and its consequent political potentials. For if the notion of “community,” and its constitutive relations, are subjected to additional “injections” of meaning, and become more overdetermined, they increasingly acquire the character of a floating signifier (i.e., indeterminacy).

We can thus conclude our discussion with the following propositions. If discursive elements tend toward full-constitution, that is, spatialization, their relationship, while not overcoming equivalence, will

tend toward difference. Conversely, if discursive elements tend toward ambiguity, that is, temporality, their relationship, while not overcoming difference, will tend toward equivalence. A relatively fully-constituted element entails a stable chain of signification that, by virtue of the stability of its constitutive relations, *resists being contaminated by other elements*. But elements that are highly overdetermined, ambiguous in meaning, and tend toward indeterminate potential articulations, *will be more vulnerable to being contaminated by other elements*. This is the reason why, as an example, religious conversion in the West is often made with ease. The highly pluralistic, overdetermined and, therefore, indeterminate character of such dynamic societies, renders them vulnerable to the importation of “external” elements that (constantly) alter their constitutive identities. This means that fully-constituted differences are overcome by potential symbolic equivalences.

A fascinating potential ensues. If the terrain of indeterminacy is broadened, then the terrain of possible contaminations (that is, overdeterminations) also broadens. This enables a most-important political potential: *it enables identities to contaminate the pluralistic social terrain (e.g., institutions, identities, practices, beliefs, attitudes, etc.) with their own narratives and interests*. And because, as established, *the social is constitutively uneven, it follows that one identity, more than any other identity, will have saturated the social's overdetermined terrain with its narratives and interests*. I am using the terms “narratives” and “interests” in the broadest sense here, as ideas and social practices that are embedded in institutional arrangements. The overall effect of this process is that the narratives and interests of a particular political identity, as embedded in concretized institutional arrangements, come to represent the totality of the community—they come to be perceived as the community’s essential being. This process, whereby an identity and its constitutive elements are elevated from a particularity to the status of universality, by virtue of their generalized dispersion through the field of overdetermination, is what enables the formation of a *hegemonic bloc*. *A hegemonic bloc is a totalized community whose “unity” is enabled by the proliferation of equivalential symbolic associations at the expense of fully-constituted differences*. I should again emphasize that this two-fold potential is not a zero-sum game, but operations that run on a continuum. Strictly speaking, all communities are and were, to some degree,

hegemonic. But this political relation assumes a wider scope in modern times. This helps us compare and contrast “pre-modern” imperial Empires with “consolidated” nation-states. While both systems of rule “stretched” over wide territorial blocs, the hegemonic dimension within pre-modern Empires was restricted, owing to more restrictive technological potentials. The imperial power merely subjugated populations and only “infiltrated” its populations subjectivity to a limited extent. The Ottoman Empire’s millet system, can be understood as the affirmation of social difference where “Christian” predominantly identified as “Christian” and not “Ottoman.” This situation is to be differentiated from “successful” consolidation of nation-states, where a broad range of heterogeneous populations and identities were “aggregated” through a common identity that, over the course of time, displaced, subsumed, or overtook “traditional” forms of identification. Weber’s (1976) chronicling of the construction of French citizens, clearly demonstrates how, over the course of the nineteenth century, rural population’s local attachments were gradually overcome and replaced by “supra-local” attachments, that is, national attachments. This process, whereby particular identities or life modalities come to inter-penetrate and constitute the basis for aggregating differential subject positions, has been articulated, albeit in the absence of comprehensive theorization, by several theorists of nationalism (Gellner, 1983; Greenfeld, 1992; Smith, 1991). What was, of course, missing, was a theory of hegemony, which we have been afforded with by contributions outside our field (Gramsci, 1971c, 1971a; Hall, 1986; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

We are now fully equipped to comprehend the full implications of my overarching argument—that the concept of hegemony is the most appropriate in helping us understand the “modernity” of nationalism. If modernity is characterized by a “quantitatively” larger social or political potential, which tends toward indeterminacy, then the terrain of political articulations constitutively broadens, as the social becomes highly overdetermined. Meaning becomes increasingly ambiguous, eroding the difference between elements and is thus overcome by equivalence, where differential subject positions can be represented as equivalent. This allows political identities to “link” themselves symbolically with other identities and it allows their ideas and modes of conduct to be equivalentially connected with those of other identities. A process of contamination ensues where the ideas and conducts of one identity

symbolically penetrate those of others. They thus become common points of reference that enable the fusion of differential subject positions. The institutionalization of things such as “the national state,” “national public education,” “national economy,” “national identity,” “national memories and myths,” etc., all constitute examples of nodes that fuse, via-a-vis equivalences, heterogeneous subject positions. And while the content of these nodes includes elements from the plurality of identities that they encapsulate, a particular identity, more than any other, will have saturated them with the content of their own ideas, narratives, and interests.

Chapter 11: The Hegemony of Nations

We have now laid down the necessary groundwork that will help us examine in greater detail the hegemony of nationalism. An underlying question had been guiding our exploratory efforts: how can a community come to be totalized in light of the social's constitutive plurality? I demonstrated how any appeal to "ultimately primacy" resulted in aporetic impasses—efforts that compelled us to generatively construct a new theoretical framework that emphasized the overdetermined nature of the social. By emphasizing the overdetermined and thus "floating" character of social elements, we were able to deduce a theory of social change that privileged the articulating practice (i.e., the political), thus disposing any theoretical reliance on presumed essentialist determinations. The overdetermined character of the social meant that signifiers "floated" in excess of their corresponding signifieds and could thus be articulatively connected to differential signifieds. This possibility is what subverts the determinations of any signification structure, as all social relations are essentially ambiguous and subject to flux. "The political" was understood as that moment, whereby the subject was confronted with the possibility of a decision, by virtue of the structure's failed determination (i.e., overdetermination).

These considerations, furthermore, led us to privilege the notion of antagonism—a possibility housed within that indeterminate discursive terrain. Since identities are always established relationally, each contains traces of other identities. Thus, while differential identities become each other's condition of possibility, they also prevent each other's full-constitution. There is no pure identity, as all identities are, by necessity, mutually contaminated. This consideration opened up new paths of historical explorations: the study of the emergence of nations could now be executed through the theoretical prism of political antagonisms, in the absence of any essentialist understandings of historical motion. The "engine of history," so to speak, is the precise product of articulated constructions, executed through the always-present terrain of political antagonisms. To state that history is driven by antagonisms is to emphasize that change emerges as a possibility in the field of indeterminacy, where structural determination has failed, and that novel social arrangements are the product of political constructions that

invariably operate and are overdetermined by the plurality of political identities at play. This is not to suggest that political practice is not overdetermined by the “rules of the structure,” but that political practice is enabled precisely because those rules are constitutively disrupted by the field of overdetermination, which opens up the possibility of decisions and thus articulated constructions. Thus *any process of nation construction, being guided by no essential determinant, is to be understood as being articulatively constructed through political practice.* This means that nation construction could and can assume a diversity of forms and that the similarity of national forms, lacking any essential determination, can only be understood as generalized family resemblances.

A consistent critique of modernist presumptions was paralleling these discussions. We saw that all modernist theories of nationalism relied on an underlying theory of modernity. The presumption here was that modernity fashioned nations according to its “image.” The limitations of this argument were revealed and we were compelled to conclude that modernity itself should be understood in terms of particular institutionalizations of cultural arrangements that were only “unified” in terms of their family resemblances. However, this was not stated naively, and we were not tempted to be dismissive of modernity’s “quantitatively larger” dimensions and its disruptive dynamism. We were thus called upon and challenged to answer the question of modern technology, as it was clear that the onslaught of modernity could not be attributed to mere alterations of meanings and to novel “socio-cultural arrangements” but to ontological possibilities that enabled an increase in the scope and rate of possibility. Our efforts led us to the generation of a new theory of technology. *Technology was understood as the distance between the corporeal limitations of the subject and (actualized) potential.* It was understood as articulated constructions that, by becoming co-articulated with the articulation process, enabled the broadening of the scope, and the increase in the rate, of articulated practices. To the extent that technology was understood as being co-extensive with “the political,” and co-terminous with “the social,” it was elevated to the status of general ontology. We were mindful not to inadvertently resort to any essentialist deductions. In this sense, the quantitative potential of technology was understood as being strictly a potential geared toward either the sedimentation of social practices, or toward their disruption.

Historical observations, much in line with the bulk of literature that preceded this work (Bauman, 2000; Marx, 1978b; Rosa, 2013), pointed to the fact that, in modern times, technological use is tendentially geared toward social disruption and thus indeterminate possibilities. This was equivalent to saying that modern technology was articulated in ways that overdetermined the social, thus tending its meaningful fabric toward ambiguity and flux. The dynamic potential of “automated” and “instantaneous” technology was identified as key historical developments that enable these range of possibilities.

We then proceeded to explore how the “unity”—or better yet, “totalization”—of the community could materialize, in light of the social’s constitutive ambiguity, that is, heterogeneity. The lack of a stable system of differences in modern times, rendered meanings vulnerable to ambiguity. This imparts the possibility of them being articulatively linked, as equivalents, to other meanings—difference is, to a certain extent eroded, as it is overcome by equivalence. This means that a social fabric can be weaved together, through the construction of symbolic equivalences that connect heterogeneous subject positions as equivalents. In this sense, these differential subject positions—precisely because they can be articulatively connected as equivalences to other subject positions—increasingly entered into relationships of mutual contaminations. And precisely because the social is constitutively uneven, one identity, more than any other, contaminates the social with its ideas, narratives, and interests. This process whereby a particular identity contaminates, more than any other, the fabric of the social, and is thus elevated to the status of a “universality,” by virtue of its generalized dispersion, is what I, following Laclau and Mouffe, call hegemony. As opposed to “pre-modern” forms of community, where relations are characterized, to a larger extent, by clearer and stabler empirical differences, hegemonic totalization involves the proliferation of symbolic equivalences. This was precisely why I deemed the notion of the hegemony to be the most appropriate in understanding the phenomenon of nationalism. If nationalism historically coincides with modernity’s dynamism—that is, its constitutive ambiguity—then hegemony is its terrain of operation. These precepts constitute the present chapter’s organizing framework. We proceed by enriching it with detailed content.

Nation and State

I would like to develop my present argument in reference to what is perhaps the most frequently encountered and debated theme in the literature on nationalism: the relationship between the nation, nationalism, and the state. No doubt, this theme assumes a diversity of forms. But I believe I would be accurate in stating that the relationship between the nation, nationalism and the state, is typically assessed in terms of temporal primacy or causal efficacy. The most frequently held position, whether explicitly stated or theoretically deduced, is that it is the state that precedes and engenders the nation and nationalism (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Breuilly, 1994; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1981, 1985; Tilly, 1975). This belief, of course, can only be substantiated on the basis of an ontology that attributes a positive essence to the state whose diverse historical manifestations are thought to be empirical variations of that underlying essence. “The state” is not an entity that is stable over time, and is itself subject to change. We have thoroughly critiqued this line of theoretical reasoning, having reached the conclusion that the historical continuity of “objects,” such as the state, can only be understood in terms of shifting family resemblances and that, strictly speaking, their “unity” over time can only be nominal. It should additionally be noted, that theories that accord causal or temporal primacy to the state do not properly theorize political antagonisms. Casual primacy cannot be attributed to a singular cause because any “causal” relationship requires the co-presence and thus co-contamination of the elements involved. This means that the identity of the elements, whether one considers them to be “the causes” or “the effect” will be altered, in what should essentially be conceived as a two-way “causality.” This, of course, does not exclude us from inquiring which of the two (or more) elements overdetermines, to a larger degree, the relationship. Rather, it informs us that power is never a zero-sum game.

Let me connect this discussion to the long-held distinction between two supposed variants of nationalism: the (“Western”) civic-territorial model and the (“Eastern”) ethnic-populist model. This distinction was originally articulated by Hans Kohn (1965) and has since become a recurring point of theoretical reference (see Calhoun, 1993, pp. 221–224; Giddens, 1985, pp. 216–218; Habermas, 1996b;

Ignatieff, 1993; Smith, 1986, pp. 140–149). The general contours of the argument are as follows. One typically observes two distinct paths toward nation formation. The “Western” civic model, being characteristic of countries such as France and England, is thought to have materialized vis-à-vis state expansion. The “Eastern” ethnic model, being characteristic of Eastern European countries, such as Germany, is thought to be a product of popular mobilization. The distinction is therefore posed in terms of causal and temporal primacy: is it “the people” or “the state” that lead the efforts in nation construction?

Historical analyses of nation construction, however, typically reveal a murkier picture. Let us consider Hobsbawm’s historical analysis of how states procured legitimacy through the production of national subjects. Hobsbawm (2012) notes that as traditional socio-political bonds declined, states sought to engender new forms of civil loyalty and legitimation (p. 85). He notes that “[t]he original, revolutionary-popular, idea of patriotism was state-based rather than nationalist, since it related to the sovereign people itself, i.e., to the state exercising power in its name. Ethnicity or other elements of historic continuity were irrelevant to ‘the nation’ in this sense, and language relevant only or chiefly on pragmatic grounds” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 87). He further suggests that the provision of democratic rights “might thus automatically help to solve the problems of how states and regimes could acquire legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens, even if these were disaffected. It reinforced, it could even create, state patriotism” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 89). However, the provision of democratic rights resulted in unintended consequences because “[t]he very act of democratizing politics, i.e., of turning subjects into citizens, tends to produce a populist consciousness which, seen in some lights, is hard to distinguish from a national, even a chauvinist, patriotism” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 88). Thus, the state often had to confront nationalism, as an external threat, but nationalism could “become an enormously powerful asset of government, if it could be integrated into state patriotism, to become its central emotional component” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 90). I believe that my theory can read into Hobsbawm’s analysis with a fresh eye. For what is Hobsbawm describing here other than how the instituting of a novel set of social arrangements (democratization) resulted in the generation of potentially novel intra- and inter-state

nationalist antagonisms? Facing the potential of opposition, the state often adopted its own national narratives in attempts to pacify its subjects. Thus, when the state, sought to create “national” subjects of the “civic variety,” its identity became increasingly contaminated by the “spill-over” effects of its own attempts (i.e., dislocation). It was therefore compelled, for pragmatic reasons, to espouse elements of the emerging nationalist ideology, to fend off state-opposition movements. The argument is clear: state attempts to create “nationals” of any sort, resulted in the alteration of the state and its partial subsumption by nationalist principles (an on-going product of historical antagonisms). It is not a question of whether the state or the nation came first but how *states come to be increasingly nationalized and how national life comes to be increasingly marked by the presence of the state*. This coeval dialectic constitutes the core thematic interest of the present chapter. The question of principal theoretical interest is not to identify the causes that underlie social or historical processes, but to delineate how differential elements such as the nation, state and society come to be *aggregated as metonymical extensions of one another*.

This discussion further informs us that any distinction between “Eastern” and “Western” nationalism that treats these notions as objective and fully-constituted facts, is bound to analytic failure. In some ways, my critique has already been foreshadowed, although not radicalized. Note the following passage from Smith (1986):

Without insisting too strongly on an ‘East-West’ opposition in terms of nation-formation, it remains true that the situation in early nineteenth century Central and Eastern Europe, and later the Middle East, bore little resemblance to Western developments. [...] Here, then, different concepts of the nation, ethnic and territorial, sprang out of their mixed routes to nationhood from politically fragmented ‘ethnic areas’ or categories, with little diffused sense of historic community, but an abundance of myths and symbols and a variety of political memories. (pp. 140–141)

Smith (1986) then proceeds to suggest that, indeed, what differentiates “nations” from “ethnies” is, in fact, “Western features and qualities,” those being “Territoriality, citizenship rights, legal codes and even

political culture” (p. 144). Consider the logical inconsistency. If it is specifically the elements of Western nationalism that elevates *both* variants to the status of nationhood, is not their distinction, then, effaced? Smith (1986) then proceeds in stating the following:

The upshot of our brief account of the formation of nations in the modern world is that all nations bear the impress of both territorial and ethnic principles and components, and represent an uneasy confluence of a more recent ‘civic’ and a more ancient ‘genealogical’ model of social and cultural organization. No ‘nation-to-be’ can survive without a homeland or a myth of common origins and descent. Conversely no ‘ethnie-aspiring-to-become-a-nation’ can achieve its goals without realizing a common division of labour and territorial mobility, or the legal equality of common rights and duties for each member, that is, citizenship. Of course, given nations will exhibit ethnic and territorial components in varying proportions at particular moments of their history. (p. 149)

Smith’s initial argument relegated the formation of nations to an ultimate determinant, that is, “Western features and qualities.” In developing his argument, however, he is compelled to consider the encompassing force of a range of other (i.e., “Eastern”) elements, which come to operate as necessary components to “Western features.” We are, yet again, encountering the impasses of positivistic reasoning. Why should the question be posed, albeit implicitly, in terms of ultimate primacy? I make the following suggestions. The elements that Smith is identifying as “Eastern” and “Western” can better be understood as sets of family resemblances, which over the course of ongoing political antagonisms, come to be articulated as equivalents, and thus manifest as metonymical extensions of one another. To the extent that the metonymical combination of these elements follows rules of formation that are entirely contingent upon the social and historical context, they cannot be thought to follow the precepts of neither an “Eastern-people” or a “Western-state” *model*.

A most-related discussion concerns the *facticity* of the “nation-state,” especially when considering the backdrop of its constitutive heterogeneity: to what extent do “nation-states,” actually

exist? A theorist that is very often associated with this thematic concern is Connor (1978) who has been an ardent critic of the supposed terminological confusion between “the nation” and “the state.” He has, moreover, warned us about the dangers encapsulated in what for him is the unsatisfactory notion of the “nation-state.” Its deployment can lead to both theoretical inaccuracies as well as political and ethical dangers (Connor, 1978, pp. 382–383). Approaching the subject matter from the standpoint of *literality*, he notes that “Only 12 states (9.1%) can justifiably be described as nation-states,” “Twenty-five (18.9%) contain a nation or potential nation accounting for more than 90% of the state’s total population but also contain an important minority,” “Another 25 (18.9%) contain a nation or potential nation accounting for between 75% and 89% of the population,” “In 31 (23.5%), the largest ethnic element accounts for 50% to 74% of the population,” and “In 39 (29.5%), the largest nation or potential nation accounts for less than half of the population” (Connor, 1978, p. 382).

I consider this to be a moot argument. As I have already demonstrated, “the nation” is not governed by an inherent and singular essence. So even where there is a supposed convergence between “nation” and “state,” as in 9.1% of the countries surveyed, that “nation” is still constituted by a field of plurality and is therefore not singular in character. The point, therefore, is not whether there is an “actual” or an “objective” convergence between nation and state, but that a nation-state can be *represented as unified despite its constitutive plurality* where “the nation” and “the state” come to be articulated as a metonymical extension of one another. As already discussed, this function of representation entails that particular elements (e.g., “the nation,” “freedom,” “democracy,” etc.), through complex processes of political constructions, come to represent the communal totality. The question of hegemony—that is, of a particularity that assumes the role of representing the communal totality—is what is at stake when examining the contested notion of the nation-state.

It is worth noting that several authors have affirmed and examined the constitutive plurality of nations, casting doubt on the widely-held modernist assumption of national homogeneity (McNeill, 1986; Young, 1993). More recently, Hutchinson (2005) has demonstrated that national states (he rejects the notion of the nation-state) are invariably governed by internal political divisions that are themselves a

product of historical schisms, e.g., revolutionary, civil, religious, ethnic, etc. (p. 93). Memories of conflict, become persistent repertoires for collective political action and political imaginaries, e.g., concerning the configuration of national institutions (Hutchinson, 2005, p. 98). In this sense, the divisions of the past come to enable new forms of political conflict. Hutchinson demonstrates, vis-à-vis historical examples, that these competing national visions come to be subordinated to the hegemony of particular political factions. There is, moreover, an alternation between hegemonic identities, especially in times of crisis, as is well demonstrated by the example of nineteenth century France (Hutchinson, 2005, pp. 94–95).

Hutchinson's historical analyses further demonstrates how historical symbols that may come to mark internal differences can very often evolve into common points of reference that may fuse competing identities. They can, moreover, be co-opted by competing factions and their content can also be re-articulated. This realization prompts Hutchinson (2005) to conclude the following:

What this indicates is that these rival visions have staying power since they reflect the diverse heritages of populations whose territorial location continues to expose them to unpredictable impacts from several directions. The nation is not simply a space but a geographical milieu and subject to recurring and multiple influences from peoples, north, south, east and west. It is also situated in time with a layered past, and its different pasts are brought into play to cope with shifting challenges. There can be no final definition of a national identity. (p. 111)

The nation, and the various symbols that come to be associated with its history, are not marked by an inherent content that attaches them to a particular identity, or that yields determinate social arrangements. These symbols can be similarly deployed to polarize *and* to unite. This is the reason why Hutchinson (2005) comes to the conclusion that the notion of the “unified mass nation” is “something of a myth,” as is the idea of “the national state as a sovereign power container” (p. 121). Hutchinson's analysis therefore distances us from the essentialisms that had come to mark the early modernist literature on nationalism.

Yet, his brilliant theoretical breakthrough is, in my opinion, stifled by his concluding remarks. For him, what keeps internal divisions and contestation in check are “a sense of common values, a consciousness of which may arise out of the cultural debates themselves” (Hutchinson, 2005, p. 113). But how can one speak of *common* values, if the social is characterized by a constitutive terrain of *heterogeneity and political conflict*? What is insufficiently explored in Hutchinson are the ontological conditions of possibility that enable the articulation of a (national) totalizing effect, in the instituting of hegemonic blocs, despite the social’s constitutive heterogeneity and plethora political antagonisms. The task here is to delineate the very ontological terrain of “commonality” as such.

A first step has been taken toward this direction with the introduction of the notion of metonymical aggregation. The “commonality” of common points of social and political reference are not governed by a literal meaning that is unobtrusively transferred from one identity to another. Rather, “commonality” is governed by *contiguity in meaning, entailing a terrain of both overlap and negation*. This can only mean that any process of aggregation necessarily entails the co-evolution of political contestations. And this is precisely the reason why any communitarian arrangements are invariably governed by conflict potential. The question of concern, therefore, is precisely how, in light of such vicissitudes, a social body can come to be represented as a *totality*.

This is the topic of concern in the present section. Our task here is to delineate the discursive operative mechanisms that, by “fusing” a variety of heterogeneous subject positions, enable the *totalization of the nation*. The question of utmost importance is what sort of *political relation* is presupposed in this instance of totalization, whereby the particularities of a socio-political space are subsumed under a general form of representations, i.e., “the nation.” To that I provide a clear answer: a hegemonic relation. It entails the political construction of nodal points (e.g., “education,” “the state,” “welfare,” “law and order,” etc.) upon which subjectivities and forms of life come to be metonymically aggregated, and that come to be homologically associated with the nodal point *par excellence*: “the nation.” And, of course, the question that is highly relevant in the context of this discussion is which political identity is, more than any other, edged upon the face of the nation. To the extent that particular

identity will have effectively saturated “the nation,” and its associated nodal points, with its own narratives and interests, it will come to be elevated to the status of the hegemon. It has in this respect, extended its identity beyond itself and has partially “encapsulated” planes of aggregation and political contestation by contaminating them with the content of its own interests and narratives.

Nationalism is by extension understood as a variable set of overdetermined “family resemblances” that come to represent the national communal “totality.” These “family resemblances” come to be dispersed variably and unevenly, as privileged nodes in the field of overdetermination, “binding” together differential identities. And since what governs any discursive formation is the uneven play of differences, it follows that a particular identity will have saturated, more than any other, the field of overdetermination and the content of nodal signifiers (e.g., “the nation”) with its narratives, thereby establishing its hegemony. *“The nation” can thus be understood as a privileged signifier of historically variable content that, through its general and uneven dispersion, fuses but unevenly privileges, multiple identities into a hegemonic bloc.*

Dimensions of Hegemony

As Laclau has aptly noted in *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (2014), the ontological dimensions that inhere to the articulated construction of a hegemonic bloc can be identified as follows. Firstly, all social systems are characterized by the ever-presence of heterogeneity (i.e., overdetermination), which prevents their full-constitution (Laclau, 2014, p. 81). Secondly, a totalization effect, being necessary for the constitution of the hegemonic bloc, has to operate vis-à-vis the system’s constitutive heterogeneity (Laclau, 2014, p. 81). A hegemonic bloc thus entails the totalization of the social—marking its limits, that is—while its constitutive heterogeneity is maintained (Laclau, 2014, p. 81). Thus, the communal “unity” is not understood as deriving from an underlying datum but as a particular political relation wherein a particular identity exercises power over identities different from itself (Laclau, 2014, p. 159). Thus,

communal “unity” is understood not as an aprioristic force that subsumes and saturates the social but as “a particularity that has succeeded in contingently articulating around itself a large number of differences” (Laclau, 2014, p. 159). This is tantamount to stating that a particularity has been elevated to the status of a universality by equivalentially “linking” itself to other identities. Therefore, identities that are, strictly speaking, incommensurate with one another because they occupy heterogeneous spaces of representation, come to be fused vis-à-vis the *hegemonic identity*.

This relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a *hegemonic relation*. As a result, its universality is a *contaminated* universality: (1) it lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity; (2) its function of hegemonic universality is not acquired for good but is, on the contrary, always reversible. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xiii)

It is prudent to acknowledge that this theme of an identity extending its content beyond itself—a process whereby “the part” comes to represent “the whole”—is something that is often identified by scholars of *nationalism*. Let us re-call Gellner’s argument that nationalism entails the superimposition of a “high” communicatory culture unto a general populace, or Smith’s “two roads” to nationhood, those being vernacular mobilization or administrative bureaucratic expansion. Giddens’ argument can also be read in this light: the shift from tradition to modernity is marked by the replacement of the city, as the prime-most power container, by the nation-state. Billig (1995), has made the argument more explicitly: “The battle for nationhood is a battle for hegemony, by which a part claims to speak for the whole nation and to represent the national essence. Sometimes, metonymically the name of the part comes to stand for the national whole” (p. 27).

All these examples follow a similar line of reasoning: they all endorse the notion that the nation-state entails the extension of an identity that subsumes other particularities. But what these approaches lack is a sensibility to the nuances of power, namely, that power is never a zero-sum game, and any

process of “imposition” is invariably marked by the alteration of all the identities involved in the process. This simultaneously affirms that heterogeneity is maintained in that process of “imposition.” This point is frequently glossed over by the theorist who deploy the notion of hegemony somewhat casually in the absence of a comprehensive theory. The work of Billig, notable as it is, comes to mind. Billig (1995) suggests that “[t]he achievement of national hegemony is well illustrated by the triumph of official national languages and the suppression of rivals—a triumph which has so often accompanied the construction of statehood” (p. 27). This statement cannot be substantiated, since the hegemonization of a content entails the preservation of heterogeneity—to be a hegemon is to be a hegemon over something *else*. Thus, strictly speaking, any successful process of homogenization entails the eradication of hegemony. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) assertively advocate,

in order to speak of hegemony, the articulatory moment is not sufficient. It is also necessary that the articulation should take place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices — in other words, that hegemony should emerge in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms and therefore suppose phenomena of equivalence and frontier effects [...] Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps — which implies a constant redefinition of the latter — is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. Without equivalence and without frontiers, it is impossible to speak strictly of hegemony. (pp. 135–136)

The analyst should therefore display the outmost sensibility to the constitutive heterogeneity and plurality that governs political constructions. Chatterjee’s (1993a) study of post-colonial nation-building in India, as an example, demonstrates how the successful fusion of heterogeneous subject positions, entails complex processes of contestation and fusion between competing identities, which come to be articulated as equivalents under the seemingly singular guise of “the nation.” Let us focus on his discussion

concerning the modernization efforts of the state. He notes that post-colonial modernizing efforts, which sought to promote the institutionalization of capital, required the construction of a “synthetic hegemony” (p. 212), pragmatically fashioned in the form of inter-group alliances and the incorporation of “entire structures of precapitalist community” (p. 213). This formation did not entail “a full-scale assault on all precapitalist dominant classes” but, rather, sought to “limit their power” (Chatterjee, 1993a, p. 212). What is more, the successful articulation of this hegemonic project operated through the “reification of the ‘nation’ in the body of the state” (Chatterjee, 1993a, p. 212). However, the articulation of this hegemonic project, while successful, was “incomplete and fragmented [...] because the hegemonic claims are fundamentally contested within the constructed whole” (Chatterjee, 1993a, p. 212). Let us re-articulate Chatterjee’s argument using our lexicon: the hegemonization of capitalist development entailed the aggregation of heterogeneous subject positions vis-à-vis a total mode of representation whose “abstract” manifestation took the form of “the nation” and whose “concrete” manifestation took the form of the “state.” The articulation of a capitalist hegemony, nonetheless, entailed the alteration of both bourgeois and non-bourgeois identities. The bourgeois identity, through its “persuasive” efforts, contaminates the content of competing identities, but the hegemonization of its ideology requires the incorporation of exogenous elements, such as the caste system, in the capitalist relations of production.

This theme of an identity exercising its power by contaminating the content of other identities, we also encounter in Weber’s historical study of the transformation of the peasantry into French nationals. He notes, for instance, how in the nineteenth century, at the backdrop of pervasive linguistic plurality, Parisian French came to be effectively dispersed throughout France and had gradually overridden patois. The effective dispersion of the Parisian French language owed its success to a variety of factors: the effective articulation between Parisian French and politeness and “quality,” the necessities of an economy that increasingly took on national dimensions, the institutionalization of public education, and so on and so forth. But Weber (1976) informs us that

When the national society became more significant than the various local societies, national language was able at last to override its local rivals, and other particularisms as well. Yet what developed was not always truly national. Notably in the center and the south there developed a whole series of compromises between official or school French on one hand and the local speech on the other: buffers between patois and French, drawing on both, applying the structures and the accent of patois to French, changing the meaning of terms in order to use them in vernaculars that ran from Frenchified patois to *patoisant* French. (p. 89)

The successful articulation of a hegemony thus entails the partial maintenance of difference through processes of co-contamination, whereby identities infiltrate one another. However, one identity will be, to a greater extent, successful in infiltrating other identities. This process whereby elements or identities are aggregated through processes of *uneven* co-contamination, constitutes the principal terrain of the hegemonic operation. And this process of fusion will very often be mediated by the dispersion of elements that are imbued with high value, such as “the nation.”

Having delineated our necessary theoretical starting points, there is yet one final discussion to be made, concerning the discursive forms through which a nationalist hegemony operates. I have thus far outlined the “preconditions” for hegemony, but I refrained from outlining with precision the discursive operative mechanisms through which a hegemony is constructed. It is necessary now to recall a discussion that took centre stage in Chapter 9, concerning the general processes through which elements are aggregated. A hegemonic formation is, essentially, a specific mode of aggregation, wherein particular elements assume the role of incarnating a fullness that, strictly speaking, can never be fully-structured. This statement, however, is simultaneously the enunciation of a problem. By “aggregation” I do not intend to designate the mere amalgamation of discursive objects in the absence of meaningful relations. “Aggregation” in my sense of the word, entails *a meaningful plane of contiguity between overdetermined discursive objects*. Thus, to pose the problem of “aggregation” is tantamount to posing the question of *order and regularity*. But one has to be aware that our ultimate analytic goal is to generatively construct a

framework for understanding the ongoing articulation of hegemonic national blocs. Thus, the problem of order and regularity has to simultaneously be posed through the prism of nationhood. We are, therefore, presented with a two-pronged challenge. Firstly, we have to outline the discursive mechanisms through which regularity as such, operates. And secondly, we have to identify how the field of regularity comes to be marked—or better yet saturated—by the signifier “the nation,” which comes to operate as a privileged point of social condensation.

Will this plane of exploration be sufficient in conclusively examining the phenomenon of interest? Obviously not, since mere regularized conduct does not necessarily entail the circumscription of a communal bloc. For example, diplomatic relations between two different nations is a form of regularized conduct, but the two nations are, nonetheless, circumscribed as distinct national communities. We are thus also compelled to confront the question of *totalization*, that is, that very “instance” or “experience” wherein the communal bloc confronts us as a circumscribed bloc. My argument is that hegemonic nationhood entails the precarious alignment between: (a) the nominal circumscription of the national bloc, and (b) the totality of its regularized meaningful relationships. It entails the precarious alignment between the privileged signifier “the nation” with signified institutional processes, in what can only amount to an unstable relationship subject to constant re-definition. As I trace my argument, we should constantly be mindful of our previous discussion, concerning the potentials of modern technology. For modern technology is, in essence, what enables unprecedented “quantitative” larger articulative potentials that broaden the spectrum of ambiguity, overdetermination and floating signifiers—the very “precondition” of hegemony and therefore nationalism. This indeterminate field that technology opens up is precisely where the hegemonic practice and therefore national hegemonic formations materialize.

Totalization and the Ontological Centrality of Naming

What does it mean to “totalize” and what are the ontological conditions of its possibility? To speak of a social or political “totality” is to pose the problem of the community’s limits. The influential ideas of Fredrik Barths immediately come to mind. It was as early as 1969 that Barths cautioned us against perceiving ethnicity in terms of specific cultural characteristics. Instead, ethnicity should be understood in terms of a *border* that binds the community. In this sense, the content of an ethnic category is seen as being invariably subject to change, while the communal “unity” is strictly contingent upon a self- and other-ascribed boundary. The overlaps with a prolific (post)structuralist premise are apparent: identity is established in terms of difference (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Saussure, 1966). This theme was later echoed in the work of a number of theorists of nationalism, including notable names such as Armstrong (1982), Baumann (1992) and Smith (1986), though in the case of Smith, we see the re-introduction of a quasi-essentialized understanding of ethnicity, which seeks to ground the notion in its presumed “dimensions.” For Smith (1986), ethnicity is defined not simply as difference (i.e., a border) but also in terms of its content.

Irrespective of their theoretical differences, what is largely left undertheorized by the above-mentioned authors, are the ontological conditions that enable the very possibility and (in our framework) necessity of difference. We have already established, in keeping with the Saussurean tradition, that the meaningful identity of an “object” is invariably established in terms of its difference with other meaningful “objects.” I am Greek because I am not Turkish, Italian, British, etc. This means that the invocation of any one meaning necessarily entails the invocation of the linguistic totality. Therefore, the invocation of any one meaning necessarily entails a process of deferment, from one meaningful term to another, until all linguistic relations are referentially exhausted in the process. Now, the question that has constantly been preoccupying us concerns the limits of signification. To the extent that this process of deferment is “infinite,” nothing could be signified. Subjectivity, in a sense, would dissolve and what we would encounter is a loop of deferment in the absence of any possibility of action. Thus, signification

entails a constitutive plane of disruption, that is, a failure in the structure which “salvages” the process from infinite deferment. We have already thoroughly discussed how this disruption is tantamount to “the moment of the subject,” where it is confronted with the possibility of a decision, precisely because any discursive formation is interrupted by a terrain of indeterminacy.

In detailing the problem of the limits of a community, we are, in essence, faced with the same ontological conundrum. In keeping with the Barthian premise, I endorse the notion that the establishment of an identity requires the construction of a border that marks the difference between “our” community and “theirs.” The establishment of an identity entails a constitutive outside to which it is opposed. But what is important to note is that this “constitutive outside,” while imbued with negativity, is, strictly speaking, *internal to the discursive formation*. It is, merely, another difference. This leads us to a very important conclusion: the precept of “identity = difference” is highly unsatisfactory as an explanation of the ultimate limits of the community, precisely because the distinction between “our community” and “the others” is a distinction that operates *within* the limits of our meaningful intelligible terrain. When confronting the question of the *ultimate* limits of the community, which are coextensive with the discursive totality, *we are called upon to answer the limits of signification as such*.

A fascinating conclusion outpours from this discussion. We have established that the limits of the community are coextensive with the limits of signification as such. We have also established that signification can only operate if a constitutive plane of disruption—that is, a *limit*—“salvages” it from infinite deferment. Thus, the limits of the community and the possibility of signification are coeval and coterminous. The communal bloc precipitates from within the grounds of the ontological possibility, and the ontological necessity, of signification. This conclusion, however, is yet unsatisfactory in answering the question of how a community is totalized, since in order for the total community to be signified, a radical exclusion toward which the community is counterposed is still required. But where can the content of this exclusion be drawn from if, as established, it cannot be drawn from within the community’s meaningful—and I emphasize, meaningful—terrain? We turn to Laclau (2007b) for an answer:

It is only in so far as there is a radical impossibility of a system as pure presence, beyond all exclusions, that actual *systems* (in the plural) can exist. Now, if the systematicity of the system is a direct result of the exclusionary limit, it is only that exclusion that grounds the system as such [...] what is excluded from the system, far from being something positive, is the simple principle of positivity—pure being. This already announces the possibility of an empty signifier - that is a signifier of the pure cancellation of all difference. (p. 38)

The totalization of the community thus entails a process whereby *all* of the community's internal differences are counterposed to the limits of discourse as radical outside. Thus, this process of radical exclusion, of pure difference, of pure negation, can only be a product of a total subversion of the systematicity of the system—a process that can ensue through the cancellation of all internal differences by means of an equivalential chain that connects all internal elements. The systematicity of the formation is subverted because in the absence of relations of difference its terrain of intelligibility is subverted. This cancellation of all internal differences thus requires that elements “purify” themselves of their internal content, if only tendentially, since it is precisely their content that fosters internal difference:

Only if the signifiers empty themselves of their attachment to particular signifieds and assume the role of representing the pure being of the system—or, rather, the system as pure Being—that such a signification is possible [...] It is only by privileging the dimension of equivalence to the point that its differential nature is almost entirely obliterated—that is emptying it of its differential nature—that the system can signify itself as a totality. (Laclau, 2007b, p. 39)

The conclusion cannot be the least bit ambiguous. The totalization of the community is coextensive with the production of *empty signifiers* that circumscribe the former. This means that the act of *naming* inheres to the community's totalization. It is for this reason that we attribute an ontological centrality to the act of naming, being at once necessary for signification as such, and the emergence of the community as bloc.

Now, what is of key interests to us is how the ontological centrality of naming inheres to hegemonic acts. This is tantamount to asking how particular acts come to signify the communal totality. The cancellation of all differences, being itself the requirement for signifying the community's limits, still requires that a signifier be drawn from within the discursive formation. To the extent that this signifier is deployed to name a constitutive void within the system of signification that disrupts its structuration, it will be characterized by a dimension of *emptiness*. In other words, it will acquire the function of subverting the systematicity of the system by representing the equivalential connection between the differential positions within the structure. A signifier assumes the role of naming the nameless—that is, the limits of discourse (Laclau, 2005b, p. 105). But since the signifier will invariably be drawn from a particular location within the discursive structure, *it will be constitutively split between the particularity from which it is drawn, and the empty universality that it comes to incarnate*. As Laclau notes, “representing the fullness of the community cannot entirely do away with the particularity of the content through which the incarnation takes place” (Laclau, 2014, p. 18). Thus, “‘fullness’ can only be touched through a radical investment in a partial object” that is not merely a partiality within the totality but a partiality that comes to *be* the totality (Laclau, 2014, p. 145). A particular element will be elevated to the status of a “universality” by nominally circumscribing the communal limits.

Connor's study of nineteenth century migrants coming to the U.S., as an example, informs us that Europeans peasants predominantly identified with their region, town or village, and not with their nation. For example, Italians had “[n]o concept of Italian-ness prior to World War I” and “Sicilian, Calabrian, Neapolitan, etc. were the key categories” of identification. Moreover, these groups “were often unable to understand each other's languages” (Connor, 1990, p. 94). Similarly, the Dutch, “who came in the 1840s and 1850s manifested a series of local identities (Gelderlander, Zeelander, etc.) that took precedence over a common identity as Dutch” (Connor, 1990, p. 94). “Only with the passing of the first generation of migrants did the local identities lose their paramountcy” (Connor, 1990, p. 94). What we are encountering here is a situation where the communal limits (and thus identification) had not coincided with that of the broader “nation.” In other words, “the nation” had not been successfully hegemonized until, broadly

speaking, the early twentieth century. It was only by then that, in Europe, we encounter a situation where the universality of “the nation” begins to heavily contaminate the plurality of “local” identities while being elevated to the status of a universal representation. Thus, “Italian” comes to subsume *but not eradicate* the categories of “Calabrian,” “Sicilian,” “Neopolitan,” etc. In other words, the category of “Italian” comes to represent the equivalential connection between these heterogeneous local identifications but in doing so comes to supersede them by subverting, but not eliminating, their difference.

I should, at this juncture, caution the reader against perceiving this process of totalization as an innocuous process that “naturally” spurs out of discursive precepts. As a reminder, my whole argument attributed ontological centrality to the notions of antagonism and articulation. This can only mean that the process whereby a name is hegemonized, and comes to operate as the communal border, is itself an act of power that is riddled with political antagonisms and crisscrossed by competing articulations. We should make the skeptic’s argument explicit: if the signifier that marks the limits of the community is itself empty of content, then its elevation to the status of a universality is a mere triviality—it lacks any sort of content that can result in power imbalances and is therefore politically insignificant. Let me flip this argument on its head: precisely because a signifier is elevated to the status of “the transcendent,” it bears the potential of being deployed as a mechanism of domination. As a reminder, and in keeping with the argument made in Chapter 9, the emptiness of the privileged signifier is only tendential—it is an effect that materializes allusively, eluding us the very instance it manifests. As Laclau (2005b) notes,

The notion of “a signifier without a signified” is, to start with, self-defeating: it could only mean “noise” and, as such, would be outside the system of signification. When we talk about “empty signifiers”, however, we mean something entirely different: we mean that there is a place, within the system of signification, which is constitutively unrepresentable; in that sense it remains empty, but this is an emptiness which I can signify, because we are dealing with a void within signification. (p. 105)

What we are describing here, far from being an “empty representation,” is a process whereby an element is split between its particularistic content and the *absent fullness* it comes to represent. And it is for this very reason why the hegemonic operation inheres to the ontological constitution of communities. The emptiness of the signifier that comes to represent the total community *is at once reduced to the status of a “floating signifier.”* This means that the tendential emptiness of the privileged signifier will become a site of potential political articulations—its power will be deployed and articulatively connected to particular configured orders of meaning. The empty signifier will invariably “slip into” signified content as its allure comes to be articulated with political imaginaries. We are, in a very direct way, mirroring Lacan’s argument concerning the unstable relationship between the signifier and the signified, though we are projecting the argument at the level of the community’s totalization. The argument holds that while the signifier is, to a certain extent, “independent” from the signified, by virtue of its floating and potentially empty character, it invariably “slip back” into a pool of potential signified content. We thus arrive at a key theoretical juncture. What can only be concluded from this discussion is that the “problem” of the community’s totalization is not independent from but coincides with the problem of regularity and order. We are thus called upon to explore, in greater detail, how:

- a) a plurality of subject positions can come to be aggregated into regularized patterns of arrangement;
- b) the privileged signifier of “the nation” comes to be infused in institutional conduct;
- c) the privileged signifier of “the nation” is deployed as a site of political articulations, through which an ideology, as a set of institutionalized social practices, is elevated to the status of essential being, where they are seen as inevitable and, therefore, natural;
- d) the narratives of a particular political identity come to saturate the signifier of “the nation.”

Regularity in Dispersion and Nodes of Aggregation

Regularity, for our purposes, is to be understood in terms of repetition. As already established in Chapter 10, every instance of repetition occurs within a total symbolic structure. Why is this so? Because the identity of an element is established in terms of its differential and equivalential association with all other elements within the total discursive formation. This means that the invocation of a signifier entails the simultaneous invocation of the total discursive structure. The total discursive structure is present in every moment where its particular elements are invoked. Thus, institutionalized conduct, i.e., repetition, occurs within a total symbolic succession. The coincidence between (a) the totalization and (b) the regularization of “the nation” is already beginning to announce itself: if every instance of regularization involves the invocation of the whole discursive structure, then the very “name” of the limits of the structure is present in every instance of regularized conduct.

But we have also established that every discursive structure is constitutively overdetermined and thus governed by a terrain of indeterminacy. This means that the identity of elements do not obey an internal coherence and may be subjected to a broad range of articulated expressions. Regularization thus entails the reduction of the variations of an element to an invariable nucleus (Laclau, 1990, p. 41). Another way to phrase this is to say that regularization entails the reduction of an element’s spectrum of indeterminacy. To conclude, and to put it simply, regularization entails attempts toward fixing the meaning of elements and therefore institutionalized conduct. A most important intervention is now required.

To suggest that regularization entails that a meaning be “fixed” does not mean that elements are reduced to literal and transparent meanings. If that were at all possible, a discursive formation would be subjected to perfect structural working. Therefore, the institutionalization of regularized patterns of conduct does not work *against* the field of overdetermination but *through* it. While regularization does entail the reduction of the field of possibilities (of thought, of practice, of institutionalizations, etc.) it does not entail the reduction of an event to a transparent and literal intelligible and invariable nucleus. This

means that when we speak of the “regularization of meaning” (and therefore practices), “regularization” cannot be thought of as adhering to any underlying unifying principle, in the absence of metonymical and metaphorical displacements, extensions and subversions.

Let me follow up this argument with a brief discussion of Foucault. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), Foucault seeks to examine the unifying principles that underlie discursive formations. He rejects four key hypotheses: that discursive unity is established (a) in reference to the same object, (b) by a common style in the production of statements, (c) by the constancy of the concepts and (d) in reference to a common theme (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 105). Instead, regularity is made possible by the *dispersion* of elements and the complex rules of the elements’ formation:

Such an analysis would not try to isolate small islands of coherence in order to describe their internal structure; it would not try to suspect and to reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of division. Or again: instead of reconstituting *chains of inference* (as one often does in the history of the sciences or of philosophy), instead of drawing up *tables of differences* (as the linguists do), it would describe *systems of dispersion*. Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*. (Foucault, 2002, p. 41)

This means that when examining regularized and institutional social arrangements, our efforts should not be hindered by aprioristic presumptions about where regularization is to be sought. If our ultimate effort is to track “the nation’s” regularized relations, it must be sought everywhere and in everything: in thought, in practice, in institutional arrangements, in speech, in metaphor, in rhetoric etc. In this sense, what is ultimately of interest to us, is sketching out the interstitial terrain in its multifarious instantiations through which the elusive object of “the nation” emerges. We can therefore say—and to link this with the

previous discussion—that the totalization of the emptiness of “the nation,” which invariably “slips into” signified content involves the dispersion of the signifier in a broad and heterogeneous terrain that is governed by multiple and heterogeneous rules of formation. “The nation,” we may suggest, is a regularized “clusterfuck” of everything and anything.

We should, in addition, note that when examining systems of dispersion, the analyst should be mindful that regularity in dispersion can be assessed from two symmetrically opposed perspectives: from the standpoint of *regularity* and the standpoint of *dispersion* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 105–106). We should be clear here that this distinction is merely analytic and that both standpoints are of interests to us. If we are to assess the *dispersion* of “the nation,” as a historically privileged point of reference, one has to discern its manifestation as a recurring point of reference in the social fabric. The task is to discern how the object of “the nation” emerges through the interplay between a plurality of articulated structures. It amounts to locating “the nation” where it graces us with its presence, where it deviates into absence, where it mimics the general form of literality, where it recedes into metaphor, in its rhetorical caprices etc. Conversely, if regularity in dispersion is assessed from the standpoint of *regularity*, as opposed to dispersion, we are led to a performative understanding of the social body. The social is seen as an aggregation of differential subject positions whose modes of conduct are of a recurring nature (spatialization). From this analytic standpoint, what we are interested in discovering are the mechanisms that, through their dispersion and complex rules of formation, endow the social body a relative degree of regularity.

Now, it is my estimation that scholarly work on nationalism, to the extent that it deployed a (quasi)structuralist perspective, has predominantly analyzed the phenomenon of “the nation” from the standpoint of *regularity*. This is the reason why “extra-nationalistic” explanations were given for the emergence of nations. The work of Gellner should offer us a clear example. Nationalism for him concerns the superimposition of a “high” communicatory culture vis-à-vis state-led education. This process is thought to be driven by the imperatives of industrial culture, which require occupational interchangeability and therefore standardized communication. The nationalist principle is satisfied to the

extent that the political unit is fused with the cultural unit, vis-à-vis a congruent communicatory culture. There is certainly merit to Gellner's argument. What he is describing is a variety of structures (the state-education-industrialism-communication nexus) that, in modern times, endow the national social body a relative degree of regularity. But it does not necessarily follow that these modern structures should assume a distinctively national form or engender the ideological and structural family resemblances of what comes to be known as "nationalism." Nor does Gellner's framework explain how the object of "the nation" is elevated to the status of the transcendent, and how its associated ideological structures come to be perceived as natural. Gellner gives us the impression that the nationalist principle is "somewhere out there" waiting to be fulfilled, but he does not explain how that very principle and its associated family resemblances come to appear to us as objects, through the complexity of their constitutive relations. And it is in this respect that Foucauldian theory can be particularly useful and help us capture the succession and dispersion of "the nation:"

The conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to 'say anything' about it, and [...] if it is to establish with them relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation – as we can see, these conditions are many and imposing [...] the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations [...] These relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization; and these relations are not present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is being analysed; they do not indicate the web, the immanent rationality, that ideal nervure that reappears totally or in part when one conceives of the object in the truth of its concept. They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its

irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority.

(Foucault, 2002, pp. 49–50)

The appearance of objects is enabled neither by their internal constitution nor by the logic of a pre-existing structure but through the very forms of their complex relations. Let us proceed by engaging the work of Anderson. Anderson (2006) identifies a number of factors that he deems to be central to the emergence of national consciousness: the decline of traditional legitimation systems (e.g., the demotion of sacred languages), capitalist expansion, the proliferation of print technologies, the fatality of linguistic diversity, the cultivation of a novel conception of time (through calendrical time, novels and newspapers) as empty, homogenous, and transverse, etc. Now, what are these identified factors, if not the conditions of possibility that enable the very appearance of the object of “the nation?” In this respect, I agree with the general contours of Anderson’s argument. But I believe that Anderson’s argument is unsatisfactory, if it is not subjected to more radical theoretical considerations. For it does not follow that the very conditions that enable the appearance of the object of “the nation” necessarily lead to the profuse institutionalization of the object. For Anderson, as an example, the creole revolutions and the subsequent establishment of the creole states were historically among the first to take on a national form. It was, specifically, the role of pilgrim functionaries and print-men that helped engender the national imagined community:

neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create in themselves the kind, or shape, of imagined community [...] to put it another way, none provided the framework of a new consciousness — the scarcely-seen periphery of its vision – as opposed to centre-field objects of its admiration or disgust. In accomplishing this specific task, pilgrim creóle functionaries and provincial creóle printmen played the decisive historic role. (Anderson, 2006, p. 65)

An argument worth taking into consideration, indeed, but even as Anderson notes, creole revolutions, while being fostered by a certain collective imaginary, were not necessarily overdetermined by nationalist narratives: “The Declaration of Independence of 1776 makes absolutely no reference to Christopher Columbus, Roanoke, or the Pilgrim Fathers, nor are the grounds put forward to justify independence in any way ‘historical,’ in the sense of highlighting the antiquity of the American people. Indeed, marvellously, the American nation is not even mentioned” (Anderson, 2006, p. 193).

What can only be deduced from this discussion is what I have been repeatedly emphasizing: the structural factors that may enable the appearance of an object (i.e., “the nation”) do not necessarily lead to the instituting of that object. The American War of Independence could hardly be characterized as a *national* revolution, having largely *preceded* a historical trajectory of articulated constructions that enabled: (a) the proliferation of the object of the nation; and (b) the diffusion of nationalistic ideological family resemblances. While the establishment of the American settler states was not incidental to the development of nationalism, it was, in fact, in the Old Continent that nationalist narratives proliferated. A similar critique could be waged against Nairn, who ties the birth of nationalism to anti-colonial movements. It is by now firmly established that the first articulated political expressions of the concept of “the nation” were bellied by European scholars in what would become imperial centres—not in the colonial “periphery” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 11; Habermas, 1996b, p. 127; Hutchinson, 2005, Chapter 2; Kedourie, 1961; Smith, 1998, pp. 9–10).

This discussion leads us to a clear conclusion. To the extent that the object of “the nation” comes to contaminate the sites of its dissemination (e.g., print), it has to be imported from a *heterogeneous space of representation*. Indeed, this is something that is touched upon by Anderson, albeit in the absence of a theoretical framework that can enable the effective theoretical execution of his historical findings. He notes that

As Seton-Watson most usefully shows, the nineteenth century was, in Europe and its immediate peripheries, a golden age of vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and

litterateurs. The energetic activities of these professional intellectuals were central to the shaping of nineteenth-century European nationalisms in complete contrast to the situation in the Americas between 1770 and 1830. (Anderson, 2006, p. 71)

Thus, the question of key importance is how all of the above-identified “social factors” come to be aggregated, irrespective of the fact that they may operate in heterogeneous spaces of representation. A related critique concerns Foucault’s unsatisfactory theoretization of the *frontiers* between discursive formations (see Laclau, 2007a). As Laclau (2007a) notes, “if regularity in dispersion is the only principle of unity of a discursive formation, what remains open is the question of the frontiers between discursive formations, a question to which Foucault, at this stage, was unable to give any precise answer” (p. 545). In other words, Foucault was unable to convincingly answer how heterogeneous spaces of representation can come to be aggregated and moreover how this aggregation can maintain a field of politics, through which novel relations can be articulated, such as the diversity of articulations in reference to the common object of “the nation.”

From the standpoint of Post-Marxian thought, this problem is solved with the introduction of the concept of the field of discursivity. As a reminder, the field of discursivity designates the “floating excess” of signifiers. What we are referring to here is the very possibility of articulatively connecting a signifier to differential signifieds. Thus, heterogeneous spaces of representation can be aggregated vis-à-vis the instituting of signifiers that operate as *nodes* connecting heterogeneous spaces of representation. The very fact that all signifiers are characterized by an excess that cannot be subsumed by the discursive structure or their corresponding signified, means that they can be articulatively connected to heterogeneous spaces of representation. This potential is enabled by the *polysemic* character of every signifier. It is for this reason that the signifier “the nation” can become a common object of reference in spaces that are characterized by heterogeneous rules of formation. The rules of formation of national art narratives, as an example, may be distinctively different from the national legal system’s rules of

formation. But those two heterogeneous spaces of representation can be “aggregated” in reference to the same potentially privileged object, that is, “the nation.”

This possibility is enabled by the fact that heterogeneity does not entail spaces of representation that are characterized by relations of absolute difference. We have consistently disputed this hypothesis. To the extent that two heterogeneous spaces of representation are aggregated, they will be characterized by some sort of metonymical contiguity that operates through relations of equivalence. Let us compare “traditionalist” versus “democratic” conceptions of nationhood. A traditionalist understanding of “the nation,” as an example, does not exhaust our understanding of nationhood. It therefore does not operate in complete externality to questions of national democracy. Traditionalist conceptions of nationhood may be structured through multiple historical references, biologisms, etc., whereas democratic conceptions of nationhood may be overdetermined by liberal-democratic narratives. Can there be a point of convergence between the two spaces of representation? No doubt, since the content of these seemingly independent discursive formations may be conjoined by similar themes. They could even come to be fused through channels of metonymical contiguity, or they may even come to be metaphorically displaced by one another. A debate that I recently witnessed in a coffee shop in my home island of Cyprus between a fascist and a progressive can illuminate this argument. The fascist proclaimed his hatred of immigrants on the basis of his presumed superiority as a Greek, in light of Greece’s exalted cultural tradition. For him, immigrants were a form of infestation, whose presence would result in the annihilation of his Greek cultural history. The progressive wittingly challenged him on the basis of their shared Greek inherited cultural traits: to the extent that ancient Greece’s greatest achievement was the invention of democracy, we, as Greek descendants, are called upon to uphold the principles of democracy and support the democratic inclusion of others. The progressive’s argument was brilliantly executed on the basis of multiple rhetorical displacements. He engaged the fascist on the basis of his traditionalist discourse, while bringing to the fore Greece’s historical connection with Athenian democracy. In doing so, he subverted a range of other historical elements that typically overdetermine and fuel Greek nationalist-fascist ideology (hatred against Muslim immigrants, as an example, is often articulatively bred in reference to Greece’s

historical connection with Orthodox Christianity.) A successful elision was constructed between the notions of democracy, nationhood, and the latter's history. "The nation" operated as a pivotal point, through which a traditionalist conception of "the nation" was connected to a "democratic" conception of the nation. From then on, the progressive introduced an additional rhetorical displacement by appealing to a modern conception of democracy—that is, of *pluralistic democracy*. In doing so, he overshadowed—or, better yet, subverted—the factual democratic insufficiencies of the ancient Athenian regime. These articulated expressions were, of course, enabled by the floating character of "the nation" and "democracy," both of which operate as privileged nodal points in contemporary political discourse (at least in European contexts).

We are now adequately equipped to comprehend the core of my argument: *that nationhood entails the proliferation and constant displacement of the signifier of "the nation."* "The nation" becomes a privileged nodal point through which a plurality of subject positions are metonymically aggregated and upon-which a plurality of political struggles converge. The field of discursivity is the terrain through which "the nation" and its associated ideological family resemblances dominate the social. It is only in light of this realization—and in the aftermath of our shattering any presumed essentialist determinations—that the full breadth of the contribution of theorists of nationalism comes to life. For if we consider the total aggregate of theoretical expositions on nationalism, *it becomes clear that what they identify are the differential subject positions and family resemblances that come to be fused vis-à-vis the privileged signifier of the nation.* A standardized system of education (Gellner, 1983), communication media (Anderson, 2006; Deutsch, 1966; Giddens, 1985; Smith, 1986), state administrative expansion and penetration in "civil society" (Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1981, 1985; Mann, 2010; Tilly, 1975), capitalism (Giddens, 1981, 1985; Mann, 2010; Nairn, 1975), labour division (Brass, 1991; Hechter, 1975; Hroch, 1985; Smith, 1986), the assertion of democratic rights (Habermas, 1996b; Mann, 2010), citizenship (Anderson, 2006; Habermas, 1996b; Smith, 1986), territorial sovereignty (Anderson, 2006; Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1985) modern industrial production (Gellner, 1983; Mann, 2010), militarism and conscription (Mann, 2010; Tilly, 1975; E. Weber, 1976), ethnic identifications (Armstrong, 1982;

Hutchinson, 2005; Smith, 1986), collective myths (Armstrong, 1982; Hutchinson, 2005; Smith, 1986), collective memories (Hutchinson, 2005; Smith, 1986), collective corporate will (Kohn, 1965; Renan, 1990), formal scholarly work on nationhood (Anderson, 2006; Kedourie, 1961; Smith, 1986), the ordering of gendered relations (Enloe, 2014; Kandiyoti, 2004; Sluga, 1998; Walby, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1993), the ordering of sexual norms (Mosse, 1985), and so on and so forth, all represent differential structures and subject positions that come to be contaminated by, and therefore fused in reference to, the sublime object of “the nation.” *In a twist of irony, the ultimate goal of my critiquing the aforementioned authors, was not to show that they were wrong, but how they could be right.* It is only by coming to be overdetermined by “the nation” that these structures assume a distinctively national form and can come to occupy the same communitarian space, despite their constitutive heterogeneity. By extension, it is to the extent that “the nation” is understood in reference to these structures—or better yet, family resemblances—that it assumes “concrete” content. There is thus a constant and precarious oscillation between the name of the community’s limits and the concrete determinations that the name receives.

I will later explain exactly how the signifier “the nation” is elevated to the status of the “transcendent,” but for now what is important to note is that to the extent that “the nation” comes to be experienced as a privileged point of reference, political imaginaries will be articulated in reference to it. This means that political identities will attempt to dominate the signifier of “the nation” with their own narratives. Considering the broader implications of this, one can say that “Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 112). It is in this respect that the political moment represents the instituting of the social and, by extension, of power relations. It follows, then, that the very institutionalization of power and therefore hegemonic relations is immanent to acts that inhere to the field of discursivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 134–137). The signifier of “the nation,” by virtue of its floatedness, can be likewise deployed in reference to the narratives of the political Left *and* the political Right, as an example. “To ‘hegemonize’ a content would therefore amount to *fixing* its meaning around a nodal point. The field of the social could thus be regarded as a trench war in which different political projects strive to articulate a

greater number of social signifiers around themselves” (Laclau, 1990, p. 28). Let us consider an example. Post-World War II reconstruction efforts in Britain were, to a large extent, executed in reference to the notion of social welfare and the concrete forms that this notion assumed. There were contestations concerning the character and the breadth of the welfare project, but there were minimal disagreements about its necessity. In this sense, welfare became a common point of reference through which a plurality of subject positions came to be aggregated and upon which a variety of political struggles converged. But we need to further add that the welfare project was powered by distinctively national determinations that imbued it political value. The political success of Post-World War II British governments lay in the fact that they were able to articulatively project the welfare state as a national project. It was because welfare was marked by the sacredness of “the nation” that it was able to exercise its hegemonic effects.

This discussion reveals that the hegemonization of social arrangements necessarily entails them being marked by the interest of particular identities. And while any social arrangement that is hegemonized will receive determinations from a plurality of identities that deploy it in reference to their political imaginary, *one identity will come to saturate it, more than any other, with its own ideas and interests*. This outpours from the very logic of discourse: the highly overdetermined character of the social and the complexity of its co-constitutive relations entails an unevenness that can never be overcome. The principle of absolute equality, while a useful political imaginary that can be deployed in the context of specific political struggles, can only assume the status of a horizon but not a ground (Butler, Laclau, & Laddaga, 1997). These considerations lead us to a critical juncture in our argument, concerning the political centrality of hegemony. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) so aptly articulate it,

Every historical bloc — or hegemonic formation — is constructed through regularity in dispersion, and this dispersion includes a proliferation of very diverse elements: systems of differences which partially define relational identities; chains of equivalences which subvert the latter but which can be transformistically recovered insofar as the place of opposition itself becomes regular and, in that way, constitutes a new difference; forms of overdetermination which

concentrate either power, or the different forms of resistance to it; and so forth. The important point is that every form of power is constructed in a pragmatic way and *internally* to the social, through the opposed logics of equivalence and difference; power is never *foundational*. The problem of power cannot, therefore, be posed in terms of the search for *the* class or *the* dominant sector which constitutes the centre of a hegemonic formation, given that, by definition, such a centre will always elude us. But it is equally wrong to propose as an alternative, either pluralism or the total diffusion of power within the social, as this would blind the analysis to the presence of nodal points and to the partial concentrations of power existing in every concrete social formation. This is the point at which many of the concepts of classical analysis — ‘centre’, ‘power’, ‘autonomy’, etc.—can be reintroduced, if their status is redefined: all of them are contingent *social logics* which, as such, acquire their meaning in precise conjunctural and relational contexts, where they will always be limited by other — frequently contradictory — logics; but none of them has absolute validity, in the sense of defining a space or structural moment which could not in its turn be subverted. (pp. 142–143)

If we are to accept that “nationalism” and “nationhood” are constituted and constitutive of complex sites and uneven relations of power, then the prime-most analytic (and by extension political task) is to unravel the overdetermined relations that enable the ongoing emergence of “the nation” and its associate family resemblances. This involves tracking “the nation’s”—and its associated family resemblances—breadth of dispersion in the field of overdetermination. It also involves illuminating how it comes to be imbricate in nodal points that are imbued with power potential (e.g., the state, legal system, education system, etc.). From then on, the task consists of identifying which political identities and therefore political antagonisms converge upon these sites of dispersion, and on the basis of what rhetorical displacements political contestation is executed. Finally, we would inquire which political identity is most successful in saturating these sites of dispersion with its narratives and interests, and what content this operation assumes.

The political contestations that frequently surround the notion of nationhood is certainly something that is often identified by scholars (Hutchinson, 2005; Jenkins & Sofos, 2005b, p. 9; Smith, 1986, pp. 138–139, 156–157). Michael Mann (2010) as an example, in his socio-historical study on the emergence of nationhood notes that “[m]ost conceptions of what the nation stood for were strongly contested” (p. 733) and that “the national issue was important and as contentious as was representation” (p. 731). He goes on to suggest that “[f]ew states started the period as nationally homogeneous: Most contained regions with distinct religious and linguistic communities, and many regions had their own political institutions, or memories of them” (p. 731). This passage accords seamlessly with the theoretical premises that have been thus far laid: “nationhood” entails a site upon which political antagonisms converge. It thus came to be riddled with the vicissitudes of political acts that sought to order the emerging community’s meaningful terrain. This further resulted in the increasing displacement of “the nation,” which came to saturate citizens’ experience:

We saw that social behaviour—even intimate social behavior such as sexual mores—became “naturalized,” more nationally homogeneous. Quite unconsciously, most state activities furthered the nation as an experienced community, linking the intensive and emotional organizations of family and neighborhood with more extensive and instrumental power organizations. (Mann, 2010, p. 730)

A cautious reading of this passage would not fall prey to the presumption of full-homogenization. A measured analysis would suggest that just *some* modes of conduct, in particular contexts, may have been successfully “homogenized,” entailing an absence of antagonisms in respects to those modes of conduct. Homogenization, as we have seen, entails the absence of politics. But we have also established that the institutionalization of any social arrangements, especially in dense technological contexts, results in the introduction of additional dislocating effects. Thus, “the nation” is trapped between a perpetual dialectic between the time-space continuum. It is a site through which social arrangements acquire a certain level

of stability, and through which social arrangements are disrupted, leading to their politicization.

“Nationhood” thus entails the constant birth and death of political imaginaries that converge upon the site of “the nation” and its associate family resemblances (e.g., the state, the education system, the capitalist economy etc.). Indeed, this ambiguous dialectic between spatialization and temporality, in our sense of the terms, is something that is recognized by Mann (2010) himself:

Yet, I doubt if these later enlarged states were actually as coherent in many ways as had been the late eighteenth-century British and Prussian states. For as more of social life became politicized, so did its conflicts and its confusions. As the scope of state functions widened, parties and states became more polymorphous. By 1900, politics concerned diplomacy, militarism, nationalism, political economy, centralization, secularization, mass education, welfare programs, temperance, votes for women, plus many more particular issues. Thus politics mobilized state elites against mass parties, class against class, sector against sector, church against church and secular state, peripheral regions against center, feminists against patriarchs - and many others. By comparison, eighteenth-century politics had been relatively simple. (p. 735)

It is worth re-emphasizing, at this point, that the polysemic character of signifiers is what allows this precarious convergence between a plurality of identities and political articulations. I need not reiterate at this point that “nationhood” will signify something different to each socio-political identity, even if they occupy the same communal space (as a reminder, it is nominal “emptiness” that circumscribed the community). Aggregations around the notion of “nationhood” and its associated family resemblances can only be metonymical, that is, characterized by uneven contiguities in meaning. This means that any process of metonymical aggregation around a node (e.g., “the nation,” “the state,” etc.) will necessarily result in possible antagonisms, precisely because there will be “disagreements” about the meaning and practices that are associated with that node. As an example, men and women may both think of themselves as national citizens. But their understanding of nationality will entail points of convergence

that will enable them to operate in the same communal space and points of divergences that will breed potential antagonisms. Aggregation and antagonism are thus two sides of the same coin. This ambiguity, I should note, is frequently identified by gender-oriented analyses of nationalism. Let us take Enloe's (2014) work as an example. She notes that

Women have had distinctly uneasy relationships with nationalism. On the one hand, thousands of women have discovered in nationalist movements a new public persona and an opening for new political participation. Seeing themselves as, and being seen by others as, members of a nation have given these women an identity larger than that defined by domesticated motherhood or marriage. On the other hand, even when they have been energized by nationalism, many women have discovered that, in practice, as women, they often have been treated by male nationalist leaders and intellectuals chiefly as symbols—patriarchally sculpted symbols—of the nation. Women have served as symbols of the nation violated, the nation suffering, the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest. Being reduced to a symbol has meant that women have not been treated as genuine participants (with their own ideas, goals, and skills) in the nationalist movements organized to end colonialism, ethnic domination, racism, and globalized capitalist exploitation. (p. 87)

Her argument converges remarkably with my own. “The nation,” entails an identificational plane of contiguity that fuses differential identities—men and women, this case. In this sense, “the nation” is undercut by a plane of “equality”—or better yet, “equivalence.” Its broad rhetorical displacement in the field of discursivity affords it the symbolic semblance of “sameness”—men and women are both *nationals*. But this displacement may also invigorate political imaginaries that may lead to novel political antagonisms and projects—it is an avenue through which women may assert their right to political participation. We are reminded here that power is never a zero-sum game. Nonetheless, the unevenness of the social tends power toward a certain direction: “nationhood” is, to a larger extent, saturated by “male

narratives” that result in the subordination of women. “The nation” thus becomes a site through which male hegemony is asserted—the hegemonization of a particular content (e.g., patriarchal ideas) entails a process of cross-contamination between heterogeneous identities. It is because “womanhood” can be produced, in part, vis-à-vis male narratives that men can exercise their power over women. And it is in this sense that the field of overdetermination is the terrain through which power precipitates.

“Womanhood” is subordinated to “manhood,” because it is symbolically overdetermined by the latter, and “the nation” operates as a privileged nodal point through which this operation of power is stitched together.

What becomes clear here is that the hegemonic operation involves a process “whereby a certain particularity is never *mere* particularity because it is always criss-crossed by equivalential relations that ‘universalize’ its content” (Laclau, 2014, p. 150). This premise can be extended to any social logic: class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, race, etc. In this sense, identities and modes of conduct that exercise their power hegemonically over heterogeneous elements are constitutively split between their site of “origin” (the “powerholders”) and the sites of their diffusion (the “subordinated” identities). This enables us to understand how structures of power are invariably subjected to modes of resistance that may result in the former’s subversion. To the extent that a hegemonized element is “split” and therefore “distanced” from its site of “origin,” it becomes vulnerable to becoming appropriated by competing political identities that may come to overdetermine that element with their own narratives. The social is therefore invariably governed by an openness that can never be overcome, and the construction of any hegemonic (national) bloc is an ongoing process characterized by constant shifts and fissures.

Having reached this conclusion, an important question still hovers in the background. Being highly sensitive to positivistic traps, we have thus far emphasized the dynamism of hegemonic politics. In other words, we were careful not to subordinate the complexity of nationalism’s plurality, to seemingly stable social determinants. We, therefore, emphasized how social arrangements are invariably subject to flux and re-definition. This is, no doubt, the position I wish to endorse. However, this is not to suggest that hegemonic configurations are something that can easily be re-defined or overcome. If that were

indeed the case, then our efforts would be rendered pointless. The political significance of hegemonic formations concerns not only the force they exercise but also their diachrony. In fact, if as I will argue later, *politics is the general form of temporality, then hegemony inheres to the temporal dimension of social life, as the very structure that gives being to diachrony*. We are, therefore, called upon to explore, in greater detail, how hegemonic arrangements come to crystallize. Exploring the ideological dimensions of social life, as they operate through the articulation of value, is central to such endeavours. Let us proceed.

Ideology and the Nation-State

In the present section, I wish to explore further the connection between “the name” that marks the limit of the community (e.g., the nation) and the concrete institutional forms that national life assumes. The aim is, therefore, to develop a theoretical connection between what I have designated as nationalism’s family resemblances and the dispersion of the privileged signifier of “the nation,” which not only overdetermines its family resemblances, but also comes to mark the community’s limits.

I have already alluded to the argument that I wish to develop: there is an essential connection between the totalization of the national community and the regularization of national life. Why is this so? As we already established, the instantiation of any discursive element (e.g., social conduct, institutionalized process, belief, attitude, etc.) entails the invocation of the total discursive structure, since that element can only be understood in terms of its differential and equivalential connection with all other discursive elements. Thus, since every instance of regularization involves the invocation of the whole discursive structure, the “name” of the limits of the structure is present in every instance of regularized conduct. “The name” that marks the community’s limit inheres to every concrete social act. Totalization and regularization are coextensive. The premise I wish to develop lays only a step further: to the extent that social practices entail the symbolic presence of the community’s limits (the nation) both come to be

experienced as *symbolically homologous*. This, however, is not to suggest that “the nation” comes to exhaust all aspects of social life. Such argument would entail a reversal back to positivism. It would, moreover, render any discussion of nationalism useless—if everything is nationalism then there could be no standpoint from which to deconstruct, or critique the phenomenon of interest. I have already stressed that nationalism entails the *uneven* dispersion of the signifier of “the nation” in the field of discursivity and the discursive fabric. Thus, the first question of interest is *to what extent* this privileged signifier overdetermines the plural and heterogeneous forms of social life. “Democracy,” as an example, is typically saturated by the presence of “the nation” to a much greater extent than, let us say, a comic convention. It is thus more likely to be homologically associated with the limits of the community and, as an extension, the communal totality. The relevant analytic task, therefore, concerns identifying structures that, by coming to be overdetermined by “the nation,” come to be homologically associated with it.

These endeavours are directly connected to the question of *value*. In every historical period, certain social arrangements come to be imbued with greater value and, therefore, acquire a certain privileged status. Some social arrangements may, moreover, be cathected with such high value that they come to be experienced as unwavering, inevitable, and natural (e.g., “God” before the advent of secularism). To the extent that these arrangements are effectively saturated by what comes to be associated with the limits of the community (i.e., “the nation”), they will operate as associated “substitutes” for that limit. This is the reason why, as an example, the limit of the national community is referenced vis-à-vis differential forms of *highly valued* social conduct, such as “democracy,” “welfare,” “the state,” “tradition,” “our way of life,” etc. To the extent that there is an alignment between these “power centres” (e.g., “the nation,” “the state,” and “democracy”), national hegemony comes to be crystallized. Conversely, if there is a pronounced discrepancy between “power centres” (e.g., between “the nation” and “the state”), the social will be more vulnerable to social upheaval, crises, and competing hegemonic articulations. As a preliminary guiding premise, I wish to suggest that *nationalist ideology* entails a movement toward the sedimentation and crystallization of concrete social arrangements—what we have termed nationalism’s family resemblances (e.g., the state, democracy, welfare, the free market,

lifestyle patterns, myths of origin, etc.). These family resemblances come to be homologically associated with the community's limits (i.e., the nation). They come to be symbolically elevated to the status of essential being, by obfuscating their historical contingency. As such, they come to be perceived as necessary and therefore natural. Let us proceed by substantiating these provocative assertions.

Our theoretical starting point is Roland Barthes' theory of *myth*. For Barthes, myth is not characterized by any essential content but is, instead, a semiotic form. Myth is immanent to any process of meaning-construction. It entails a process whereby the symbolic association between terms, generates a second-order signification. Let us consider the example of "freedom or death" as deployed in Greek nationalist narratives. The expression is constituted by three terms, each of which invokes a particular set of meanings depending on the context of its invocation. The argument holds that, in "stringing" these three terms together, a new layer of meanings is generated (second-order signification) that subverts the particularistic content of each three signifiers. The expression "freedom or death" extends the conceptual terrain beyond the singularity of the terms deployed, by invoking a certain attitude toward war, violence and the territorial homeland: as a Greek I am willing to sacrifice my life, kill others if necessary, so as to ensure that (territorial) sovereignty is exercised by the legitimate nation—our nation. But the expression also involves the invocation of historical continuity: its deployment conjures images of past "Greek" glory and grievances: The Fall of Constantinople, the Greek War of Independence, the Cretan Revolution, the Greek-Cypriot War of Independence, the Battle of Thermopylae, etc. This complexity of meaning does not inhere to the singularity of each term ("Freedom," "or," "death") but is established in terms of their symbolic association. Thus, the meaning of each individual term is subverted while a new meaning emerges, that is, a second-order signification. Let us now recall a premise that was established in previous discussions. Symbolic significations operate beyond the realm of speech and writing and are, in fact, coterminous with social life (Laclau, 2014, p. 145). The implication here is clear: Barthes' argument can be generalized and applied to the whole social fabric. This means that social life is constitutively constructed by process of meaning construction that operates through various forms of subversion and

displacement. Myth, subversion and therefore distortion is the very substance of social life (Laclau, 2014, p. 25).

The question now is the following: what does myth have to do with our discussion of nationalism and more specifically the question of value? To which I answer: everything. What Barthes' theory brilliantly elucidates is that the very semiotic forms that govern discursive logics result in a *constitutive unevenness in meaning through processes of subversion*. To say that a string of meanings materializes by subverting other meanings is precisely to state that a value and therefore power-differential precipitates. This is tantamount to stating that a power relation has been established. The hegemonic operation and myth therefore inhere to one another: to hegemonize a content entails a particularity being imbued with higher value by coming to be equivalentially connected to other (competing) narratives, thus subverting their content. Let us consider, as an example, the case of the "United Kingdom." This signifier that marks the limits of the said community has, without a doubt, been subjected to a wide range of interpretations throughout the years. Its meaning is highly contested by rivalling political and economic ideologies, ethnicities, races, genders, and so on and so forth. But at the same time, a particular range of its constitutive determinations have acquired a high degree of stability over time. The market economy, individualism, individual liberty, are all relatively stable points of reference that come to be associated with British social life. And while they are not imbued with a literal core meaning, they are more so saturated by liberal family resemblances. The fact that they are deployed as reoccurring sites of aggregation, antagonisms or for the pursuit of political rights, without being highly contested as notions, speaks to the fact that they are elevated in value and have acquired a high degree of stability. Their elevation in value operates through their effective subversion of and subsumption of (competing) heterogeneous narratives. Socialist narratives proper cannot compete against liberal narratives in the U.K.—they can only acquire legitimacy if they are articulated in accordance with liberal "grammar." Social democracy and the New Labour Party are the associated bastardized offsprings of liberal hegemony. But one should also add that while liberalism has acquired a certain hegemonic status in this context, it operates vis-à-vis the hegemonization of nationalism—liberalism and its associated family

resemblances come to be homologically associated British *national* life. There is, in this case, a relation of contiguity between “the nation” and “liberalism”—a metonymical connection vis-à-vis a symbolic equivalence. Both are, moreover, nodal points, that is, privileged sites that fix the signification chain and that, as an extension, come to operate as sites of aggregation and political antagonisms. And both are imbued with high value, since they can effectively (though never absolutely) subvert the content of other (competing) narratives and social arrangements. The implication here is *that a hegemonic bloc is effectively constructed to the extent that nodal points—and let us emphasize that they are imbued with high value—are articulated as symbolic equivalents*. This helps us understand the relative “success” of the Europe nation-state in the mid-twentieth century. It was the first time in the nation’s history where there was a relative but strong metonymical equivalence between nation, economy, culture, politics, education, tradition, etc. —an equivalence that was, of course, destabilized by the onslaught of post-fordism, neoliberal globalization and various associated contemporary social developments (e.g., “postmodernism,” “reflexive modernization,” “post-industrialism” “liquid modernity,” etc.) (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003; Giddens, 1994; Harvey, 1990; Laclau, 1989; Lyotard, 1984; Touraine, 1971).

What is important to note is that if the link between these homological structures acquires a strong symbolic connection (that is of course expressed in “concrete” social arrangements), the relation of contiguity will start shading into one of *analogy*. The relation will no longer simply express a meaningful terrain of metonymical contiguity, but planes of *metaphorical replacement* (Laclau, 2014, p. 109). To the extent that this metastasis from metonymy to metaphor materializes, hegemonic planes will come to be crystallized. It represents the ultimate operation of contamination where, in our case, “the nation” will come to operate as a *replacement* for a series of other nodal points that are imbued with high value and exercise power effects: the state, the family, religion, economy, etc. This operation represents the ultimate form of subversion, where the wings of a particularity envelops the totality of being and thus emerge as a privileged node of *social condensation*.

This helps us better situate the frequently-encountered claim that increasing state intervention in the social resulted in a successfully-constructed national homogeneity. The nation was never homogenous as such. Rather, the *claimed* homogeneity of nations is better understood as a successful hegemonic construction, whereby forms of social life were successfully articulated as metaphorical replacements, and therefore equivalents, of one another. The same critique holds for the position that holds that nationalism entails the successful convergence between “politics” and “culture”—an unwarranted distinction that we dissolved earlier. But if we are to free this argument, which assumes a convergence between objective social facts, from its positivistic underpinnings, we can re-articulate it as follows: in certain historical contexts “national culture,” as a blanket term that subverts its constitutive heterogeneity, was successfully articulated as a metaphorical replacement for “national politics,” which in turn was successfully articulated in connection to concrete forms of life such as the state, the legal system, democracy, etc.

It is important to delineate the full implications of this argument. If certain elements come to be articulated as metaphorical replacements of one another, their relationship will have shifted from a relation of *visible contingency* to one of *essential connection* (Laclau, 2014, p. 63). In other words, they come to be perceived as *natural* extensions of one another. The long-standing Greek nationalistic slogan of “country, religion, family,” to use an example, is an attempted political construction at such metaphorical replacement. The three terms are presented as being, in essence, analogically equivalent. To suggest that the contingency of a relation between elements is concealed, is tantamount to stating that the origins—that is the contingent construction of the relation—comes to be forgotten. This process of collective forgetting is what Laclau (2014) calls (following Husserl) sedimentation, that is, when the contingent instance of an articulated relation has been concealed (p. 122). Conversely, reactivation (also from Husserl) “would be the moment of return to that originary instance, to that contingent institution” (Laclau, 2014, p. 122). This process of “collective forgetting” is often identified as an integral component to nationalist ideology (Billig, 1995, p. 37; Hall, 1996, pp. 613–616; Renan, 1990, p. 11). As Billig (1995) suggests, “By this reckoning, ideology operates to make people forget that their world has been historically constructed. Thus, nationalism is the ideology by which the world of nations has come to

seem the natural world—as if there could not possibly be a world without nations” (p. 37). This statement can be further generalized to intra-national arrangements. The nation-state-military nexus, as an example, often manifests itself as an inevitably essential aspect of our social world. An *ideological effect*, then, in our sense of the term is to be understood as the belief that there are particular social arrangements “that can bring about the closure and transparency of the community,” that is, arrangements that are thought to incarnate the national totality (Laclau, 2014, p. 17). Thus, there is an ideological effect whenever particular contents shows themselves as more than themselves by coming to operate as metaphorical replacements for the limits of the community (Laclau, 2014, pp. 17, 20).

While I do not wish to enter into a detailed discussion about the controversial and highly contested notion of ideology (for a detailed discussion, see Laclau’s “The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology” [2014]), some epistemological glimpses are necessary in order to substantiate this argument. The contemporary use of the notion of “ideology” can be traced to Marx (1978c) who used the term to designate the “ideal” realm of the social world, which for him obfuscated the “real” and “material” underlying relations of production. This essentialized distinction, however, could not withstand the critical onslaught of both empirical observations and increasingly radicalized theoretical directions that progressively blurred the boundaries between (a) “ideas” and “matter” and (b) “truth” and “science” (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1971b; Laclau, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, 2001). Thus, what one observes, both within and without the Marxist tradition, is either (a) the progressive destabilization of the notion of ideology or (b) the profuse application of the concept. This led to two respectively related developments. The first was the increasing scrutinizing of the concept, as in Foucault’s case (1980, p. 118), and, in various instances, to its abandonment (Laclau, 2014, p. 35). The second was the over-application of the concept—everything social was subsumed under the notion of ideology (see Laclau, 2014, pp. 12–13). It is needless to point out that both theoretical trends rendered the notion of ideology useless. At the backdrop of these developments, attempts were made to recover the category of ideology, whose conceptual and political history certainly endowed it with utility (see Zizek,

1994). More recently, Post-Marxist efforts have been advanced in this direction, as epitomized by Laclau's (2014) final publication.

For Laclau, the category of ideology can be theoretically and politically useful if it retains content from its conceptual and historical tradition, albeit in a radicalized form that rids it of any underlying essentialisms (Laclau, 2014, p. 35). Thus, what is theoretically and politically useful about the concept of ideology is its deployment in efforts to designate how, in the structuration of communal blocs, social processes are *constitutively* marked by deformation and misrecognition (Laclau, 2014, p. 15). We are merely explicating a premise thus far established: that the meaning of discursive elements, being overdetermined and, therefore, contaminated by the presence of other elements, is constitutively distorted. If by ideology we intend to refer to a process whereby meaning, through the very process of its constitution, is deformed, then ideology inheres to the structuration of any communitarian space. Barthes' exposition on myth could be read in the same light. Signifying processes produce meaningful planes that exceed the particularity of the constitutive elements, but partially retain their meaning. Thus, any signifying process distorts the content of its constitutive elements, while at the same time being parasitically contingent upon them. The question that now confronts us is whether the notion of ideology can be "saved" from an over-extension and over-application of the concept. If the discursive fabric is invariably governed by distortion effects, then is everything social deemed to be ideological? If this is affirmed, then the category of ideology is rendered theoretically and politically useless, and the possibility of critiquing ideology dissipates.

According to Laclau (2014), it is only by examining the intimate connection between power and hegemony, on the one hand, and ideology, on the other, that one can forge a framework that can re-introduce the concept and, therefore, critique of ideology. I have already foreshadowed my argument: the hegemonic operation inheres to any process of ideological construction. We have already established that "the name" that comes to mark the discursive—and therefore communal limits—cannot be a *mere* discursive element, since that would simply entail the instituting of a new conceptual difference. That conceptual difference would, strictly speaking, be internal to the discursive formation and would,

therefore, not designate the limits of the formation as such. When designating the limits of the formation, we are in essence attempting to name something that is unnamable—a “void” of pure negation that constitutively disrupts the structure of any system. The limits of discourse are not “topographical,” “conceptual,” or “linguistic”—the limits are an ontological precept that prevents the perfect structuration of any social space—and it is this very precept that we are attempting to name. Since the discursive limit—that constitutive point of pure negation and structural failure—does not inhere to the constitutive discursive relations but is rather something “external” to them, it can only be signified to the extent that *all* of the formations’ internal content is equivalentially signified. A complete internal equivalence is signified in opposition to its very limits. This entails a process whereby the differential elements that are constitutive of any discursive formation, and thus any communitarian space are equivalentially connected under a seemingly singular signifier that comes to symbolize their equivalential connection. So what is essentially signified through this pure chain of equivalence, is the incarnated body of the social. This means that a privileged nominal category, e.g., “France,” “Germany,” “U.S.A.,” etc. will come to be homologically extended to forms of life that come to be equivalentially connected. Thus, “France,” as the limits of the said community, comes to equivalentially connect a series of elements that occupy a communitarian space, many of which are operant in heterogeneous spaces of representation, e.g., “Paris,” “Marseilles,” “Rhône,” “the French State,” “secularism,” “wine culture,” “artisan cheese,” “French impressionism,” and so on and so forth.

But what is important to note is that this equivalential connection cannot retain the *specificity* of the elements, nor their oppositional differences, since they are to be subsumed under a singular category—that of “France.” The specificity of a category such as “the state,” as an example, which is marked by myriad processes and vicissitudes cannot be subsumed by the category of “France,” which moreover, refers to cultural and aesthetic elements that may have nothing to do with the state. “France” only signifies their symbolic equivalence. This means that the content of the elements, in that process of equivalential connection will be characterized by a conceptual poverty: equivalence subverts their specificity (Laclau, 2014, p. 35). At the same time the particularistic content that constitutes these

elements cannot be completely eliminated vis-à-vis the nominal category that circumscribes them, since that would entail a purely empty signifier. The notion of a purely empty signifier, as Laclau (2014) has noted, is self-defeating, since a signifier without a signified would amount to mere noise (p. 119). Thus, the totalization of the community, vis-à-vis nominal circumscription, entails the partial retention of the particularity of the elements (Laclau, 2014, p. 35). What are we, then, to conclude? If “the name” that comes to mark the limits of discourse is *necessarily present* in the instantiation of concrete arrangements that come to operate as its metaphorical replacements, and if “the name” constitutively subverts the content of those arrangements, *then the construction of hegemonic blocs is necessarily undercut by a plane of distortion—a distortion which is itself a necessary component of any signification process*. The ideological effect can therefore be understood as an originary plane of distortion that inheres to any signifying structure and therefore construction of hegemonic blocs (Laclau, 2014, p. 35). Laclau’s creative epistemological input illuminates that the construction of hegemonic blocs, as such, is invariably marked by a constitutive plane of distortion. It is in light of this realization that the category of ideology can be re-introduced in theoretical and political discourse, that is, in attempts to designate processes of distortion that inhere to hegemonic arrangements. What interests us, then, is how processes of distortion: (a) give way to hegemonic operations that name the limits of the community (in our case, “the nation); and (b) enable the signification of structures (e.g., “the state,” “public education,” “welfare,” “democracy,” etc.) that come to operate as metaphorical replacements for the communal name. If the category of ideology is to be useful, it is to be retained as a designator for processes of distortion that spiral into hegemonic structures (see Laclau, 2014, pp. 35–36) and, therefore, come to be experienced as inevitable and natural.

This conclusion leads us to our next discussion, concerning the highly contested notion of the “nation-state.” The “nation-state,” within the modernist literature, has almost exclusively been scrutinized in terms of its *facticity*. The notion is disputed on the grounds that it does not mirror empirical “reality” (Connor, 1978; Hutchinson, 2005; Smith, 1991) or affirmed as a necessary product of modernity—let us recall Giddens’ (1985, p. 219) argument that modern states can only be national states because state

administrative expansion requires a cultural (i.e., national) counterpart. In my opinion, there is something politically significant, albeit not acknowledged, about the elusive notion of the “nation-state,” as well as in the “counter-factual” deployment of the term in contemporary political and theoretical discourse. I maintain that the notion of the “nation-state” should not be assessed in terms of its facticity but in terms of its *political potential and ideological effects*. In this sense, the “nation-state” can be understood as a diachronic attempt at establishing a metaphorical relation between “the nation” and “the state,” in a process that is, of course, riddled and marred by constitutive layers of distortion.

The crystallization of national hegemonic blocs passes through various stages of construction. Heterogeneous elements are metonymically aggregated. Heterogeneous identities, demands, practices, institutions etc. come to be subsumed under privileged signifiers and privileged institutional arrangements that come to symbolize their equivalence. These institutional arrangements emerge as nodal points in the constitution of “the nation” or “the people.” They thus become metaphorical replacements for the seemingly singular community of “the nation”—they come to incarnate the national community’s absent fullness. But what is important to note is that these social arrangements are imbricated in concrete forms of social life (as opposed to the highly formalistic representation of “the nation”). Thus, these arrangements do not just designate “the name of an abstract universality, whose ‘essence’ would be repeated, beyond accidental variations, in all historical contexts” and become the name of concrete social arrangements, “whose only essence is the specific articulation of heterogeneous elements which, through that name, crystallize in a unified collective will” (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 109–110). In other words, these institutionalized lifeforms are the avenue through which the formalistic representation of “the nation,” which may often bear the highest value, comes to be imbricated in everyday life. They are the avenues through which “the nation” contaminates the social with its traces. And the reverse also holds: these institutional arrangements receive their being precisely by coming to be identified with the highest order, that is, “the nation.” To this we add, that since any discursive terrain is constitutively uneven, one institution will come to be saturated, more than any other, with the mark of the privileged signifier. This means that the signifier of “the nation” will come to be “personified” in an associated *concrete institution*.

And while there is not an essential connection between “state” and “nation,” it is very often the case that the state comes to saturate its being with the mark of “the nation” and therefore comes to appear as its natural and inevitable counterpart (ideological effect). The notion of the “nation-state” is, thus, not an inaccurate representation of reality, but it attests to the attempted (and often successful) construction of a particular type of hegemonic bloc that is ordered around the symbolically intimate relationship between “the state” and “the nation,” both of which operate as metaphorical replacements of one another.

Let me now proceed to a short but most relevant discussion concerning the state’s efficacy in articulating a hegemony that is ordered in its accordance. If we are indeed operating in the epoch of the hegemony of nations, which assumes its concrete forms vis-à-vis, among others, the hegemony of the state, then this is so to the extent that these nodal points are effectively imbued with the greatest value. I should add a clear cautionary remark here: when I speak of value, I do not deploy the term in the naïve sense of the term. A node that is imbued with value does entail it being “liked” or “wanted” or even something social actors explicitly identify with. The state, as an example, can very often come to be the source and personification of discontent. When I talk about a node being imbued with high value, I mean to suggest that the node is a site through which power materializes vis-à-vis its subverting and subsuming of competing and associated nodes.

The historical construction of the state is predicated on a clear trend. While it is true that states have historically operated on the basis of coercion, suppression, and oppression, their ascent to hegemony is also contingent on their constructed *necessity*. Let us emphasize here that “the state” refers to a cluster of family resemblances that overdetermine the social through their dispersion. But let us also qualify what overdetermination entails, should we be tempted to privilege the mental or purely formalistic aspects of this process. To say that a relation is overdetermined, is to affirm that a *necessary relationship is established vis-à-vis a contingent articulation*. It is to affirm that the identity of the elements can *only be established in terms of their interlinkage*. Necessity should here be understood, not as a theorist’s casual metaphor but as an *ontological force* of various possible intensities. The state has effectively constructed relations of necessity between its concrete functions and the various social domains it has penetrated. The

procurement of monetary union, of technological infrastructure, of law and justice, public education, private property, and so on and so forth, all represent just some of the necessary social arrangements that have, at least in the European world, come to be part of modern national life. This is the reason why state crises have the effect of disrupting a broad spectrum of the social—because the social’s various elements are mechanistically contingent upon a variety of state-saturated processes. Thus, by saying that the state, as a privileged node, is imbued with high value, I mean to state that its dispersion in the field of overdetermination effectuates a series of relations that are necessary to the workings of the national totality. Eugene Weber’s (1976) laudable historical study of how the French peasantry was, over the course of a century, gradually turned into French nationals, can be interpreted in this light. A theme that cuts through this study is how the state increasingly transformed itself from an external and alien agent to a necessary component of village life. Accounts that seek to track the state’s increasing penetration in the social (e.g., Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1985; Mann, 2010) should be interpreted in this light. Hegemony, then, is procured through the contingent construction of necessity—a necessity that, by ontological fiat, results in identities overdetermining one another. How does this discussion tie in to what was said earlier about ideology? The answer is simple. To the extent that social arrangements come to constitute *necessary* nodes that order social life, they are more likely to come to be conceived as *inevitable* and, therefore, *natural*. Constructed necessity, then, is the obverse of the ideological effect. This realization enables to more effectively track the breadth of hegemonic structures that come to be imbricated in social life.

I should briefly comment on two issues of theoretical interest, as a prelude to the next and final chapter. The first concerns the general form of political contestation. A political act is effective to the extent that it subverts the content of oppositional currents. But such an act does not operate in a discursive vacuum. It operates in the context of determinate social arrangements and indeterminate possibilities. Thus, its effectiveness will be governed by its ability to parasitically utilize those arrangements for the pursuit of political goals. To the extent that nodes that are imbued with value and power are effectively deployed, aggregated, and utilized, power will have materialized. What is politically important, then,

about “nationalism” as identified in this work, is that it constitutes the principal terrain of politics in the modern world. Nationalism should therefore be understood as the hegemonic fabric through which “modern” communities are performatively executed and politically constructed. It is understood as a variable set of overdetermined “family resemblances” that come to represent the national communal “totality.” These “family resemblances” come to be dispersed variably and unevenly, as privileged nodes in the field of overdetermination, “binding” together differential identities. And since what governs any discursive formation is the uneven play of differences, it follows that a particular identity will have saturated, more than any other, the field of overdetermination and the content of nodal signifiers (e.g., “the nation”) with its narratives, thereby establishing its hegemony. “The nation” can thus be understood as a privileged signifier of historically variable content that, through its general and uneven dispersion, fuses but unevenly privileges, multiple identities into a hegemonic bloc.

Let me remind the reader that the nationalist family resemblances are constitutively dislocated because they are co-constituted by an array of overdetermined heterogeneous elements. Thus, the deployment of the elements can only operate through discursive forms that effectively aggregate them for political purposes. This is because the aggregation of heterogeneous elements can never wholly operate on the basis of the particularity of the elements. As already established, the aggregation of elements can only be effectuated if the particularity of the elements is subverted by a general form of representation that constitutively distorts them (e.g., privileged floating signifiers such as “democracy,” “the nation,” “justice,” etc.). The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is that *the general form of politics is, essentially, rhetorical in character, that is, operating on the metonymy-metaphor continuum* (Laclau, 2014). For example, welfare state processes are imbricated in a diversity of ways in myriad social domains. And while the specificity of each process may be contested in certain contexts, such as when a legislation on social policy is being prepared, political contestation at the national level operates by subsuming these diverse processes under the general forms of “more government” or “less government.” The implication here is that political contestation is successful to the extent that rhetorical forms effectively arrest, deploy or construct *articulated necessities*, e.g., law and order, public education,

monetary policy, diplomacy, etc. The political act oscillates between extant articulated necessities and rhetorical forms that are the expression of projected political imaginaries. The political potential of metaphor, as understood in this work, should be explicated: to the extent that metaphors operate as privileged nodes of social condensation, they can, by extension, potentially encapsulate a broad scope of articulated necessities. Thus, the effective deployment of metaphors constitutes a principal dimension of politics. This is the reason why the metaphor par excellence, that is, “the nation,” can yield significant political potential if it is deployed effectively. “The nation’s” broad dispersion in the social comes to mark not only the visible articulated necessities of social life, such as the economy, public education, welfare etc., but even the most intimate and affective dimensions of the national subject. It is for this reason that the study of metaphor and the manner by which it is politically deployed, should constitute political theorists’ principal foci.

This brings us to our final discussion concerning the question of technology. The technological potential is here understood as the “distance” between the corporeal articulative capacities of the subject and (actualized) articulated potential through discursive interlinkages. *We established that the execution of the technological potential may result in inter-territorial and inter-cultural connectivity—what, essentially, in modern times, becomes the terrain of national politics.* Arrangements such as government bureaucracy, digital computing, technological infrastructure, law and order, state services, formal knowledge, etc., are examples of technological terrains upon which political antagonisms converge and hegemonic projects are constructed. What is theoretically and politically significant about the technological potential is that, as its scope of discursive interlinkages broadens, *rhetoricity as the general form of politics, can potentially arrest a wider range of discursive elements.* The classical example of how the rhetorical form of “*Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer*” arrested and penetrated the diverse constituent particularities of the German techno-socio-political milieu, while at the same time formalistically marking the limits of the national community, should serve as clear evidence. This helps us explain why and how power, in modern times, has the potential of being applied in broader scope and in greater intensities, without resorting to an essentialized understanding of power or technology. We are,

moreover, better positioned to situate the notion of “mass politics” in a new light and with keen sensitivity to the rhetorical and technological forms through which contestation, on the “mass” national scale operates.

Chapter 12: Conclusion and Implications: The Nation as Hegemonic Fabric

The present work was initiated on a clear mandate. We began by identifying certain profuse theoretical proclivities encountered in scholarly work on nationalism. Our survey of the literature revealed that the nation and nationalism is typically defined on the basis of either (a) essentialized understandings of human nature, or (b) positivistic understandings of society. The nation is understood not in terms of its full operational terrain but in terms of *an underlying referent* that is thought to engender it. Since the unity of the nation is aprioristically attributed to a “privileged” root cause, the plurality of forms that co-constitute the phenomenon of interest remain under-examined. Positivist explanations therefore obfuscated the extent to which “the nation” and “nationalism” come to be diversely imbricated in the social fabric and how the nation is totalized in light of the plurality of its constitutive forms and subject positions. Our principal research question was how heterogeneous and pluralistic social elements can come to be aggregated and totalized as, specifically, a national communal bloc. In this sense, what we sought to examine was how a national totality can emerge specifically as a “unified” totality without regressing into a positivistic logic that relied on a single unifying principle of totalization.

In addition to conducting a conventional survey of scholarly work on nationalism, our efforts were supplemented by an in-depth examination of canonical works in our field. The works of Anderson, Gellner, Breuilly, Nairn, and Smith were thoroughly examined, revealing that in each case, the theorist’s contribution was undermined by impasses that germinated because of their implicit reliance on positivistic reasoning. In every case, attempts to explain the pluralistic complexity of the phenomenon of interest reached the aporetic impasse, when theorists ultimately resorted to single-cause explanations. For Anderson it was language, for Gellner the imperatives of rationality, for Smith the ethnic core, for Nairn the materiality of uneven development. Habermas’ recent works on globalization and democracy were also considered. What was illuminated was that Habermas’ endeavours were similarly undermined by essentialized understanding of the nation-state, implicitly defined in terms of its post-World War II

variant. Our efforts led us to conclude that these theoretical shortcomings were not an outcome of conscious theoretical executions, but were, instead, derived from outdated epistemological frameworks. The literature did not possess the appropriate theoretical tools to study its object of interest.

In light of these observations, and the specific insights that were illuminated by our critique, we proceeded in constructing a new epistemological framework that sought to eliminate the vestiges of positivism. Our starting point was Michael Mann's theory of power, which functioned as a necessary theoretical pivotal point. I demonstrated how Mann's laudable efforts, which asserted the inherent "promiscuity" of power structures, fell short in fully coming to terms with the radical co-constitutionality of power structures. As an alternative, I began introducing Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony, which saw socio-political formations as discursive terrains of overdetermined forms and relations. The principal theoretical concept that was deployed as a necessary theoretical tool was discourse, which refers to the relational terrain through which social arrangements are instituted and politically contested. What is affirmed is the radical overdetermined character of the social. If the identity of the elements is understood in terms of their differential position within a relational complex, it then follows that an element contains traces of other elements—it can only be understood in reference to them. Thus, the elements that are constituted through the relational complex are necessarily governed by a dimension of equivalence to one another as well. The difference-equivalence spectrum undercuts the relational terrain of any social or political conduct and institutional arrangements. Thus, a discursive formation, the very terrain through which the social and the political operate, is understood as a set of differential ideal and material relations that are undercut by relations of equivalence.

The implication drawn from this discussion is that the instituting of the identity of the elements, which is instituted through aggregation processes, can only be metonymical in character. This means that the elements at play, to the extent that their identity is understood in terms of their difference but also their equivalence to other elements, is governed by a contiguity in meaning. This contiguity can never be reduced to a single underlying element precisely because none of the elements is governed by an aprioristic essential and pure "core." The Post-Marxian concept of discourse and overdetermination bring

to light that the identity of any element, to the extent that it is intelligible, does not precede its relational complex but is co-constituted through it. This means that any social process cannot be aprioristically attributed to any privileged “cause” (or “essence,” “positivity,” “social base,” etc.), since that “cause” does not precede its relational complex but is constituted through it.

Most importantly, the overdetermined discursive fabric through which social arrangements are instituted is constitutively uneven in the sense that certain elements may be, when compared with others, overdetermining (or subverting) a wider number of other elements. This means that certain elements within the discursive fabric, by virtue of their profuse dispersion in the field of overdetermination, will potentially operate as privileged nodes through which power is differentially distributed and through which identities will disperse their own narratives and thus contaminate other identities. In other words, nodal points imbued with value are the sites through which a hegemony comes to be constructed. This sets up the stage for a novel understanding of nationalism and national communities. I proceeded by critically examining three key issues, which constitute the literature’s principal thematic contours: (a) the history of nations, (b) the modernity of nations, and (c) the hegemony of nations.

A critical examination of historical work on nationalism revealed that the emergence of nations is not aprioristically determined by “social causes” as implied in positivistic historical accounts. The emergence of nations is best understood as a complex and ongoing process of political aggregation of (changing) heterogeneous elements (e.g., institutions, practices, values, etc.). These elements, given appropriate conditions of possibility that vary from context to context, are totalized as a specifically national totality. Their totalization entails that a particularity—in our case, the signifier of “the nation” which is, through complex processes of political contestation, elevated to the status of the “transcendent”—assumes the role of representing the communal totality. This process entails the constant and proliferating displacement of “the nation” in the discursive fabric, enabling it to operate as a node (a) through which heterogeneous elements and subject positions are aggregated; (b) upon which novel political antagonisms converge; and (c) through which power is unevenly distributed. What is therefore demonstrated is that the question of hegemony is central to historical analyses of nations. This realization

compels us to shift our efforts toward novel theoretical considerations. The key analytic task is not to determine the root causes that underlie the emergence of nations. Rather, it is to trace how, in light of the socials' constitutive heterogeneity and dislocation, a national totality comes to be constructed through the political "elevation" of a particularity that operates as a privileged point of social condensation. This injection of diachrony into the analysis adds a contemporary dimension to historical examinations of nations, because it seeks to track and reveal the ongoing political terrain through which the nation is constructed. These efforts are directly related to, and supplemented by, analysis of the so-called modernity of nations.

A critical examination of modernist theories of nationalism reveals that nations are not universally fashioned according to particular modern precepts that can ultimately be reduced to singular elements. Rather, the "modernity" of nations is best understood as a contingent cluster of family resemblances that comes to be hegemonized as "privileged" forms of social conduct. Moreover, an examination of the "technological question" that is often linked to the modernity of nations, reveals that technology does not reside in a determinate object or social process. Technology is understood as an ontological potential, wherein the subject enlarges the scope of its articulative potential through the construction of discursive interlinkages. The execution of this potential results in territorial interconnectivity and the proliferation of social dislocations. The social thus comes to be increasingly overdetermined. A two-pronged consequence follows. Firstly, diverse populations are incorporated in what becomes the attempted and contested articulations of novel totalities (e.g., nations). Secondly, identities are rendered ambiguous by the proliferation of dislocating effects. Identities thus become vulnerable to processes of inter-identity infiltration. This enables hegemonic possibilities, since hegemony entails that a particular identity "contaminates" others with its own narratives.

We then proceeded into an in-depth exploration of the notion of hegemony in light of the ontological precepts that were established. The question of principal concern was how a national hegemonic bloc is constructed. This analytic endeavour entailed a multidimensional theoretical synthesis that demonstrated how hegemony materializes through (a) the articulation of the national community's

limits, and (b) the articulation of regularized institutional arrangements that come to be associated with the national community. We were led to conclude that the limits of any community coincide with the limits of discourse as such. The circumscription of a national community therefore entails a signifier to be drawn from the discursive fabric—that is, “the nation,” that comes to represent the limits of discourse. This privileged signifier comes to symbolize the equivalential connection between the national community’s internal elements. A particular element, such as “the nation,” comes to operate as the community’s limits. From then we proceeded to explore how this privileged signifier comes to be imbricated in forms of life. What was demonstrated was that the articulation of national hegemonic blocs entails that the privileged signifier of “the nation,” through its broad dispersion and imbrication in the discursive fabric, comes to operate as a privileged node of social condensation. It becomes the reference point par excellence, through which: (a) heterogeneous subjectivities, institutional arrangements, and spaces of representation, come to be aggregated, and (b) upon which political antagonisms converge. What was concomitantly established was that the dispersion of “the nation” is constitutively uneven, meaning that it will come to mark, in variable degrees, the various domains and subjectivities of the social. This means that while some social arrangements may come to be relatively symbolically independent from “the nation,” others may come to be saturated by it. Thus, institutional arrangements that come to be thoroughly saturated by “the nation,” such as “the state,” “democracy,” “citizenship,” etc., may also come to operate as metaphorical replacements for the national community’s limits. To the extent that the relationship between “the nation” and concrete institutional arrangements starts shading from one of mere metonymy to one of metaphor, the national hegemonic formation will have crystallized. The implication here is that social arrangements that come to be associated with “the nation”—which is imbued with “transcendent” value—they will come to be perceived as inevitable and therefore natural—their historical contingency will have been subverted by the “transcendent” weight of “the nation.”

Nationalism is by extension understood as the hegemonic fabric through which “modern” communities are performatively executed and politically constructed. It is understood as a variable set of overdetermined “family resemblances” that come to represent the national communal “totality.” These

“family resemblances” come to be dispersed variably and unevenly as privileged nodes in the field of overdetermination, “binding” together differential identities. And since what governs any discursive formation is the uneven play of differences, it follows that a particular identity will have saturated, more than any other, the field of overdetermination and the content of nodal signifiers (e.g., “the nation”) with its narratives, thereby establishing its hegemony. “The nation” can thus be understood as a privileged signifier of historically variable content that, through its general and uneven dispersion, fuses but unevenly privileges, multiple identities into a hegemonic bloc.

Having achieved our endeavours in generating a non-positivistic understanding of the nation and nationalism, it is paramount to proceed into a discussion of the theoretical and political implications of our achievements. What the classic modernist school revealed, in a remarkably effective fashion, was the historical contingency of nations. In this sense, the primordiality that nationalist narratives typically ascribed unto the nation was destabilized by the onslaught of historical evidence and novel theoretical considerations. The present work furthers these attempts by radicalizing our understanding, not only of the nation and nationalism but of social communities and politics as such. It is important to consider the full implications of this assertion, by relating it to recent theoretical trends that can be summarized under the umbrella term of “deconstruction.” According to Laclau, to deconstruct a phenomenon is to strip off its taken-for-granted premises, by revealing its historical contingency. This amounts to *reactivating* the originary instituting act that generates the phenomenon of interest (Laclau, 1990, p. 35). The deconstructive act, one should further note, does not entail a mere “return to the past,” in the style of a seemingly objective historical analysis, but should be understood as a possibility that is enabled by novel political potentials or antagonisms (Laclau, 1990, p. 35). If I am able to reveal the historical contingency of the nation, it is only because the nation’s constitutive dislocation afforded me that possibility—critique germinates in the limits of discourse in the terrain of indeterminate possibilities (Foucault, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). In this sense, the modernist literature on nationalism clearly operates, *in part*, within the terrain of deconstruction. Its attempts in reactivating the nation by referring us back to the moment of its originary institution led to the de-unification of the nation, because it could no longer be conceived, as

nationalist narratives would have it, “as being unified by an endogenous underlying logic” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 49). However, the classical modernists’ attempts did not go far enough. Positivities were re-inscribed unto the nation, by relegating it, not to a determinate national essence, but to a presumed “social base.” To the extent that the originary instituting of the nation was thought to derive from an underlying *social* logic, the breadth and the complexity of “the nation’s” operational terrain was obfuscated. A (national) hegemony, as we established, is not articulated on the basis of a privileged social base, but is a complex process through which heterogeneous elements are aggregated in reference to a privileged particularity that comes to symbolize their equivalence (i.e., “the nation”).

I believe that one of the most important contributions of the present work is that it frees our political imaginaries from the fetters of positivism by allowing us to acknowledge, recognize, analyze, and politically deploy the array of discursive interlinkages that (through the technological potential) come to constitute the allusive phenomenon of “the nation.” According to Laclau, “Deconstruction makes it possible to unknot this link between historical and logical limits and to re-inscribe the apparently deviant cases in the very logical structure of the relation under analysis. The result can only be what I do not hesitate to call a widening of the transcendental horizon of politics” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 52). Thus, a critique of positivism leads us to conclude that “there is no way of morally discriminating, a priori, between particular courses of action,” whether they are political or theoretical (Laclau, 2014, p. 50). Metaphor, in the sense understood in this work, is essentially what conceals the contingency of the articulating practice—what elevates the metonymical extensions within a chain of signification to the status of analogy—where contingency is transformed into essential belonging. The present work, through its deconstructive logic, provide us with tools that can potentially reveal nationalism’s constitutive terrain of operation by (a) revealing the multifarious layers of nationalism’s contingent operations, and (b) by revealing the articulated practices that enable the appearance of the object of “the nation.” The present work can therefore be considered as a political act that destabilizes the metaphor of “the nation” by enabling us to refer back to the multifarious political acts that continually (re)construct it. “The nation” no longer appears to us as a monolith but as a contingent set of relations that can be now deployed for novel

political projects—a critique of the ideology of the nation has once again germinated in “the nation’s” sites of dislocation. To the extent that our understanding of the nation is not arrested by any presumed underlying logics, and to the extent that its constitutive terrain of operation can be revealed, our political imaginaries can widen accordingly. The deconstructive sensibility can only widen political potential.

I would like to proceed in summarizing some of the key insights, raised in the present work, that are directly related to the question of theoretical and therefore political, efficacy. These insights may help us not only better understand the contemporary political landscape but also equip us for novel political potentials. In efforts to substantiate this claim, I will then proceed in examining three contemporary issues of political relevance: populism, globalization/neoliberalism, and democracy. By conducting brief case studies, I will demonstrate how the present insights help us approach these topics with a fresh eye.

- (a) “The nation” as the social and political organizing signifier: The hegemonic operation can be summarized in terms of a two-fold process. Firstly, a particularity (e.g., “the nation”) comes to mark the community’s limits and thusly comes to operate as a privileged node of social condensation. Secondly, the particularity comes to overdetermine a broad array of institutional conduct. As heterogeneous subjectivities are aggregated vis-à-vis the privileged signifier, vis-à-vis forms of social life, political antagonisms will invariably operate through it. It will, therefore, receive determinations from the aggregated identities. The constitutive unevenness of any discursive formation will “ensure” that a particular identity will contaminate, more than any other identity, the content of this privileged signifier with its own narratives. By extension, it will have “infiltrated” other subjectivities that converge upon this privileged site of aggregation and contestation. Thus, the dialectic between the community’s “name” and the concrete forms that the name assumes are immanent to the general terrain of politics and therefore hegemony and power. This connects to an earlier discussion: any form of conduct simultaneously invokes the whole discursive structure and therefore the privileged signifier that comes to mark the structure’s limits. This means that the total architecture of

political power operates vis-à-vis a continuously operant dialectic between signifiers that come to “mark” the limits of discourse, and by extension the communal limits, and the manner by which they come to be symbolically imbricated in social life.

- (b) Metaphors that operate as a replacement for the community’s limits: The privileged signifier’s (e.g., “the nation”) dispersion in the total discursive structure is constitutively uneven. It will come to mark the multifarious social domains in variable degrees. This imparts a possibility. Some institutions or social arrangements will, through effective processes of articulation, come to be saturated by the privileged signifier. Their relationship with the privileged signifier will thus start shading into one of analogy. These institutions or social arrangements will, by extension, come to operate as metaphorical replacements for the privileged signifier and the community’s limits. In the context of European national politics, elements such as “democracy,” “our traditions,” “the state,” “our way of life,” “the people,” etc. very often operate as replacements for “the nation.” To the extent that these signifiers have been articulated thoroughly around the privileged signifier of “the nation” and come to be imbricated in necessary forms of life, they will also be endowed with high value and, therefore, yield the potential of being deployed for political purposes.
- (c) Metaphors can operationally subvert “the nation:” We have already established that the instituting of social arrangements is necessarily accompanied by an indeterminate terrain that enables the possibility of their subversion. This means that metaphors that are endowed with political potential may, for whatever reasons, come to partially subvert “the nation.” For example, the entity of “the state,” which continuously articulates its legitimacy and forms of operation around “the nation,” may come to be symbolically dissociated from “the nation.” The two entities may potentially enter into an antagonistic relationship. This helps us explain why, as an example, in recent times, due to contemporary developments such as

neoliberalism, “the state” is increasingly becoming symbolically “decoupled” from “the nation.” In our sense of the term, a relationship of analogy (metaphor) is beginning to shade back into one of metonymy (visible contingency). However, this relationship should not be seen as one governed by a clear-cut division. The traces of the past inhere in the present and future acts. The state is still intimately tied to “the nation” vis-à-vis its imbrication in necessary national forms of life, which are “mechanistically” dependent on it. This is the reason why state-opposition strategies are not typically geared against the state as such, but aim to “restore” the state to its legitimate national form. The recent rise of radical politics can be interpreted, in part, through this theoretical prism. I will utilize this theme in a forthcoming discussion on nationalist populism.

- (d) Rhetoric, Necessity and Pragmatism: Politics and social life operate on the metonymy-metaphor continuum. Metonymy and metaphor, aside from being forms of speech, are coeval and co-terminus with social and political life. The implications to be drawn from this argument for a political theory is that the general form of politics is rhetorical in character. The political act is successful to the extent that rhetorical forms can arrest necessary forms of social life, by aggregating extant arrangements and by articulating new ones. But we should note that the political act is invariably overdetermined by conditions that are highly contextual. A mere deployment of “the nation,” as an example, does not entail a successful political act, if it does not symbolically penetrate the necessities and demands of the immediate context. A political act is successful to the extent that extant arrangements are articulated in reference with contextual concerns and future political imaginaries. Thus the general form of temporality inheres to the political dimension of social life (Laclau, 1990; Vahabzadeh, 2003). Rhetoricity and therefore hegemony inhere to the fundamental experience of being (Laclau, 2014).

(e) Nationalism as hegemonic fabric: The hegemonic form of human community in modern times is the nation. This does not mean that it is the only form of community nor that it is always the most desired form of community, but that it is the form of community that has, more than any other, asserted its hegemony. The implications to be drawn from this is that political acts and imaginaries will invariably operate through a life-fabric that is necessarily highly contaminated by “the nation” and its associated family resemblances. This is something that is very often underemphasized in sociological and political analysis. It is very often the case, as an example, that studies of “racial,” “ethnic,” or “religious,” inequality are executed without considering how these forms of inequality operate through nationalistic precepts. The perpetual issue of racism in the United States, as an example, is not solely an issue of racial power or outdated racist perceptions, but is very often tied to questions concerning who the legitimate, real, normative American is. It is, therefore, contaminated by questions and perceptions about national identity. Globalization research is also plagued by this tendency. A stream of scholarly work that is structured around the presumed division between “the global” and “the national” is blind to how “the global” has been articulated through an extant national hegemonic fabric. This is an issue I will address in the next section by briefly considering recent political developments in Europe. The broader political implications of this argument should also be considered. In light of what was discussed in the previous section, one can deduce that effective political acts will necessarily operate through the prism of nationalism. Let us qualify this statement, should one be tempted to accuse us of endorsing a naive understanding of “nationalism.” To say that the nationalist hegemonic fabric has to be deployed in future political projects does not, by any means, entail an endorsement of “hot” (Billig, 1995), “bellicose” (Anastasiou, 2008b), or “reactionary” (Nairn, 1975) nationalism. Nor does it entail resorting to a xenophobic or nativist logic (Mudde, 2007). Our whole efforts in de-essentializing nationalism have given us the ability to assess the nationalist hegemonic field beyond its apparent and “hot” manifestations. Among

other things, what this reveals is nationalism's terrain of indeterminacy, that is, its fractures and fissures. Any political project will invariably utilize available discursive resources (i.e., the hegemonic fabric) that, by operating through the field of indeterminacy, may subvert or dislocate extant arrangements. This is something that the "anti-nationalist" camp, whether theoretical or political, has not been able to come to terms with. As a result, their critique of nationalism can only assume the form of an "external" assault that, in my opinion, is only marginally effective. If nationalism bears the seeds of its own "destruction," then its subversion has to *partially* inhere to its modus operandi. This, of course, does not mean that nationalism is to be solely understood in terms of its "hot" or "nativist" "variant." For us, nationalism is a hegemonic fabric that is highly overdetermined by a multifarious social fabric that operates on the basis of (changing) multiple sites of aggregation and antagonism. Thus, to state that a critique of nationalism can only operate immanently to the hegemonic fabric, does not entail resorting to nationalist rhetoric in the style of pre-world war two Europe. If "democracy," as an example, operates as a metaphorical replacement for "the nation," it can be deployed in efforts to subvert bellicose nationalistic narratives. By affirming the presumed inherently democratic character of "the nation," I can subvert xenophobic trends, if I can effectively (implicitly) impute a multiculturalism unto "the nation" vis-à-vis its metaphorical replacement of "democracy." A critique that stays true to the premises thus far established would, therefore, aim to alter the content of "the nation," vis-à-vis its metaphorical terrain of operation, or progressively replace it with signifiers that may in the future, through their dispersion, come to operate as new novel sites of social condensation.

Nationalism as Hegemonic Fabric: Globalization and Neoliberalism

It is September of 2017 and I have recently returned from the European Sociological Association's thirteenth Conference, which bore the title of "(Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities." The conference was hosted, quite appropriately, if not ironically, in Athens. The presentations covered a diversity of topics that led to fruitful discussions. I believe that I would not be exaggerating in stating that the neoliberalism-inequality-capitalism nexus constituted the conference's principal thematic focus. In all sessions and plenaries that I attended, the topic of neoliberalism constituted a principal theme of discussion, and rightly so. But I was alarmed by the fact that "neoliberalism" was frequently (implicitly) described as a process that was external to the nation-state, bearing the appearance of an abstract global behemoth. Perhaps this was nowhere else more apparent than in Wendy Brown's speech, at the closing ceremony, where she unequivocally declared the end of national sovereignty, in light of neoliberalism's onslaught—an argument that is, of course, meticulously developed in her recent publications (see Brown, 2010, 2015). This theme reflects wider tendencies deeply inscribed in the social and political canonical literature. It reflects not so much the content of an answer but the style by which the problematic is articulated.

The principal issue of contestation in the literature is whether "globalization," "neoliberalism," and "supranationalism," have undermined national sovereignty or nation-state efficacy (Beck, 2009b; Brown, 2010, 2015; Giddens, 1994; Habermas, 1996b, 1999; Holton, 2011; Sassen, 2006) and whether they have subverted, revamped, or reactivated nationalist sentiments and identifications (Ariely, 2012; Auer, 2010; Calhoun, 2007; Holton, 2011; Mann, 1997; Pieterse, 2006; Smith, 1990). It would not be an exaggeration to say that the literature on globalization has been structured around the theoretical division between "the national" and "the global." This typically holds true whether the globalization thesis is either affirmed, rejected, or accepted with reservation. Consider as evidence, the following excerpt from Castells:

The sources of social power in our world—violence and discourse, coercion and persuasion, political domination and cultural framing—have not changed fundamentally from our historical experience, as theorized by some of the leading thinkers on power. But the terrain where power relationships operate has changed in two major ways: it is primarily constructed around the articulation between the global and the local; and it is primarily organized around networks, not single units. Because networks are multiple, power relationships are specific to each network. But there is a fundamental form of exercising power that is common to all networks: exclusion from the network [...] However, because the key, strategic networks are global, there is one form of exclusion – thus, of power—that is pervasive in a world of networks: to include everything valuable in the global while excluding the devalued local. There are citizens of the world, living in the space of flows, versus the locals, living in the space of places. Because space in the network society is configured around the opposition between the space of flows (global) and the space of places (local), the spatial structure of our society is a major source of the structuration of power relationships. (Castells, 2009, p. 50)

Note how “the global” becomes synonymous with power, while exclusion becomes synonymous with “the local” in a theoretical move that can only circularly affirm the theory’s internal premises. The point I am trying to make is that the very problematic under consideration is structured by a theoretical opposition that is thought to correlate to an objective “real life” dichotomy. It is my firm belief that we need to relinquish the problematic at hand altogether. I should note that some recent literature has made laudable contributions in this respect (see Helleiner & Pickel, 2005; Hirst et al., 2009).

The question of interest, much in the line with the theoretical spirit of the present work, is how “supra-national” processes materialize in light of “national” conditions of possibility and vice versa. What we are thus interested here is not a presumed fundamental opposition, but how certain contemporary developments come to inter-penetrate and thus co-constitute one another. From then on the question is one of sketching out the landscape of political possibilities and of power distribution. The globalization

thesis, in all its variants, maintains that power has, in general, metastasized from the national to the supra-national level (e.g., Beck, 2009b; Castells, 2009; Giddens, 1991; Habermas, 2001a). As I already demonstrated in my critique of Habermas, this perspective can only acquire validity if we are to essentialize the nation-state in terms of its post-World War II social democratic variant. To assume, as an example, that the state's capacity to raise taxes has been "compromised" by the global liberalization of capital, which can now threaten flight, consists of an assault against the national-state or national sovereignty, is to ignore the very steering mechanisms within and through nation-states that have enabled this possibility. I would like to proceed into a short case study analysis, by examining the recent "Grexit" crisis, so as to add an applied dimension to my overall argument—that is, that supranational processes are invariably undercut and constituted by national dimensions.

On January 26, 2015, SYRIZA, the radical Left coalition party of Greece, was elected into office. They were voted in, after the two previous governments, one of which was led by PASOK and the other led by the New Democracy, had respectively signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs), with the TROIKA (The European Commission vis-à-vis the Eurogroup, the European Central Bank [ECB], and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]). The MoUs' officially stated purpose, was to pull Greece out of an economic crisis that had ensued following a banking and public debt crisis. The MoUs stipulated that credit be dispersed to the Greek government from its European partners (Germany being the biggest creditor) and that the Greek government execute a series of economic reforms, many of which followed neoliberal orthodoxy: increases in regressive taxes, lowering of the minimum wage, reductions in pensions, reductions in various forms of income assistance, etc. The implementation of the MoUs' clauses, essentially led to the imposition of a series of harsh austerity measures, which effectively resulted in a 25% contraction of the Greek economy, rising unemployment and rising poverty.

SYRIZA's political success was predicated on their successful anti-memorandum campaign, promising to cancel the MoUs and to renegotiate a new deal with European partners that would be based on social justice principles. The TROIKA, of course, would have none of this, insisting that the MoUs continued being implemented. Following SYRIZA's election into power, the new leadership immediately

entered negotiations with the TROIKA in what essentially resulted in a drawn-out and frustrating process, without any results or agreement. The SYRIZA government had demanded: (a) Greek government debt relief; (b) economic and political restructuring that would enable conditions conducive for economic development; and (c) the implementation of a taxation and benefits system based on social justice principles. The IMF, on the other hand, insisted on the implementation of austerity measures, while being cognizant that any austerity plan, in the absence of debt relief, would be unsustainable. The German government, which essentially spearheaded the Eurogroup, if not TROIKA as a whole, was prepared to partially concede on the issue of austerity, but was completely intransigent on the issue of debt relief: a reduction to the Greek debt would entail problems with their national constituency.

The deadlock was “resolved” in what had amounted to a highly coercive tactic by the TROIKA. In retrospect, it became clear that the TROIKA was essentially trying to run out the clock, being conscious that time was working in their favour. An agreement had to precede the June 30 deadline, when several of Greece’s installments to the IMF were due. If a deal was not met, Greece would default on its payments (as it did). An additional sum of 7.5 billion that was going to be provided to the Greek government under the terms of the MoU was withheld by its creditors. It would only be provided on conditions that the terms set by the MoU be met, or on conditions that a new MoU be negotiated. This money was essential for the daily running of the Greek government (e.g., to pay pensions, salaries, provide subsidies, etc.). Moreover, during the whole negotiation process, bank deposits were gradually being syphoned out of Greece, a process that had been exacerbated by SYRIZA’s decision to call a national referendum on whether or not to accept the TROIKA’s terms.

The Greek government had, therefore, come to face a dilemma. It could stick to its pre-election political promise of rejecting the TROIKA’s terms, but this would risk bankruptcy or (an anticipated) “bank-run” following the referendum. The Greek government would have had to resort to the introduction of a parallel currency. This would have laid down the steps for a possible return to the Greek drachma, something which would have introduced a series of uncertainties and dislocating effects into Greek society such as potential food and drug shortages and increased import prices in an economy that is

heavily dependent on imports. Being faced, on the one hand, with the uncertainties of a possible return to the drachma, and on the other hand, the imposition of a third MoU, the Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, chose to concede to the TROIKA's general demands. What could have been a historic decision came to a halt, and the possibility of choice was subsumed by the European (Monetary) Union's hegemony.

Now, these events are often interpreted as an encroachment on national sovereignty, where neoliberal interests and policies had overpowered a Greek national mandate. The SYRIZA government, after all, had a clear democratic mandate by the people, seeing how they were voted on the basis of an anti-memorandum campaign. We should also note that in the referendum, 61% of Greek voters voted against accepting the TROIKA's terms. But can these developments be interpreted not in terms of a seeming opposition between global/neoliberal encroachment and national sovereignty? Can we interpret these developments by looking at how particular interests were articulated from within a nationalist hegemonic fabric that is also constituted by supra-national dimensions? While I cannot be exhaustive in my approach I would like to focus on certain key processes that can illuminate my argument.

What transpired (and certainly did not go unnoticed) during this whole process was the periodical "orientalist" bursts that were directed against the Greek people by German politicians. Such narratives posited a fiscally responsible German government that had been summoned to discipline the lazy and irresponsible Greeks. It was as early as 2010, during the negotiations of the first MoU, that the German Chancellor, at a rally in Bocholt, stated that "We're right to tell the Greeks: you have to save money, you have to be candid and you have to work on your honesty, otherwise we can't help you" (Dierks, 2010). This narrative was recycled prolifically during the years of the crisis. One need not look any further than Germany's most popular tabloid, *Bild*, to see a string of headlines of ill-informed and prejudicial content, concerning the Greek crisis: "German anger at paying for luxury Greek pensions," "What crisis? Business as usual in Greece"; "The average Greek pays €1,335 a year in bribes"; "Greeks threaten to stop buying German goods" (*Bild*, 2010). *Bild* outdid itself with their infamous "NEIN!" campaign. In the midst of the negotiation process, they dedicated their front page to the imposing title of "NEIN! Not One More Billion

for the Greedy Greeks!” while encouraging readers to publish selfies with the same message (Coleman, 2015; Yardley, 2015). This insulting narrative was often reproduced by German senior officials themselves. For example, during the final leg of the negotiation process, Germany’s vice-Chancellor and member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Sigmar Gabriel, stated that “[t]he game theorists of the Greek government are in the process of gambling away the future of their country” and that “Europe and Germany will not let themselves be blackmailed. And we will not let the exaggerated electoral pledges of a partly communist government be paid for by German workers and their families” (Spiegel, 2015; Wearden & Smith, 2015).

Now, it is obvious that this sort of rhetoric that outpoured, even from Germany’s top political ranks, is clearly undercut by a dimension of prejudice. The question, however, is whether there is something more to this story than meets the eye. Was this sort of prejudicial narrative directed against a scapegoated external “threat,” i.e., the greedy Greek, or was this sort of narratives also, if not predominantly, directed inwardly toward the German national community? Might this sort of rhetoric also have entailed an articulation of German national identity? Dr. Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus of the Institute for Media Studies at Berlin's Humboldt University, in a 2015 interview by the Local, asserted that German politicians often attempt to cater to the “common self-perception among the media and the big-selling papers,” such as Bild. That is, they portray “Germany as a financially responsible, economically powerful country” (Barfield, 2015). This is because these popular media outlets are the ones that have access to, and can therefore more effectively graft the opinion of, a large portion of the German electorate (Barfield, 2015). Still, one should be careful not to brand this tendency as a self-serving effort through public pandering. The key question is the following: why did this dominant narrative resonate so well with the German electorate?

In an intriguing study of German nationalism, Muller (2005) observes that German national identity is accessed indirectly vis-à-vis its political economy (p. 144). This is because the “traditional” national identificational platform of “cultural” and “political” nationalism lost its legitimacy in the aftermath of Nazism and the second world war (Muller, 2005, p. 143). After World War II, the so-called

German economic “miracle” (positive current accounts, extraordinary growth rates and sustained low inflation) “became the founding myth of the West German identity” (Muller, 2005, p. 144). The “economic miracle” helped uplift a depressed German self-esteem by operating much like the Protestant Ethic, “which takes economic success as a sign of salvation” (Muller, 2005, p. 145). This first phase of German economic nationalism was perhaps best captured through the notion of the “social market economy.” The “social market economy” denotes a liberal market economy through which a social ethic would spontaneously emerge following proper state intervention, which was seen as being “indispensable to reign in a destructive pluralism of interests groups” (Muller, 2005, p. 146). The procurement of national unity was therefore seen as a goal to be achieved “by economic rather than political means” (Muller, 2005, p. 147). What is, moreover, relevant to our analysis is that the German economic model was increasingly recommended to the rest of the world in what amounted to a presumed noble attempt to compensate for its Nazi legacy (Muller, 2005, p. 148). In this sense, feelings of German superiority were articulate in terms of its national economic organization, which was increasingly understood as its new gift to the world (Muller, 2005, p. 148). But Muller notes that with the waning of Germany’s economic growth, Germany’s economic nationalism was displaced to the monetary sphere and its high-performing deutsche mark. This entailed a new articulation of its national identity, where its economic superiority was increasingly associated with its monetary stability, which was executed under the priestly revered mystique of the Bundesbank (Muller, 2005, p. 151). “Here the second layer of German monetary nationalism came into play a general societal and political consensus on a strong currency and low inflation,” which would find its expression in the diffuse and highly rhetorical form of “stability culture” (Muller, 2005, p. 150). Muller (2005) makes the interesting observation that the notion of “stability culture,” while on the surface refers to economic policy, is also riddled with cultural and ethical connotations (pp. 150–151). “Cultural distinctiveness, accordingly, made the differences between Germany and its strike-plagued neighbours. Country-specific attitudes toward monetary stability were held responsible for diverging macroeconomic developments” (Muller, 2005, p. 151).

What Muller is identifying in this discussion mirrors some of our earlier insights. He is showing us how economic categories (e.g., “social market economy,” “stability culture”) come to operate as metaphorical replacements for the community’s limits, that is, German nationhood. These categories, at the nominal level, circumscribed the communal limits, but are at once imbricated in forms of life. They come to constitute social policy, they acquire an ethical content that extends beyond the economic realm and they overdetermine German national self-perceptions. In this sense, these particularities became planes through which an emerging intra-national hegemony was stitched together using liberal narratives/interests, which came to represent the German national totality. The construction of an effective “economic” hegemony came to be highly overdetermined by a “national” hegemonic fabric, in the sense that the “national” and the “economic” came to co-foster one another—they operated as each other’s condition of possibility. It is by no surprise, then, that in the aftermath of the Greek economic crisis, a German intervention was legitimated on the basis of a narrative that extolled a responsible German nation/citizen against a presumed lazy Southern European nation, which would receive help only if it was to adopt the superior German economic culture. The limits of the community had thus come to be marked by the metaphorical alterity of the fiscally responsible German and the lazy and “excessive” Greek. Habermas himself explicitly critiqued the German government’s stance on this issue. In an address to the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), he noted the German government’s approach to solving the Greek crisis was predicated on a flawed readings of the crisis (Sally, 2014). He went on to note that the solutions proposed by the German government were appropriate only to the economic traditions of Germany (Sally, 2014). In this sense, the German approach to the Greek crisis was channeled through German self-understanding.

Let us now prod deeper into how these national-economic precepts forged the framework for the construction of a supranational German hegemony at the European level. Muller (2005) makes the important observation that Germany’s attempts to globally promote their economic culture was seen not as imperialism but as a cultural mission that sought to export the German “stability culture” (pp. 148, 153). With the sequential transition toward the European Monetary Union (EMU), the influence of

German economic policy, and especially that of the Bundesbank, began to take on a supra-national dimension. “Since the mid-1980s monetary policy for France, Denmark, Austria, and the Benelux countries was made in Frankfurt,” while the Bundesbank’s “institutional designed” and its “policy style” was transferred to the European level, especially vis-à-vis the European Central Bank (Muller, 2005, p. 153). Following Germany’s recapitulation to Mitterrand’s pressures for European monetary unification, something which was vigorously resisted by the populace, a new avenue for supra-national Germany hegemony had opened. As Muller (2005) notes, “The last act of the Bundesbank was to transfer its monetary exceptionalism into the construction of EMU. The euro was to be ‘at least as stable’ as the deutsche mark, and it would be safeguarded by a so-called Stability and Growth Pact, which would limit inflation rates, restrict budget deficits to 3 percent, and reduce public debts to less than 60 percent of GDP” (p. 161). If these terms were violated, the European Commission could authorize a process of enforcing policy revisions or fines unto nonconforming nation-states (Muller, 2005, p. 161). Ironically, this rigid policy was only made more flexible by French-German pressures, following the European Commission’s and European Central Bank’s encroachment on German sovereignty (Muller, 2005, p. 162). Muller (2005) prophetically notes the following: “Unfortunately, the excessive rigidity of the Stability Pact was relaxed not by agreement but by the combined power play of France and Germany, a gambit that could, in the worst case, lead to a return to an overt policy of national interests in the supposedly postnational EU” (Muller, 2005, p. 163). In any case, the EMU was sequentially effectuated through a series of supra-national reforms, beginning in 1992. This set the stage for the introduction of a common European currency, the Euro, which was effectuated in 1999, with the first coins and banknotes being released on January 1, 2002.

The function of the Euro should clearly be explicated: as a supra(national) currency, it came to be mechanistically contingent upon forms of national life. It thus operated as a metaphorical plane of (supra)national condensation, through which an array of contingent necessities operated, such as the importation of food, drugs and products, the exchange of goods and services, the procurement of ordered economic exchange and investment, etc. In this sense, it operated as a nodal point that came to aggregate

a series of *both* national and supranational arrangements and thus constituted a novel terrain of politics, as became clear by the case of a possible “Grexit.” What became increasingly evident during the crisis was that a possible “Grexit” would have resulted in (an at least short-term) humanitarian crisis in Greece. Greece was a predominantly import economy. An exit from the Eurozone, which would have led to the *de facto* introduction of a devalued drachma, would have resulted in food and drug shortages, since these goods would have had to be imported at higher prices. When asked by the Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, whether a return to the Greek drachma was viable, then Greek Finance Minister, Dr. Yanis Varoufakis, answered that it would have been “so painful as to be debilitating” (Varoufakis, 2017, p. 457). At the backdrop of this eventuality, the TROIKA, coerced the Greek government into accepting a third MoU, which essentially continued the implementation of the destructive neoliberal policies of the two previous MoUs: further deterioration of labour rights, increases in regressive taxes, and lowering of pensions.

While these developments may, on a superficial level, seem like a coercive imposition of neoliberal policies—which no doubt they were—it is important to identify the national(istic) dimensions that overdetermined these processes. We have already outlined how the German national identity, during the negotiation process, was articulated through the lens of its post-World War II economic successes. In this sense, the articulation of the German national identity came to be constituted by a pronounced “economic” dimension through a nexus of associated categories: “German,” “social market economy,” “stability culture,” “Deutschemark,” “Bundesbank,” etc. But what is paramount to note, in regards to these rhetorical categories, is that they come to be co-imbricated with political practice more generally. Thus, the “Grexit” crisis became an avenue through which “German stability culture” could be exported to Greece, where in actual practice, Greece’s economic policy came to be partially steered by German economic culture. Hegemonic relations thus came to be articulated through processes of “infiltration.” Greek social, economic, and political policy came to be “incorporated” in German decision-making but this was implemented with the “blessings” of the Greek parliament. And while this process might have initially been resented by the Greek populace, the institutionalization of such policies could very well

come to assume a normalcy with the passing of time. In other words, they could come to be sedimented and, therefore, appear as natural.

What moreover needs to be clearly explicated is that political categories such as “stability culture” do not refer to a literal content. Indeed, it is the very polysemy of the term that enables it to be deployed for hegemonic operations. Exportation of “German stability culture” should be understood in terms of its alterity and ambiguity: it is the channel through which a German electorate was pacified and through which punitive neoliberalism had been implemented in Greece. In this sense, one should be mindful that the sort of policies that were implemented in Greece vis-à-vis the MoUs are at odds with German internal economic policy, which up to this day displays pronounced social democratic elements. Thus, it is the nominal-polysemic dimension of political rhetoric that allows for the hegemonic operation to take effect, as it allows for the execution of multiple and variable political effects.

We should also consider how national interests were effectuated through the “Grexit” crisis as well. A recent study by the Halle Institute for Economic Research concluded that Germany had actually benefitted from the Greek crisis (Dany, Gropp, Littke, & von Schweinitz, 2015). This, despite the fact that it had lent Greece, billions of dollars. “The study by Halle Institute for Economic Research said Germany had made interest savings of more than 3% of GDP between 2010 and 2015, and much of that was down to the Greek debt crisis” (“Germany government gained from Greek crisis - IWH study,” 2015). This is because fears of a “Grexit” and a possible Eurozone crisis led to increased investments in German government bonds, thusly lowering bond yields to investors. The study also noted that Germany had benefitted by gaining access to lower borrowing cost, saving the German government 100 billion Euros between 2010 and 2015 (Janssen, 2015). For example, in 2012, Germany borrowed 3.9 billion Euros over the course of six months at the unprecedented rate of -0.01% (Schultz, 2012). There have also been discussions of Germany benefiting from a weaker Euro, at times of crisis (see Janssen, 2015; Schultz, 2012). While demand for German exports in the Eurozone may decrease when the Euro decreases in value, demand for German products beyond the Eurozone increase (Schultz, 2012). These developments are not coincidental. They clearly attest to Germany’s political and economic orientation: the successful

articulation of national interests through the supranational politico-economic fabric of the European Union and the Euro. One can therefore see that the articulation of supranational projects is invariably undercut by nationalistic considerations, where supranational institutions become a site upon which national interests are asserted through processes of “infiltration.” Indeed, it was as early as 1993 that the now German Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, which spearheaded the handling of the Greek crisis declared that “We must become more secure and certain again in a feeling of national belonging ... Patriotism is not old-fashioned. Our fatherland could do with far more patriotism” (*Guardian*, 15 September 1993, as cited in Billig, 1995, p. 100). Habermas’ critique of the German government, which linked its current actions to its nationalistic past, is no mere accident either. In his above-mentioned address to the SPD, he asserted that “[i]t is not in our national interest to fall back into the hegemonic position that paved the way to two World Wars and was only overcome through European unification” (Scully, 2014)

The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion, in regards to the Greek crisis, is the following. The Euro operated as a supra(national) nodal point, through which a German hegemony spread its tentacles. What underlies this political possibility is the manner by which the Euro uniquely functions in the context of the Eurozone. The Euro operates, at once, as a national and supranational economic and social adhesive. It is a discursive terrain that simultaneously “aggregates” national and supranational arrangements, thus enabling the possibility of intra- and inter-national cooperation *and* contestation. One sees, as an example, how Germany was able to capitalize politically on the fact that the Greek economy had come to be mechanistically dependent on the Euro. Not only was Germany able to direct, in part, Greece’s social and economic policy through the MoUs, but it had benefitted economically by a series of other processes that were contingent upon the function of the Euro: (a) lower borrowing costs and lower bond yields were enabled by the possibility of a “Grexit,” where investors diverted investments in *stable* Germany; (b) increased global demand for German products following the devaluation of the Euro during the crisis.

There is, moreover, no “contradiction” between the articulation of German national interests or identity and its supranational commitments. Indeed, the Christian Democratic Union Party’s ideological orientation incorporates nationalistic and neoliberal narratives, each of which are deployed (sometimes in tandem) according to contextual limitations and demands of political efficacy. In this sense, “German stability culture” came to be homologically associated with the German government’s attempts at “exporting” neoliberalism to Greece, in what *also* resulted in reinforcing Germany’s national economic interests. One can read these developments through the lens of hegemonic politics: The Christian Democratic Union Party had effectively signified the German totality through the lens of its own identity and interests. Thus, “exported stability culture” vis-à-vis the diffusion of punitive neoliberal politics to Greece, operated as a metaphorical replacement for German national culture. This narrative was in fact so pronounced that it was adopted—and sometimes in a cruder fashion—even by the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The German identity, stability culture and neoliberalism nexus, can therefore be understood as nodal points through which the Christian Democratic Union Party came to infiltrate Greece and its internal constituencies, not excluding the identity of its “opponents.” What becomes apparent is that a supranational hegemony was simultaneously articulated in reference to intra-communal hegemonic operations. The Christian Democratic Union Party had effectively signified its own community, asserted its supranational interests, and infiltrated the consciousness of intra-communal “opponents.”

Did these arrangements undermine Greece’ nation-state functions and national sovereignty? An answer to this question can only be relative: any subversive effects that were exercised by Germany through the Euro, operated immanently to a Greek nationalist hegemony, not despite of it. It is not a question of mutual exclusivity but rather how each level of operation becomes each other’s condition of possibility. If the nation is to be seen as an overdetermined set of family resemblances that place historical limits and possibilities on action, one can easily see how Germany, vis-à-vis the TROIKA, was able to capitalize on an extant nationalistic fabric. While I am not in a position to develop the full breadth of this argument, let me briefly outline some operational dimensions that can add life to the argument.

The first thing to consider is that Germany's punitive stance against Greece, imposing austerity measures while rejecting any possibility of Greek debt relief, was partly contingent on German nationals' perceptions: the Merkel administration could only convince the Bundestag to approve loans to the Greek government if it was to demand the effective implementation of policies that would, at least by appearance: (a) reform the chronic "recklessness" of the Greeks; (b) bring Greek economic policy in line with that of Germany's superior economic culture; and (c) ensure that Germany's loans were repaid under any conditions. In Greece, the SYRIZA government was always highly skeptical of resorting to the re-introduction of the Greek drachma—something which would have granted the Greek government more political options—because it could have led to a humanitarian crisis that could have empowered its fascist right-wing party, the Golden Dawn. We thus arrive at a most interesting conclusion: that Germany's encroachment on Greece's national sovereignty was predicated on national precepts that placed constraints on both governments: The German government had to appease its electorate by punishing Greece, and the Greek government had to accept such punishment in fears that a "hot" nationalism could explode in its back yard with the possible instability that could follow the re-introduction of the drachma. Supranational hegemonic operations were thus highly overdetermined by national hegemonic constraints and possibilities.

There are theoretical as well as political implications to be drawn from this discussion. It is very often the case that theoretical understandings of global processes conveniently bypass the constraints that nationalism places on supranational forms of actions. Similarly, by overemphasizing the global dimension of supranational processes, the assertion of national interests, vis-à-vis global processes, is downplayed. These tendencies can assume a variety of forms but what is most common is to posit an encroaching neoliberalism against a compromised national sovereignty. The case of the "Grexit" crisis reveals a murkier and highly complex picture, where neoliberal policies had been enabled by the presiding phantom of national sovereignty: self-reassurance on behalf of the Germans and fear of nationalistic backlash on behalf of the Greeks. The nation-global interplay, as one would expect, is clearly marked by ambiguities, which themselves constitute the field of political possibilities. No doubt, the invisibility of

the nationalistic dimension of (global) politics is itself a sign of the latter's hegemony—its constitutive dimensions remain hidden or taken for granted. The successful execution of both national and global politics should, therefore, consider the myriad nationalistic precepts that come to rhetorically constitute any political arena, whether national or global. This was something that the Christian Democratic Union Party of Germany was evidently conscious of during the “Grexit” crisis. Unfortunately, Greece is paying the price for German political success.

Of Nation and People: Why Metaphors Matter in Politics

The notion of “populism” has, in recent years, increasingly permeated European political discourse. This is due to recent developments that have resulted in a series of dislocations being introduced in the European political fabric. The recent political success of radical right-wing and fascist parties in Europe, constitutes one dislocating dimension: The U.K. Independence Party, the Front National in France, The Freedom Party of Austria, the Alternative for Germany, the Greek Golden Dawn, Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, the Danish People's Party, etc. On the other end of the political spectrum, we are witnessing a more radical re-articulation of Leftist politics, with the recent political success, as examples, of Podemos in Spain, Melenchon's La France Insoumise, and SYRIZA in Greece. The curious and ideologically ambiguous case of the Five Star Movement's success in Italy should also be noted. Arguably, the most significant recent development in Europe has been the “Brexit” vote, which was followed in the coming year, by a highly contested referendum for Catalanian independence. These developments have frequently been interpreted by theorists and pundits alike as a re-ignition of so-called “populist” and/or “nationalist” politics. The term “populism” is similarly deployed to—in my opinion erroneously—interpret radical right-wing politics in the U.S., including Donald Trump's ascent to power.

Relatedly, on the academic side of things, one observes a re-kindled interest on the subject-matter of populism (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Katsambekis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Mudde, 2007; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Taggart, 2000). Scholarly work on populism has predominantly focused its effort on understanding populism by examining its social, economic and political underpinnings. Efforts have also been directed toward prescribing clear terminological definitions. It should come by no surprise that the meaning of the term “populism” is, to this day, still highly debated (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 321). Indeed, the very pervasiveness of the term has led to its being deployed to understand a diversity of phenomena, many of which are ideologically “contradictory” (see Stavrakakis et al., 2017). What is, moreover, of interest to us is the tendency in both scholarly and political discourse to conflate the term “populism” with “nationalism” (see De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Katsambekis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). It makes one wonder whether the over-application of the concept of “populism” is due to incorrect understandings of the phenomenon or whether it is reflective of its “floatedness.” We are here, again, encountering a literature that has not been able to come to terms with the inherent plurality that governs a phenomenon. As a result, the predominant orientation in the literature has been to attempt to “arrest” populism vis-à-vis positive definitions. For example, Mudde (2007), in the first chapter of his now classic monograph, attempts to distinguish and linguistically purify the nuances between political ideologies that are deemed to have an objective correlate. Such attempts should prove futile should one acknowledge that political ideologies are necessarily overdetermined and constitutively un-pure, that is, undercut by the hegemonic dimension of political life. In this sense, the challenge from an analytic standpoint is not to purify any phenomenon, but to trace its constitutive impurity, which necessarily results in power effects: a Left-wing ideology that is marked by the traces of Liberalism, as an example, reveals to us the hegemonic terrain through which Liberalism exercises its power effects. The exact same conclusion can be deduced when examining the relationship between “populism” and “nationalism.” While care should be taken not to casually conflate the two terms, the task consists not of reductively distinguishing the two but of establishing how they may become each other’s condition of possibility.

Recent contributions by the “Essex School” of discourse analysis have made substantive contributions in studies of populism (e.g., De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Katsambekis, 2016; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). This academic current is highly critical of essentialist understandings of populism and nationalism as well as the tendency to conflate the two terms (see De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). They thus attempt to differentiate them not through positive definitions, but by looking at the architecture of discursive narratives. As De Cleen and Stavrakakis suggest, “Discourse theory focuses on political architectonics, analysing how signifiers are related to each other to produce particular structures of meaning,” often through the use of spatial metaphors (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 6). Building on the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005b), Essex School proponents maintain that populist movements can best be understood as articulated processes whereby diverse political demands are aggregated through signifiers (e.g., “justice,” “democracy,” “nation”) that operate as “privileged” points of popular condensation. From then on, nationalism is distinguished from populism by examining whether a political movement condenses around the signifier of “the people,” which is juxtaposed to an “elite,” or “the nation,” which is juxtaposed to its “non-members” (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). Thus, populism is to be understood as a form of political opposition structured around the signifier of “the people” that operates within a community that is *internally divided* by a “down/up” axis that separates “the people” from “the elite” (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 10). Paralleling this logic, nationalism is to be understood as a form of political opposition structured around the signifier of “the nation.” In the case of nationalism, political camps are divided by an “in/out” axis that separates the members of the nation from its non-members (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 9). The question of interest, therefore, is not what nationalism or populism *is*, but how particular sets of social arrangements come to be organized around the signifier of either “the people” or “the nation.” In this sense, these efforts are remarkably convergent with my own. I would, however, like to introduce an additional dimension to this analysis, by examining how, in actual practice, the nationalism/populism distinction is often blurred by political acts that attempt to establish an analogous connection between “the people” and “the nation.” The implication to be drawn, as far as our understanding of discursive

architectonics is concerned, is that in/out and up/down distinctions may be contingent upon one another. Why is this so? Because in a nationalist hegemony, political processes will invariably operate through the nationalistic prism. While, for analytic purposes, the in/out and up/down distinction can be made in terms of *tendency*, their inextricable connection should also be taken into consideration. Populist (up/down) politics, as an example, will very often come to be overdetermined by nationalist (in/out) politics. The notion of metaphor is central to this line of analysis.

As already established, a signifier fulfilling the role of representing a totality, is here understood as a totalizing effect—an operation that is invariably undercut by a hegemonic dimension. As a reminder, hegemonic operations are essentially metaphorical in character, since hegemonic signifiers operate as replacements for diverse demands and social arrangements, thereby providing an anchorage, through which a “singular” community can be signified. Hegemonic blocs, such as nations, are invariably constructed through metaphorical replacements, whereby hegemonic signifiers such as “the nation” come to be homologically associated with forms of life, e.g., “democracy,” “capitalism,” etc. Extending this logic, one can suggest that the hegemonic act is also operant in the articulation of social movement totalities (Laclau, 2005b). Social movements are very often constructed around a privileged node, e.g., “the nation,” “the environment,” “peace,” etc. that may come to be homologically associated with forms of life or other representations. For example, a labour union may extend its central claim to “labour rights” to a broader campaign structured around the notion of “social justice.”

This helps us situate the aforementioned contemporary European and North-American developments in a new light. What we are witnessing is not necessarily an upsurge of “populism” or “nationalism” but an articulation of a series of political projects that attempt to re-define the meaning of “the people.” When examining the case of “nationalist” parties in particular, what we typically observe are attempts at establishing a homologous relationship between “the people” and “the nation.” The political narrative of the emerging radical Left parties such as Podemos and SYRIZA, on the other hand, articulates the content of “the people” through the lens of “democratic,” “pluralistic,” and “humanistic” narratives. This does not mean that “the nation” and its associated family resemblances are absent from

the narratives of Left movements—far from it—but that “the nation” is typically articulated in reference to “democratic” metaphors. My argument is the following: to the extent that successful political acts or movements are articulated in a national totality, they will be, albeit unevenly, contaminated by an extant (national) hegemonic fabric through which they pragmatically operate. Trying to attribute a determinate content to the notion of “nationalist populism” is therefore self-defeating. “National populism” is a platform through which diverse political projects can be articulated. National populism can therefore best be understood as articulated attempts of popular aggregation, whereby the hegemonic signifier of “the nation”—the metaphor par excellence—is “married” to a range of diverse political demands and homologically extended to other signifiers (e.g., “anti-immigration,” “anti-elitism,” and “tradition,” or “democracy,” “pluralism,” and “human rights”). Its political success is measured by how effectively projects can “access” and saturate the metaphor of “the nation,” which is already cathected with affect, with their own narratives. National populism is thus an attempted political chimera through which a populist totality is parasitically signified vis-à-vis the hegemonic metaphor(s) of “the nation.”

What interests us, then, is how internal communal divisions may be overdetermined by, and co-articulated with, the community’s limits. It is my opinion that “local” or “intra-communal” politics are very often undercut by this dimension in an unwavering dialectic within “internal” and “external” distinctions. The nationalist hegemonic fabric is invariably operant in modern politics. A brief examination of the pro-“Brexit” narrative can add further weight to this argument. The U.K. Independence Party’s Nigel Farage’s final speech before the “Brexit” referendum should serve as a useful starting point. It comes by no surprise that the presentation begins by extolling the British nation by establishing an equivalence between heterogeneous elements: “We are a great country,” “a proud country,” “a brave country,” “a country with an amazing history,” “of entrepreneurialism,” “sporting greatness,” “an amazing science.” This articulated equivalence is then juxtaposed to the invasive presence of the European Union, (“the club,” as he calls it) whose ultimate aim is to override, politically, the United Kingdom: “They think we are better off letting other people make our decisions for us”; “The real agenda is political”; “We are members of a political union”; “European law is supreme.” So a picture is

drawn of a United Kingdom defending itself against the intrusion of the European Union. In this sense, the frontier separating “us” from “them” is articulated (in/out architectonics). Farage’s speech reaches its crescendo, when this frontal division is metaphorically transposed to the platitude of “the people” and “the establishment:” “This referendum is the people versus the establishment”; “Vote to put power back in the hand of people”; “Vote to take control of our country back”; “Vote to get our borders back”; “Vote for Britain to become independent.” But is this simply about a nation taking back its sovereignty against an imposing external European Union or are there internal demons to be faced? Whose interests does the European Union serve? “The vested interests,” “the big corporate businesses,” “who for the first time in history are able, through the European commission, to effectively write the rules for their own businesses, to the detriment of their small- and medium-sized competitors,” the “political and bureaucratic class,” and “Mr. Cameron.” Thus, the external enemy, the European Union, is articulated as an equivalent to internal enemies. In this sense, “the establishment” captures intra-communal (up/down architectonic) as well as inter-communal (in/out architectonic) divisions, while the category of “the people” is cathected with a ring-wing imaginary that reserves the category for “native” or “white” Brits. Indeed, a post-“Brexit” attitudes study by the National Centre for Social Research noted that the predominant reason why “Brexiters” voted to leave the European Union was due to anti-immigration sentiments (Bulman, 2017). The “Brexit” campaign, therefore, took on a chimeric form. The signifier of “the nation,” accessed in the case of Farage’s speech through “country,” was homologically extended to “the people” and then connected to the family resemblances of “national sovereignty.” This was, then, juxtaposed to the principal external enemy, the “European Union,” which was homologically extended to “internal elite,” “big business interests,” and the ambivalent enemy of “the immigrant,” which simultaneously constituted an intra- and inter-communal threat. This analysis reveals very clearly that “internal” frontiers can come to be overdetermined by “external” frontiers. In this sense, any analysis of populism, which looks at its intra-communal structuration, would benefit by examining how such structuration is overdetermined by articulations of the communal totality, which invariably involves its differentiation from “outsiders.” As Laclau has aptly stated, “the play of differences subverts any rigid frontier between the internal and the

external” (Butler et al., 1997, p. 8). Supranational processes are overdetermined by national processes and vice versa.

Democracy, Equality, Possibility

In light of these insights, one can more clearly identify why theoretical positions that still cling onto the Enlightenment’s liberal imaginary of a cosmopolitan world, are governed by apparent shortcomings (e.g., Beck, 2002, 2003; Habermas, 2003). Consider, as an example, the following excerpt from Castells (2009):

There is, in addition, a geopolitical problem. Nation-states still see the networks of governance as a bargaining table at which they will have the chance to advance their interests. Rather than cooperating for the global common good, nation-states continue to be guided by traditional political principles: (a) maximize the interests of the nation-state, and (b) prioritize the personal/political/social interests of the political actors in command of each nation-state. Global governance is seen as a field of opportunity to maximize one’s own interests, rather than a new context in which political institutions share governance around common projects. In fact, the more the globalization process proceeds, the more the contradictions it generates (identity crises, economic crises, security crises) lead to a revival of nationalism, and to attempts to restore the primacy of sovereignty. Indeed, the world is *objectively multilateral* but some of the most powerful political actors in the international scene (for example, the United States, Russia, or China) *tend to act unilaterally, putting their national interest first, without concern for the destabilization of the world at large.* (p. 41)

Note how the problem at hand is posed in terms of a national “unilateralism” that is supposedly in contradiction with the “world system’s” seemingly objective logic of multilateralism. We are, in essence,

back in the realm of orthodox Marxism. The “objective” contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation is simply clothed in “political” categories of analysis. And I extend the underpinnings of my critique: this is another example of a theory that has not effectively come to terms with how a particularity can assert its power or hegemony, through a pluralistic terrain. There is no “clash” of logics at play but a highly complex overdetermined (supra)national political terrain through which hegemonic projects are articulated. There is, likewise, no “revival of nationalism” at play. Nationalism was, for most of the twentieth and twenty-first century, *always* operant on the (supra-) national level. We simply were, and still are, frequently blind to its constitutive pluralistic terrain of operation. The 1990s’ “cosmopolitan liberal” explosion, in all its cheesy manifestations, was an articulated distraction in this respect. In the background, a powerful conglomeration of nation-states was busy articulating novel dimensions of a supra(national) hegemony. In this sense, Benedict Anderson (2005) is correct in identifying the United States’ global hegemony as a key dimension of globalization.

This brings me to the last leg of my discussion, which concerns the question of democracy and inequality. A theoretical position invariably yields ethical commitments. An ethic is sculpted according to the contours of onto-theoretical grounds. In this respect, a theory that limits the terrain of analysis, by resorting to a seemingly “objective ground,” to which political praxis should conform, limits our democratic imaginaries. It is in this respect that I find Castells’ solution to the problem of “nation-state unilateralism” unsatisfying. He suggests that “[i]n the last resort, it is only the power of global civil society acting on the public mind via the media and communication networks that may eventually overcome the historical inertia of nation-states and thus bring these nation-states to accept the reality of their limited power in exchange for increasing their legitimacy and efficiency” (Castells, 2009, p. 42). A solution is, once again, posed in terms of a seemingly potential opposition between a “civil society” and “the state.” This, in my opinion, amounts to a limited democratic imaginary. Castells’ argument can be read as a surreptitious re-introduction of the Marxian notion of “a people struggling for itself,” in the aftermath of its expected “awakening.” This is because the ontological dimensions of hegemonic politics are underemphasized in Castells’ work. A civil society “for itself” can only be posited outside the very

relations (e.g., the state) that *produce* the subject of civil society. Is it by surprise that, in the broad scheme of things, the national subject, that is, the subject of “civil society,” generally endorses, and often with vehement passion, its (nation-)state’s “interest?” This is perhaps the most substantive shortcoming of normative democratic theories—a scholarship that bathes in the optimism of “democratic sovereignty” but forgets that the very forces that produce the democratic subject are characteristically *unevenly* democratic. The democratic subject is hegemonically produced. There is no “democracy” as such; there is only power and “democratic participation” is invariably embedded in power structures. Is it by surprise that the modern “democratic awakening” saw unprecedented forms of power centralization, proliferation of violence and unprecedented levels of social inequality—very often executed in the name of democracy? Empirical developments put us at great odds with the theoretical optimism of normative democratic theories.

The question of democracy and, more broadly, inequality and ethics, has been articulated and posed in a variety of ways in recent scholarship. It has been posed in terms of participation (Fraser, 2005), deliberative democracy (Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1996a), communication (Castells, 2009), agonism (Mouffe, 2005), (mis)recognition (Butler, 2004; Fraser, 2005; Melucci, 1996), redistribution (Fraser, 2005), radical democracy (Laclau, 1989, 2014; Mouffe, 2005), subjectivity (Touraine, 2009), social exclusion (Giddens, 1998), cosmopolitanism (Beck & Levy, 2013; Habermas, 2003), etc. While a full-on exploration of the democratic implications of my argument is outside the scope of the present project, it is worth articulating some preliminary considerations for future discussions. The question of democracy, as far as I am concerned, is commensurate with the question of power. Yes, democracy is about “participation,” “recognition,” “redistribution,” etc., but all these notions fundamentally refer to the structuration of power relations. Democracy, we thus may suggest, concerns the equal distribution of power. This assertion, however, should be considered in light of the premises thus far established. The notion of “equal power” is, of course, self-defeating, as is any epistemological claim that asserts intelligible difference in the absence of value differentials. Democracy, then, in the manner by which it is

classically imagined cannot function as a fundamental *ground* of social organization. It can, however, function as a political imaginary, that is, a *horizon* (Butler et al., 1997; Laclau, 1989).

If the political goal is one of radical inclusion and radical egalitarianism in a context of plurality and proliferation, it then follows that democratic politics entails not the universal institutionalization of a particularity but a radical openness to the possibility of equality. How does this pan out if, as according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), there is no political framework outside the hegemonic operation? It is here that we see the merits of the distinction between *foundation and horizon* (Laclau, 1989). For if we are to engage in the hegemonic operation on the basis of foundationalism, we are bound to suture the social space in its accordance. Even if our ethics are benevolent in our estimation, the particularity of their content will necessarily exclude populations. This is characteristic of the mendacity of humanistic liberalism, which on the one hand claims to monopolize a benevolent universal humanistic ethics that takes the self-contained individual as its starting point, while at the same time excluding cultures that are predicated on the subversion of the individual in the interest of the group. While it is ontologically impossible to institute any sort of social arrangements in the absence of exclusions (Butler et al., 1997), by casting our presumed universal ethics as a horizon upon which we are oriented but never quite able to capture our orientation ceases to be one of ethical arrogance and totalizing absolutism. The horizon is a goal to be reached but also the simultaneous negation of our claim to universality. It becomes a reflection of our limitations and a testament to the fact that, as cultural relativists, we believe that truth can only be accessed through a contingent discursive structure, and that truth is always governed by the partiality of human construction. This democratic form of politics thus does not entail a rigid reliance on an essential transcendental signifier. Rather, signifiers that are imbued with value and affect are deployed strategically by considering and contesting the consequences of possible paths of engagement (Laclau, 1989). Judith Butler has rightly suggested that radical democracy entails the continuous and necessary “undoing” of our identities in accordance with the imperatives of recognition and inclusiveness (Butler, 2004; Butler et al., 1997). This requires that, to the best of our abilities, we discard essentialist conceptions of what it means to be “human,” “national,” “citizen,” etc., while saturating these terms with democratic imaginaries that

render them available to re-articulation and possibility. A passage from one of Laclau's (1989) earlier works proves to be illuminating in this respect:

The discourses of equality and rights [...] need not rely on a common human essence as their foundation; it suffices to posit an egalitarian logic whose limits of operation are given by the concrete argumentative practices existing in a society. A horizon, then, is an empty locus, a point in which society symbolizes its very groundlessness, in which concrete argumentative practices operate over a backdrop of radical freedom, of radical contingency. The dissolution of the myth of foundations does not dissolve the phantom of its own absence. This absence is—at least in the last third of the nineteenth century—the condition of possibility for affirming the historical validity of our projects and their radical metaphysical contingency. This double insertion constitutes the horizon of post-modern freedom, as well as the specific metanarrative of our age. (p. 81)

Democracy as a possibility, as openness to inclusion, and as rejection of a rigid foundationalism becomes the guiding precepts for the instituting of novel arrangements whose content is to be decided on the basis of contextual specificities. To the extent that these imaginaries come to constitute the precepts of a new hegemonic project, it is quite clear that they will have to operate as nodal points upon which social life and political projects converge. We are thus called upon to answer the question of how these imaginaries are to be articulated as concrete forms of life. And it is this passage from theoretical abstraction to political praxis that has proven, for political and social theory alike, to be the most challenging. It goes without saying that I cannot be exhaustive in my answering this question, but I will provide some guidelines that I believe can come to be politically useful.

The passage from an institutional hegemony (i.e., based on the hegemonization of a particular content) to a democratic hegemony requires the disposal of aprioristic understandings of (in)equality. Inequality is no longer to be understood, as being determinate by a particular underlying dimension, e.g.,

economy, gender, race, etc., but as the emergence of *values* within a total discursive configuration. We have already established how value differentials emerge through the configuration of discursive relations. The conclusion from that discussion was clear: elements as such are not imbued with value, but rather “their” value emerges through their articulated connection to other elements. Much in line, then, with recent intersectional theorists, I maintain that values can only be partially “equalized” if the interacting dimensions that produce value differentials are simultaneously dis- and re-articulated. We have seen, as an example, that in Europe the introduction of women into the workforce, while undermining one dimension of oppression, led to the emergence of additional dimensions of oppression. Women were expected to work in the formal economy while *also* expected to continue working, unpaid, in the household.

The relativity of the aforementioned “failure” or “success,” depending on how one looks at it, is a direct outcome of a recurring theoretico-political tendency. What is typically contested is not value differentials as such, but the specific content of social processes (e.g., the restriction of women in the private sphere). This does not mean that the specific content of social processes is not to be contested—that is an impossibility—but that the ultimate and projected political vision has to be undercut by the clear and transparent dimension of value equalization, if only as possibility. This enables the political subject to connect their contextual and content-specific demands to broader political considerations that can only reinforce their endeavours. “Equality,” in this sense, can operate as an empty signifier through which various political projects come to condense. But the key question here does not just concern political mobilization but also social institutionalization.

Indeed, if we want to witness a *movement* toward a democratic hegemony, equal value, to the extent possible, has to be institutionalized as a *necessary component of social life*, through its dispersion and imbrication in the social fabric. The success of capitalist hegemony, as an example, operates through the institutionalized *necessity of inequality*. This means that any attempt to work outside its operational logic is bound to failure. For example, a successful business that is based on the model of collective ownership (“equality”) is by necessity required to compete against, and therefore possibly negate, other

businesses (institutionalized inequality). One therefore sees how value differentials are prolifically institutionalized in a capitalist system, to the point where one has to “join the system” even as one hopes to “fight against it.” This not only reveals that politics work immanently to a discursive fabric, but that political possibility is partially constrained by the total configuration of values. *A democratic hegemony, therefore, requires the broad institutionalization of relations that, through their interaction, put limits on the structuration of high value differentials.* Democratization, then, is neither contingent upon a spontaneous awakening of “the people” nor upon the political assertion of “civil society,” as suggested by Castells. Democratization entails the articulated structuration of forms of life, through which democratic subjects, in the way that a radical democrat conceives of them, can be continuously produced. This does not mean that power dissipates, but that power differentials, *on certain levels*, are simply reduced through social arrangements that come to operate as “predicates.” In the same way that it was possible to imagine the state behemoth coming to be imbricated in diverse forms of social life, it is possible to imagine the broad dispersion of social arrangements that, through their interaction, put limits on the structuration of high power differentials.

These political considerations are directly connected to the question of technology. We have already discussed how technology is the constitutive mediator between the corporeal capacities of the subject and (actualized) potential. Technology is what operates between the cleavages of what the subject can produce or execute as a delimited corporeal entity, and what it actually achieves, in light of discursive potentials. As already established, the precipitation of power differentials works immanent to the technological potential, since the technological potential is the avenue through which power is effectuated. This means that the question of technology is central to any democratic efforts, although not in the naïve way that this relationship is frequently posed, e.g., a falsely labelled “Arab Spring” was often attributed to the supposedly inherently democratic potentials of social media. What transpired from earlier discussions, was that high power differentials, such as the one between “the state and civil society,” are actualized through potentials enabled by modern forms of technology. What was identified as being novel about modern forms of technology, such as automated electronic and digital communication, was a

quantitative potential that through certain relational configurations could enable the articulation of high power differentials. We saw, as an example, how the hegemony of the modern state operates through a technological fabric that is often saturated by the state's identity. In this sense, necessary social processes such as "infrastructure," "law and order," "military," etc., come to be homologically associated with, and operant through, the state, thus coming to imbue the state with higher value. It is in this sense that the question of democracy is central to the question of technology: to the extent that modern technological potential enables the precipitation of higher value differentials, it has to come to be thoroughly arrested by an implemented democratic imaginary that puts limits on this potential. In other words, the technological potential has to be institutionalized in a manner that prevents the structuration of high power differentials.

Returning back to the question of globalization, one can clearly see how democratic suggestions that are predicated on essentialized dichotomies, such as "local/global" (Castells, 2009) and "national/supranational" (Habermas, 2001a), will invariably run into limits, if the question of power differentials as such is not taken into consideration. Habermas, as an example, tends to essentialize representative democracy, often presenting it as a process through which power is "equalized." Thus, for him, a neoliberalized Europe can only come to be democratized with the institutionalization of (a) a supranational constitution and (b) a supranational redistributive mechanisms, through which a supranational solidarity can come to emerge (Habermas, 1999, 2001b, 2003). My critique is not meant to outwardly dispute Habermas' suggestions. Indeed, I will not be the first nor the last to find merit in Habermas' thought-provoking and politically-useful work. But at the same time, I deem it prudent to dispose of any perspectives that regard democratic processes to be inherently innocent—every social process, whether "democratic" or not, is invariably undercut by dimensions of power. A commitment to equality should not take as its starting point the veil of a democracy that invariably obfuscates its constitutive dimensions of power. Much in keeping with the broader aim of the present work, the democratic duty "proper" consists of revealing, in their present-absence, constitutive dimensions of power that come to be imbricated in the field of overdetermination, that is, social life. In this sense, we can re-articulate the Enlightenment promise, stripping it of its essentialist dimensions. While our aim does not

consist of discovering a real and underlying truth that supposedly determines our being, we are called upon, as radical democrats, *to critique everything and anything to the extent that it help us pragmatically advance democratic efforts*. This is the horizon of possibility that emerges in a post-essentialist politics.

This realization is not meant to lead us to an understanding of power as something diffuse. Power, as we have seen, is operatively effectuated through nodal points that, through their penetration in the field of overdetermination, exercise hegemonic effects. Returning more specifically to the question of nationalism, one can definitely assert, in light of these aforementioned propositions, that a post-positivist critique of nationalism entails three principal dimensions. The first involves tracking its constitutive terrain of operation, as it materializes through plural and interstitial social and political processes. The second involves altering the content of “the nation.” The third involves replacing the prolific signifier of “the nation,” with other signifiers that can more effectively be homologically extended to narratives of equality, e.g., “democracy.” As it stands, at this historical juncture, efforts of promoting a democratic politics will invariably operate through these three principal dimensions—that is, through the nationalist hegemonic fabric, in the sense understood in the presence work. This means that a democratic politics has to arrest, infiltrate, and contaminate an extant nationalist hegemonic fabric, by coming to overdetermine its constitutive dimensions. In this sense, *“the nation” and its constitutive dimensions will come to operate as partial “allies” through which efforts of constructing a democratic hegemony may come to be achieved*. If nationalism, in the way that it operates today, is to be “eradicated,” it has to be arrested and infiltrated. This means that no politics can operate on the basis of a puritanistic pretence.

I will conclude what has been a long journey with some anecdotal considerations. In the context of conversations in the public sphere, my radical political opinions as well as my commitment to the principle of equality are often met with fervent resistance. The argument that is typically deployed to counter my political positions is that my ideas are “utopian” and therefore “non-applicable.” I find this argument to be out of line with historical realities, for the very simple reason that the applicable ideas of today used to be the non-applicable ideas of the past. Even a cursory historical examination would reveal that the ideas of liberalism, representative democracy, and secularism—the foundational ideas of modern

European civilization—were at some time considered to be irrational and out of touch with reality, that being the organizational infrastructure of the Feudal System. It is the hegemonization of these very ideas that makes us “forget” that their successful diffusion was executed over the course of centuries, through myriad processes of political contestation and often violent conflict.

The argument of non-applicability is usually combined with a challenge: I am called upon to delineate with accuracy a complete alternative future imaginary. I am, in essence, called to “imagine” how an equal society, in its totality, would come to operate. To which I answer that for us radical democrats “equality” does not constitute a determinate and nuclear core of a possible society, but an interpretive prism—a horizon through which we evaluate contextual challenges. I do not, as an example, have to delineate with apodictic accuracy, the workings of a “perfect society,” in order to commit, substantively, to the available political options of our time, e.g., more equitable distribution of wealth, the promotion of collective forms of ownership, the promotion of women’s rights, etc. *“Equality,” then, consists of a guiding political imaginary that I apply as I endeavour toward its never-ending construction.* The question of whether one can furnish a completely equal society is, therefore, insignificant. What is certain is that we could progressively advance toward this vision, even if it can never fully be implemented. Such continuous process of construction can only ensue with the hegemonization of a democratic imaginary that has the effect of, in its overdetermined dispersion, putting limits on the structuration of high power differentials.

This vision, in its uneven and incomplete forms, is already explicitly and implicitly being advanced by a plurality of groups that are, in the context of (post)modern politics, often dismissed as “utopians,” while the self-identified “pragmatists” (in the naïve sense of the word) keep clinging to the “reality” of a world that takes exploitation and oppression as its necessary starting point. It makes one wonder whether the term “pragmatist,” as it is often deployed in the context of contemporary politics (in the naïve sense of the term!), is simply a euphemism for “accomplice.” They too forget that each historical moment constitutes a decision. That every moment offers a possibility. That everything is subject to the whims of time:

Ο χρόνος αυτοκράτορας
Ανθίζει σαν το ψέμα
Στις ρωγμές των βασιλείων
Που κτίσαμε εμείς.

[Time the emperor
Blossoms as a lie
In the fissures of the kingdoms
That we have built.]

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