

## **Nationalism and Ideology**

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The purpose of this paper is two fold. It seeks firstly to place the concepts of "nation" and nationalism firmly within a materialist framework and, secondly, to analyze the relationship between nationalism and class. Various forms of nationalism are discussed and the implications of nationalism for socialist strategy are considered.

Cet article a deux buts. Premièrement, il tente à placer les concepts de "la nation" et la nationalisme fermement dans un contexte materialiste et, deuxièmement, il tient à analyser la relation entre la nationalisme et la classe. Des formes variées de la nationalisme sont discutées, et les implications de la nationalisme pour la stratégie socialiste sont considérées.

Historical materialism posits the primacy of the relations of production in society, with class struggle constituting history's motive force. Accordingly, Marxists tend to become bellicose when confronted with assertions (such as Tadjman's [1981:233]) that "nationalism [rather than class] is the most important determinant in the course of history." Modern nationalism is surely a momentous political fact, and there is good reason for approaching it with caution. Socialist revolutions have met with success only in conjunction with nationalist movements and, in every capitalist crisis, the working class has displayed a stronger national than class identity. While some Marxists have tried to accommodate these realities by reducing nationalism to class interests, others have conceded that nationalism is a mysterious independent force.

In this paper, I shall situate the concepts of "nation" and "nationalism" within a materialist framework and, secondly, attempt to analyze the relationship between class and nation. It is my belief that recent theories of ideology will throw light on these two key problems and provide us with an understanding of nationalism which is both innovative and comprehensive. Illustration will be provided through a discussion of nationalism in its various forms: state, sub-state, anti-imperialist and socialist.

#### The Nation: real or ideal?

In order to have a clear understanding of the ideology of nationalism, we must first apprehend its relationship with, and the meaning of, the concept of "nation" itself. Are the terms "nation" and "nationalism," as Rosa Luxemburg asserts, no more than empty husks into which each historical epoch and system of class relations deposit their particular material content? Or

does the nation have some constitutive essence? Does it refer to any discernible material factors?

The philosophy of idealism locates the nation in the consciousness, with external symbols and practices being merely the outcome, the realization of the inner effect. According to Ernest Renan (1954:659):

Nation is the embodiment of a spiritual principle... Land provides the substratum, the field of battle and work; man provides the soul; man is everything in the formation of that sacred thing that is called a people. Nothing of material nature suffices for it.

For Renan, the nation is based on "collective consciousness" and "active will." Symbols and practices associated with nationality become completely subjective products of the human mind. Marxist theory emphasizes that consciousness itself is a social product, rooted in the material conditions of life. Yet, an examination of Marxist thought on this matter will reveal a strong tension between material factors and subjective consciousness in defining the nation. More often than not, however, an understanding of nations as "ideas" seems to take priority over objective factors. This reliance on subjective factors was implicit in some of the texts of Austro-Marxism. Otto Bauer (1907:107), for instance, maintained that the nation was essentially an idea, a "community of character awakening from a community of destiny" while Renner (1917:123) advanced the startling concept of a "national spirit." Lenin identified these abstract notions as an "idealist theory," and Stalin polemicized against the Austro-Marxists in his 1913 essay, "Marxism and the National Question." In this essay, Stalin summed up Bauer's concept of nation as nothing but the "mystical national spirit of the spiritualists" (1953:310). He put forth his own definition

of the nation as "an 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" (301). In order for a community to qualify as a nation, it must possess that "specific spiritual complexion of the people," otherwise known as the "national character," which distinguished one nation from another but was intangible to the observer (306).

Stalin has of course, resorted to the same type of language for which he will, a few pages later, chastise Bauer. His definition seems to concede the priority of subjective consciousness over the mere operation of material factors in the make-up of the nation. Tom Nairn likewise stresses subjectivity in his analysis of nationalism in The Break-up of Britain (1977). For Nairn, nationalism is an idea originating in the European "Enlightenment" and spread to the rest of the world along with capitalist development. The uneven development of capitalism stimulates envy and frustration among peripheral elites who seize upon the idea of nationalism in order to mobilize the masses to right the balance. It is thus seen as a purely psychological construct; its materiality is denied:

To say the assorted phenomenon and bric-a-brac of nationalism have a "material" basis is akin to saying that individual neurosis has a sexual explanation... "Nationalism" is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as a "neurosis" in the individual, with a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (The equivalent of infantilism for societies), and largely incurable. (1977:359)

Here, Nairn localizes nationalism in the consciousness, a conglomeration of psychological reactions resulting somehow in a unified functional ideology. It is severed from its <sup>re</sup> foundation in reality.

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The work of Régis Debray (1977) and Nicos Poulantzas (1978) may prove to be helpful in dealing with the nation from a materialist standpoint. The striking similarities which characterise the theoretical perspectives of both authors on this particular issue allows us to lump them together here. Both view the nation as substantial, transhistorical, and inscribed in the conceptual matrices of space and time. While the form of the modern nation is seen as historically transient, an invariable "something else" has cut across pre-existing modes of production. (For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to all such spatially and temporally defined formations as "nations").

Temporally, the nation's materiality is manifest in "ritual repetition, ritualisation of memory, celebration and commemoration" (Debray, 1977:27) or what is generally designated by the term "common historical tradition" (Poulantzas, 1978:107). Spatially, we are dealing with territory, "from the growth of towns through communications, transport and military apparatus, to the emergence of borders" (Poulantzas, 1978:99) or what Debray calls "enclosed space" (1977:27). What these authors seem to be getting at is that what is conventionally seen as indicative of the nation -- economic unity, territory, tradition and the like -- now must be viewed as the very constitutive essences of nationhood. The nation emerges out of the concrete practices of each social formation as it works to transform nature. At this level, it is no superstructure. Along with the productive forces and social relations, the practices which constitute the nation hinge upon the determinant ecological and geographical conditions which make up the infrastructure.

The organization of people into politico-territorial structures is the result of many factors. The early superstructural forms of kinship or religion provided groups with identical objects of worship or common practices such as totem or taboo. The modern nation is, however, the creation of capitalism. Most significantly, capitalism entails the separation of direct producers from their means of production and the creation of a mass of people free to sell their labour power, providing the material basis of modern "citizenship" (Navari, 1981:13). Capitalism created new classes tied together by an intricate division of labour, cast over vast territories and bringing together distant regions into immediate and functional relationships. It created the need to preserve and expand a system of domination and exploitation of complex interdependencies.

The state is not a product of the nation; rather, the modern nation is constructed by the state through a process of unification and homogenization. To return to Poulantzas (1978:105):

The State marks out the frontiers of this serial space in the very process of unifying and homogenizing what these frontiers enclose... The exact configuration and topography followed by this territory will, of course, depend on a whole series of historical factors (economic, political, linguistic, and so on). But what matters here is the appearance of territory and frontiers in the modern sense of the terms. The territory becomes national, and, by means of the State, constitutes an element of the modern nation.

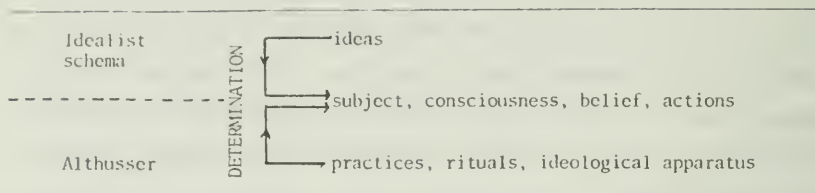
The tendency to substantialize and reify the nation on the part of Poulantzas and Debray is not without its dangers. For instance, according to Debray (1977:27): "We must locate the nation phenomenon within the general laws regulating the survival of the human species... against death. Against entropy." Similarly, the Poulantzean nation is an "object both theoretical and real," possessing "transhistorical irreducibility" (1978:94). As James Blaut (1982) has pointed out, these kinds of arguments are derived from

German idealist theories of the state, especially the theses of Herder and Fichte. Here, the view is that all people and the land upon which they reside form a metaphysical Whole, a superorganic nation destined to become a unified state. As such, these recent contributions are seen by Blaut as essentially a throwback to conservative thought. More serious, however, is the conceptualization of the nation itself as an active force in history. There is a danger of viewing it as prior to, more basic than, and autonomous from the class struggle: "The state is rooted not in class but in a deeper and more abiding substance, the nation" (Blaut, 1982:12).

While stressing the material basis of nationhood, it is not my purpose to substantialize and reify the nation on its own terms. Further, it is necessary to avoid that idealism by which national phenomena are reduced to consciousness. How, then, are we to understand the ideology of nationalism? Here, the work of Althusser on ideology is instructive. For Althusser, ideology has a material existence and is not ideal because it is always inscribed in social practices and expressed in objective social forms, such as languages, rituals. For the single subject,

the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject (1971:169).

Althusser is arguing against those who would overemphasize the role of men and women as creative agents, whose ideas determine the actions that he or she performs. Instead, he inserts actions into practices, which are in turn governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed. In graphic form:



Thus, consciousness itself can arise only as a reflection of material practices. This supports my earlier contention that those items that are conventionally viewed as symptomatic elements of the nation (territory, tradition, and so on) may be seen precisely as the very constitutive essences of nationhood. These common objective factors lie outside of national consciousness; meaning is applied to them externally. But without these elements, there can be no ideology of nationalism. In other words, at the infrastructural level the materiality of the nation is the effect of concrete practice on its own terms. It is only through this understanding that we may comprehend the ideology of nationalism, which lies in the realm of superstructures.

#### Nationalism and Class

What is the relationship between nationalism and class? We can identify several tendencies within the Marxist tradition concerning this question. The first tendency is most closely associated with Lenin. Here, the ideology of nationalism is reduced to the class interests of the bourgeoisie. For Lenin, the historico-economic basis of national movements was that in order to achieve complete victory for commodity production, "the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language, with all obstacles to the



development of that language and to its consolidation in literature removed" (1970:46). Bourgeois-democratic national movements were confined to the "period of the collapse of feudalism and absolutism) (1970:46) and as such, should be given only conditional support by the proletariat.

This view is entirely consistent with Lenin's emphasis upon the existence of "paradigmatic" class ideologies. In his world of highly polarized political struggles, "the only choice is -- either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms, there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology)" (1975:48). Each concrete ideology has a necessary class belonging, and nationalism was the ideology of the bourgeoisie during a particular historical epoch.

The second tendency is to view nationalism as prior to and autonomous from the class struggle.<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, the view which predominates in mainstream social science. The appearance of ethnic conflict is enough for such authors to dispense with class analysis. But what is disturbing is the trend in this direction among numerous Marxists. For example, it is affirmed that the class struggle has been "eclipsed" by nationalism in Nairn's subjectivist formulations (1977:351). Furthermore, as we have seen, the inclination on the part of Debray and Poulantzas to invest the nation with an actual existence indicates a view of nationalism as being independent of the class struggle (as shall be clear later, however, Poulantzas is somewhat ambiguous). This trend is entirely consistent with the current overemphasis on the "relative autonomy of superstructures" characteristic of much of neo-Marxist theory.

A third tendency is that of viewing nationalism as an empty concept. According to Hobsbawm (1977:3), for instance, nationalism is a fuzzy

ideological construct "devoid of any rational theory." The decline of the economic role of the nation-state due to the internationalization of capital has resulted, he says, in the proliferation of "neo-nationalisms." These nonsensical "neo-nationalisms" do not in themselves require any special theoretical effort by Marxists. In taking this approach, Hobsbawm is practically conceding the irrelevance of class analysis in dealing with this concrete form of political movement. Although it may be no more than an illusion, we would still, however, have to explain the illusion. Finally, I shall return to Poulantzas, whose position, as I have indicated earlier, is ambiguous. In State, Power, Socialism, the book that is of most interest to us here, the nation appears as substantial, transhistorically irreducible, and likely to persist long after the end of class society (1978:94). Nationalism can have a progressive character; it encompasses both the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the working class and the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie (119). Nationalism, it would seem, has no history and is not tied to the interests of any one class.

Elsewhere, however, Poulantzas (1974) breaks down ideology into constitutive elements which necessarily have a class belonging. Deriving from Lenin's conception, social classes are seen as possessing paradigmatic ideologies. Concrete historical ideologies are an amalgam of heterogeneous elements, each with a necessary class belonging. Thus, the dominant bourgeois ideology has both petty bourgeois and working class elements contained within it. Poulantzas considers nationalism an ideological element of the bourgeoisie; as such, it is not subject to transformation in a socialist direction.

How can we reconcile these two views? Has nationalism remained the ideological element of the bourgeoisie, perhaps now belonging to relatively

more progressive sectors of this class? Or, is nationalism free of any necessary class belonging and, by implication, not fundamentally a product of the class struggle?

This is the kind of ambiguity which has plagued Marxist discourse on nationalism for too long. We are faced with two momentous realities: class struggle and national struggle. How may we reaffirm the primacy of the former without falling into reductionism? Fortunately, recent analyses of Ernesto Laclau (1977) will help to extricate us from this dilemma. Although Laclau focuses upon different phenomena (he is concerned with populism and fascism), we may, with caution, apply the thrust of his analysis to our problem.

Laclau begins by rejecting the notion of paradigmatic class ideologies, specifically the Poulantzean version which stresses that ideological elements have a necessary class belonging. Conversely, he argues that "ideological elements taken in isolation have no necessary class connotation, and that this connotation is only the result of the articulation of those elements in a concrete ideological discourse" (99). How are these neutral ideological elements incorporated into class discourse? Here, he cites Althusser:

Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it recruits subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation that I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most common police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' ... (100-101).

Interpellation is the mechanism by which individuals, who are simply bearers of structures, are transformed by ideology into subjects. The ideological level of society is made up of different types of interpellations. For Laclau, then, the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the "subject" interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse.

This approach constitutes a real step forward over traditional Marxist theories of ideology. Laclau transcends the problem of paradigmatic class ideologies, which often tend to fall into abstract reductionism (i.e. "Marxism-Leninism is the ideology of the working class"). The idea that neutral ideological elements are articulated into class discourse through interpellation, which cuts across class boundaries, is a far more satisfactory way of accounting for spontaneous popular traditions and empirical forms of consciousness.

Next, Laclau makes a distinction between class struggle and "classes-in-struggle." Class struggle is intelligible at the abstract level of the mode of production: the production relation that constitutes its two poles as classes in an antagonistic relation. "Classes-in-struggle," however, is an antagonism distinct from the former in that it is only intelligible at the level of a concrete social formation, and only apparent in the ideological and political sphere. Thus, in addition to the overdetermining class struggle, in any class society, there is a second contradiction, that between the "power bloc" and the "people." This kind of contradiction characteristically takes the form of dominated classes or class fractions struggling for hegemony against the dominant class or class fraction. "If the first contradiction...is expressed on the ideological level in the interpellation of agents as a class, this second contradiction is expressed through the interpellation of the agents as the people. The first contradiction is the sphere of class struggle; the second, that of popular-democratic struggle" (1977:107).

How can Laclau's formulation shed light on the kind of struggles we are concerned with here; namely, national struggles? In addition to the interpellation of agents as a class, attendant upon the contradictions at the

level of the mode of production, we may also imagine the interpellation of agents as "the nation". In this kind of struggle, the dominated sectors would not identify themselves as a class but as "the nation," counterposed to the dominant power bloc which exists external to this nation. The people/power bloc struggle may thus be transformed into a national struggle, specifically where there exists (a) a territorial separation between the "people" and the power bloc and (b) a cultural, linguistic, and/or ethnic distinction between the "people" and the power bloc. It becomes apparent just how potentially volatile national interpellations can become when we consider first the antagonisms wrought by the uneven development of capitalism, (which tend to fall along national lines), and second, the reservoir of easily recognizable, immediate, and neutral ideological raw materials, such as language and symbols. Along with John Saul (1979:401), we can recognize that the centre-periphery contradiction may be articulated with the class contradiction and become the primary non-class interpellation in a significant proportion of the world.

Furthermore, Laclau asserts that "classes do exist at the ideological and political level in a process of articulation and not of reduction" (1977:161). He is able to make this assertion by distinguishing between the form and content of an ideology: "the class character of an ideology is given by its form and not by its content" (1977:160). The elements which constitute the nation have a real existence in time and space, but these elements in themselves are neutral. They have no necessary class connotation. Class determination is applied to them by means of an articulating principle. I shall now turn to an examination of its various articulations in detail.

## Nationalism and hegemony

Nationalism is one of the primary forces of unification and integration in capitalist society. The process of nationalist socialization masks class antagonisms, absorbs contradictions, and legitimates the rule of the dominant class. Nationalism here is the ideology of the dominant class and, to paraphrase Laclau, it is dominant precisely because it is able to interpellate not only members of that class but, also, members of the dominated classes. "A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized" (1977:161).

This conception is reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony refers to the ability of the dominant class to secure the consent and cohesion of the broad masses; ideology serves to cement and unify the entire social bloc: "The development and expansion of the particular group which has imposed its hegemony are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all 'national' energies" (1971:182). The dominant ideology, he says (12), is able to "propagate itself throughout society -- bringing about not only a unison of political and economic aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups." Thus Gramsci recognized the necessity of the dominant class to interpellate subjects by appealing to non-economic sentiments in order to transcend the limits of a single economic class.

As Miliband (1969) has shown, the dominant class that articulates national consciousness in its ideological discourse has articulated a particularly potent legitimizing force. "Narrow" class interests are subordinated to the "national interest," a convenient state of affairs for the national bourgeoisie and the national state. The state, organic intellectuals, and various apparatuses in civil society are involved in the fostering and propagating of nationalist ideology. It is only through a highly developed national consciousness that the dominant class may go so far as to lead the working class into its imperialist adventures.

The current terminological confusion between "state" and "nation" is symptomatic of this dominant ideology. According to common usage, the nation is synonymous with the state, and the state with its "subjects" (e.g. "United Nations"). This misnomer is not the result of sloppiness; for, politicians are generally cunning in their use of words. Rather, it is one of the basic strategies in the modern legitimation of regimes.

For new post-colonial states (such as those in Africa), created within territorial boundaries which appear artificial once the authority of the colonial power is removed, the creation of a national consciousness plays a much more urgent role (Saul, 1979:170). This would explain the concern with "nation-building" which characterizes bourgeois development literature. Part of the reason for the preponderance of military regimes in many post-colonial states becomes clear when examined in this light. Should the hegemony of the dominant class in these countries falter, the state's repressive power is there to legally enforce the social order.

### Sub-state nationalism

As Ambercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980) contend in their critique of the "dominant ideology thesis," however, ideology is more than a mere "social cement" which unambiguously incorporates subordinate classes. Rather, ideology has a fundamentally dialectical character. Through the interpellation of subjects, it sets up a Self/Other opposition. National interpellations, therefore, have a dual function: on one hand, as I have outlined in the previous case, nationalism can be synthetic; on the other, nationalism can position subjects in antagonism to the dominant power bloc.

The phenomenon of sub-state nationalism is an example of the latter case. Earlier, in my discussion of Laclau, I concluded that, in addition to class struggle (which is fundamental in any capitalist society) there exists a second contradiction, only intelligible at the level of a concrete social formation, that between the "people" and the power bloc. Here the dominated sectors in society would be interpellated not as separate classes but as the "people," counterposed to the dominant power bloc. Further, I hypothesized that the people/power bloc struggle may be transformed into a national struggle in situations where there exists (a) a territorial separation between the power bloc and the "people" and (b) a cultural, linguistic, and/or ethnic distinction between the "people" and the power bloc. When this struggle occurs within the boundaries of a single state, it is manifest in the phenomenon of sub-state nationalism. The Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict will serve as a good illustration of this.

Eritrea, colonized by the Italians in 1896, was quickly transformed into a predominantly capitalist political economy. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has remained a feudal autocracy, at least up until the 1974 revolution which deposed Emperor Haile Selassie. The federation of these two distinct social



formations in 1952 and the subsequent annexion of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 has resulted in a situation in which the feudal landowning class has remained dominant within the power bloc. This hegemonic fraction not only directly exploits the peasantry at the level of the mode of production, but also subordinates the Eritrean workers, petty bourgeoisie, and budding indigenous bourgeoisie. This contradiction has sought expression on the ideological level through the interpellation of agents as the "nation." The leading Eritrean factions set about constructing the idea of an Eritrean "nation," based upon historical, cultural and territorial attributes -- and emphasizing its inherent "right of self-determination" -- in order that they might become hegemonic within their "own" state (c.f. Tseggai, 1976).

The following example of sub-state national struggle will highlight the role of the petty bourgeoisie, the group most often associated with modern nationalism. I refer again to Laclau. He considers the basic feature of the petty bourgeoisie to be its separation from the dominant relations of production in society. Its struggle takes place, therefore, not at the level of the dominant relations of production, but at the level of the political and ideological relations that make up the system of domination in that social formation. Thus, "...in these sectors, the identity as the 'people' plays a much more important role than the identity as a class" (1977:114).

Moore and Latouche (1976) have emphasized the role of the petty bourgeoisie in their examination of Quebec nationalism. For these authors, the roots of modern nationalism are found in the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s. Under the slogan of maîtres chez nous, the Liberal government of Quebec initiated a process of state nationalization, repatriation, and modernization. By subordinating the church, the dislocation that had existed between the political and ideological institutions was eliminated. In addition to consolidating the role of the petty and middle bourgeoisies of

the private sector, state intervention also created a "real" bureaucracy with a technocratic outlook. These fractions saw the logical prolongation of the Quiet Revolution to be the establishment of a mixed economy in which state capitalism would play a major role. Lacking a firm economic base of their own, they sought to use the Quebec state as a source of economic power; in doing so they came into conflict with the Canadian hegemonic system. They saw political sovereignty as the only solution.

The classes-in-struggle here are the Quebec petty-bourgeoisie (led by its technocratic fraction) and the Canadian bourgeoisie. Each class sought to give coherence to its ideological discourse by presenting its class objectives as the consummation of popular objectives rather than narrow economic interests. The result was quite striking. The interpellations of the Canadian bourgeoisie, with Pierre Trudeau as its mouthpiece, took on a distinctly liberal-democratic character and, of course, the petty-bourgeois Parti Quebecois incorporated nationalism into its ideological discourse, the interpellation to which the leading fractions could best appeal in order to establish their own hegemonic system.

#### Nationalism in the Periphery

The centre-periphery contradiction alluded to earlier presents a new set of problems. This contradiction, attendant upon the uneven development of capitalism, is manifest at the superstructural level in situations of structural dependency as well as direct colonial exploitation. It will obviously leave indigenous classes and fractions in a subordinate position in relation to the metropolitan bourgeoisie. It is not for this reason, however, that it is a contradiction. Commonly, in colonial situations, parts of the autochthonous superstructure are instrumentalized for the interests of

the colonial power during the conquest and administration of the colony. Local leaders had their power considerably enhanced in this manner. Furthermore, in post-colonial situations, comprador classes benefit significantly from their role as intermediaries. In these instances, the leading indigenous classes and fractions are incorporated within the power bloc.

Contradictions inevitably emerge, however, when the indigenous fractions seek to impose their own hegemony but are unable to do so because of the (neo-) colonial structure of the power bloc. In the resultant ideological struggle, the indigenous contenders would certainly not interpellate individuals as class conscious subjects; for this would threaten their own privileged positions within the social formation. Rather, they will draw upon the easily recognizable ingredients of territory, tradition, and race in recruiting subjects.

The experience of Kenya is an interesting case in point. Here, as Colin Leys (1978) has shown, a class of indigenous accumulators had existed from pre-colonial times, based upon the concentration of land and livestock. The colonial state launched a number of these precolonial accumulators on a fresh path of accumulation by appointing them "chiefs" who were enabled to tax and fine their "subjects" and to further accumulate land within the restricted African land areas by engaging in costly litigation. However, their drive toward embourgeoisement was thwarted by the contradiction with the European estate farmers who had the monopoly over surplus labour, agricultural commodities, and markets, and secondly, with the metropolitan bourgeoisie and its intervention in commodity production.

This indigenous class of capital had several strengthening features. It was heavily concentrated in the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group, located at the political and economic centre of Kenya. Confounded in their bourgeois aspirations as accumulators, the members turned increasingly to education. As a result, Kikuyu elites were heavily represented in the state apparatus and, naturally, came to the forefront of the nationalist movement.

Out of concern for maintaining their central leadership position, and anxious that the nationalist movement, which by now had a mass base of landless peasants, might be transformed into a revolutionary movement, the Kikuyu elites articulated an ethnic interpellation. Mass oathings, cultural nationalism, culminating in the militancy of "Mau-Mau," all served to consolidate Kikuyu consciousness and strengthen the Kikuyu organizational ability to challenge the colonial state.<sup>2</sup> At independence, as Leys has observed, the Kikuyu capitalist class was in a "position of strategic control over post-colonial re-alignments needed for the next phase of accumulation" (1978:250).

Since independence, the Kenyan bourgeoisie has continued to struggle against the neo-colonial structure of the power bloc. "African Socialism," "Kenyanization," and often openly racist policies directed against the Asian comprador class have been invoked in order to enlist consent and support from the subordinate classes for the dominant indigenous fractions in their assault upon the barriers of international capital. Thus the national interpellation attendant upon the centre-periphery contradiction is not necessarily progressive in spite of the anti-imperialist rhetoric. More often than not, it serves only to replace one form of class rule with another.

Amilcar Cabral (1969), on the other hand, saw national consciousness as a progressive force in the African context. For him, imperialism entailed the negation of the historical process of the dominated sectors through the subjugation of the national productive forces. National struggle was viewed as

...the phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected (83).

In the neo-colonial context, where the petty bourgeoisie is allied with imperialist capital, nationalism is clearly identified as part of the international class struggle. Cabral recognized the possibility of the petty bourgeoisie "committing class suicide" and emerging as the revolutionary vanguard of workers and peasants. National interpellations here are revolutionary; they seek to destroy the very structures upon which the exploitation of workers and peasants are built.

#### Nationalism and socialism

What is the relationship between nationalism and socialism? Under what circumstances can nationalism be considered a progressive force?

Two extreme points of view can be identified in regard to these questions. The first is represented by Eric Hobsbawm (1977). Marxists cannot be nationalists, he claims, since nationalism, by definition, subordinates all other interests to those of the "nation." He advocates the need for Marxists to distance themselves from it.<sup>3</sup> A contrary position is taken by Regis Debray (1977), who argues that Marxists must acknowledge their own popular-national roots. Communists will never win in France or elsewhere unless they capture national heritage for their own ends. Any contradiction

between the French tricolour and the red flag is denied. It appears that the disagreement here is one between idealism and pragmatism. While Hobsbawm is concerned with the tainting of working class ideology with nationalist infusions, Debray sees nationalism as a necessary device for furthering the revolutionary cause.

As I have argued, no class can be hegemonic on the basis of class interpellations alone; a hegemonic class must incorporate the "people" into its ideological discourse. National traditions crystallized into immediate and easily recognizable symbols represent a potent force in which the subjects interpellated by them find a strong principle of identity. Their relative continuity is in contrast to the historical discontinuities that characterize class structures (Laclau, 1977:166).

This last point may be useful in an examination of the successes of socialist revolutions. Significantly, they have taken place only in countries with low levels of capitalist development and always in conjunction with nationalist movements. Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, and Mozambican political economies, among others, were characterized in their pre-revolutionary periods by the simultaneous existence of both capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production. Is it any wonder that the class interpellations of proletarian ideology alone proved to be an insufficient device for mobilizing the masses without the simultaneous interpellation of subjects through nationalist ideology? Lenin understood the tactical significance of this and sought to capture nationalist aspirations for revolutionary ends. This explains all the rhetoric concerning the "right of self-determination." Lenin's assurance of this right to Finns, Poles and Ukrainians allowed him to enlist their support while ensuring that their complacency would prevent their pressing for it (Lenin, 1970).

The nation will not go away, but has a real existence in time and space. It is, both literally and figuratively speaking, the terrain of class struggle. Figuratively, the elements which constitute the nation (territory, tradition, ethnicity and so on) provide a quarry of immediate and easily recognizable ideological raw materials. In themselves, these elements are passive. They receive meaning externally, through articulation into class discourse. Hegemony is not achieved at the level of the relations of production, but at the level of political and ideological relations. The working class must present its class interests as the "national interest," and dis-articulate national interpellations from the dominant bourgeois ideology. Nationalism is a potent ideology and an important resource for popular mobilization.

Literally speaking, in spite of internationalism, the masses live in circumscribed national communities. Only a national transition to socialism is possible, through the capture of the national state. Herein lies an important point of coincidence for socialists and nationalists; for, nationalism often involves a struggle for state power, whether through succession or independence. Nationalism may thus lead to a radical break with the interests of the dominant class and develop into an ideology seeking to destroy the fundamental structures of domination in society.

Nationalism should not, however, be welcomed uncritically into working class discourse. By definition, it subordinates all interests to those of the nation. As such, it is, as Hobsbawm (1977) argues, incompatible with Marxism. Nationalism is, above all, the ideology of class collaboration. Its primary historical function has been to mask class antagonisms, absorb contradictions, and legitimate the rule of the dominant class. The ideology of nationalism confronts socialists with serious dilemmas and without a

proper understanding of the opportunities and dangers it presents, appropriate political strategies will remain obscure.

#### NOTES

1. See James Blaut's 1982 critique.
2. Following Connor (1972), "tribalism" is here considered to be a form of nationalism. For more on Kikuyu nationalism, see Nottingham and Roseberg (1966).
3. Hobsbawm (1983) argues, however, that nationalism, when combined with working class radicalism, can be a powerful force for progressive social change. He cites the examples of Britain during the Chartist period and immediately following the Second World War.

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