**The Colonial “Other”: On the Blind Spot of *Imagined Communities***

 Anderson’s attempt to provide a detailed explanation of the circumstances surrounding the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism leads to the creation of historical narrative that demonstrates the essentially European nature of nationalism. This historical narrative fails to shed light on the numerous and parallel histories of the nationalist phenomenon, and designates the nation as a modern Western phenomenon, passively inherited by countries on the West’s peripheries. The West – European and American – is the central actor in the movement of history, while the histories of the other parts of the world are perceived as, at most, imitations or derivatives of this movement. This historicist structure, which the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has called “first Europe, and then the world,” stands at the center of the criticism of Anderson’s historical project by members of the Subaltern Studies Group.

 Partha Chatterjee, an Indian professor of anthropology and history and theoretician, argues that Anderson’s explanations strip the colonized world of all true agency: they establish anti-colonial nationalism as the product of European political and intellectual history, and present it as nothing more than derivative discourse, leaving the non-European world no opportunity for narrative autonomy. In the first chapter of his book *Nation and Its Fragments*, entitled “Whose Imagined Community?”, Chatterjee describes his opposition to the idea that anti-colonial nationalism is imagined by automatically and passively choosing a single model among the many received from the West:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain “modular” forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized (5).

Chatterjee offers an alternative historical narrative to describe the development of anti-colonial nationalism, as part of an updated examination of the ambivalence, contradictions, and paradoxes of the processes involved in the creation of this nationalism, which, in his opinion, cannot be reduced to merely a pale imitation of existing European models. He seeks to prove that anti-colonial nationalism is more than a reaction to imperialist occupation – it is the creative action of the complex practices of assimilation and selective adoption effected by colonized peoples in an effort to create for themselves a national identity based on something other than Western models. In order to understand anti-colonial nationalism, Chatterjee argues, it is imperative to study not only the East’s attempt to resemble the West and adopt its imperial power structures, statecraft, and control, but also colonized peoples’ ceaseless attempt to maintain the existence of colonial difference, which clearly distinguishes them from the modern West and provides them with national-cultural autonomy. The most creative achievements of the act of national imagination in Asia and Africa, Chatterjee argues, are not the product of equivalence with or similarity to, but rather difference from, the modular nationalist forms identified with the modern West.

 Chatterjee begins his critical discussion of *Imagined Communities* by raising a fundamental, methodological problem that characterizes the historiography of the nationalist phenomenon: the tendency to identify nationalism as a political movement, its existence to the power dynamics of the public domain. It is because of this tendency that non-Western nationalism is described as the product of a political struggle for liberation from imperial mechanisms of control and power, thus preserving and reinforcing the West’s exclusive responsibility for the creation of the nationalist phenomenon. Chatterjee maintains that, in order to fully understand anti-colonial nationalism’s complex developmental processes, it is vital to distinguish between nationalism as a political movement and nationalism as a cultural construct – a distinction which makes it possible to locate the genesis of anti-colonial nationalism before the official, indisputable emergence of processes of decolonialization. In Chatterjee’s historical interpretation, anti-colonial nationalism fashioned for itself a sovereign sphere within the framework of colonial society, even before beginning the true political struggle against imperial occupation. It accomplished this by dividing the social sphere into two domains: the materialistic domain and the spiritual domain (Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories 7-11).

 The materialistic domain is the outside domain, the formal arena for economics, statecraft, science, and technology. This is the domain, Chatterjee argues, through which the West, having long proven its supremacy therein, seeks to preserve the colonial difference between itself and the non-Western world. It accomplishes this through the partial – and only partial – application of processes of normalization with the colonized population, which are ultimately intended to perpetuate the unbridgeable rift between colonizer and colonized, and the ruling class’s essential foreignness to those it rules. The East, Chatterjee explains, has no choice but to acknowledge the West’s supremacy in the materialist realm, and in order for anti-colonial nationalism to undergo a transformation that might prepare it for control and organization, it must study and imitate the West’s achievements, making use of the imperial authority’s power structures and institutions. Anti-colonial nationalism’s activity in the materialistic domain thus reflects a desire to challenge and nullify colonial difference, to adopt Western political models, and to oppose the European attempt to draw distinctions between East and West.

 That being said, the materialistic domain and the dynamic described therein are nothing more than an advanced stage, one that follows the emergence and development of national identity and culture in what Chatterjee calls the spiritual domain. The spiritual domain is the inner domain, home to the essential characteristics of native cultural identity. This domain, which encompasses, among other things, religion, language, art, and family, is the first realm over which anti-colonial nationalist declares its sovereignty: it excludes the colonial state, basing itself on the preservation and maintenance of essential difference between the colonizer’s modern Western culture and the traditional culture of the colonized. If the nation is an imagined community, Chatterjee argues, then this is the domain in which it begins to form, the domain in which anti-colonial nationalism fashions its most significant and creative national project: the creation of a modern national culture that is neither Western nor European. In this spiritual domain, the nation becomes an imagined sovereign community well before freeing itself from the bonds of colonial rule. The new nationalist subjectivity created in the spiritual domain does not seek to base itself on a universalist concept of nationality or citizenship, but rather on the demarcation and formation of a particular difference that allows oppressed subjects to create an autonomous national space for themselves, one based on the characteristics of their traditional culture.

 As should be clear from the prior description, Chatterjee’s critique of the West’s history of nationalism strives to examine this history from a heterogeneous point of view that restores the complexity of the nationalist process—suppressed in Anderson’s discussion—to the non-European world. As Chatterjee demonstrates, anti-colonial nationalism is created through a complex, sometimes even paradoxical, process of maneuvering between two domains, the spiritual and the materialistic: the modern post-colonial nation-state consolidates itself in parallel to its preservation of an ambivalent, even negative, relationship with that which is “modern.” The capitalist foundations of production are established against a background of anti-capitalist ideology; traditional culture’s distinct character is preserved alongside the adoption of a political power structure demanding acknowledgment of European supremacy. Yet it is this very paradoxicality, Chatterjee argues, that aids those relegated to the margins of the Western history of nationalism in demanding their freedom of imagination, and provides them with the potential to fashion new, original, and diverse forms of the modern nation-state.

 In Chatterjee’s view, Anderson’s blindness to the heterogeneity national formation processes in the non-European world, and especially to their inherent paradoxes and contradictions, is rooted in a deeper methodological failure: viewing homogeneous, empty time as one typical of modernity, and one necessary to the action of national imagination. In a later critique of *Imagined Communities*, Chatterjee argues that Western nationalism is nothing more than a particular form of a universal, rich, and diverse idea, and neither its source nor the default choice for its realization ("Anderson's Utopia"). This argument stems from Chatterjee’s criticism of Anderson’s attitude towards the modernist temporality of homogeneous, empty time. Such a form of time, Chatterjee explains, is a particular product, and not a fundamental characteristic, of modern temporality itself: in fact, it is the utopian time of capital, allowing human beings to understand and discuss reality through categories of political economics, such as prices, wages, markets, labor, and so forth (131-132). Anderson’s assumption that national existence is predicated upon the choice of a conception of time based on horizontal simultaneity thus stems from a narrow, one-dimensional view of modern life; such a conception of time is not characteristic of modernity as a whole, but rather only of capitalism, which constitutes only one particular expression of modern existence. Anderson overlooks the fact that this conception of time, linearly connecting past, present, and future and aiding in the imagination of nation and national identity, is utopian – it is not situated at any particular point in real space, and is itself the result of an ideological distortion intended to aid capitalism in tightening its grip. For Chatterjee, the real space of modern life is, in Foucault’s terms, a heterotopia: a space whose representations are contradictory, whose coherence is garbled, and which therefore produces conceptions of time that are manifold, diverse, and even opposed to one another. These conceptions of time are not remnants or relics of a pre-modern past, as Western historiography would have it, but rather a result of modernity itself: a heterogeneous temporality that forestalls the possibility of a homogeneous sociology, and undermines the universality and uniformity of processes of national imagination.[[1]](#footnote-1) In an effort to offer an alternative historical narrative, Chatterjee presents anti-colonial nationalism and the result of a complex negotiation between processes of modernity and traditional culture, between the internalization of imperial forms of subjugation and control and an active attempt to maintain difference and strengthen the autonomy of national culture.

 Although this historical narrative aids in shedding light on problematic aspects of Anderson’s discussion, some of Chatterjee’s assertions themselves contain fundamental issues demanding further critical inquiry. Like Anderson, Chatterjee does not fully succeed in avoiding the depiction of nationalism as an elitist program based on a cultural synthesis realizable only by the pure and refined intellect of the minority intelligentsia. The masses, Chatterjee argues, immersed for so many centuries in frivolous dogmas, traditional rituals, and irrational folk religion, are unprepared to cultivate an anti-colonial national consciousness, and to carry out the complex series of maneuvers that turns this consciousness into an active entity on the field of political power. But Chatterjee fails to explain how these elites manage to free themselves from the world of ideological forces and cultural traditions in which they find themselves, and carry out the complex negotiation between the spiritual domain and the materialistic domain as rational, conscious, and autonomous subjects.

 Moreover, the separation Chatterjee describes between the spiritual domain and the materialistic domain betrays an excessively narrow conception of the political, which he identifies chiefly with the public sphere. Chatterjee’s assumption that it is possible to maintain a complete separation between these two domains, and prevent the entanglement of the colonial power in the intimate, internal sphere of traditional cultural existence, does not allow him to examine how the spiritual domain is suffused by the influence of Western political culture’s values, which forestall any possibility for the creation of an authentic Eastern national identity. Chatterjee’s description of the national identity created in the spiritual domain as a development and adaptation of a pre-national communal identity leaves his structural claims exposed to the pitfall of essentialism and primordialism, and even raises the question of why national identity was under discussion in the first place. In this light, it seems that, ironically, in his attempt to re-appropriate anti-colonial nationalism from the West, Chatterjee gives nationalism an excessively transcendental and murky definition – one which prevents the possibility of distinguishing and separating it from other, older and more traditional, forms of communal identity. Chatterjee’s assumption that national identity first comes into being in an autonomous domain, and on the basis of cultural affinities rooted in a pre-colonial past, keeps him from critically examining the fact of the spiritual realm’s separation from the materialistic, and seeing how this separation is itself an inherent ideological component of anti-colonial national imagination, not an empirical and factual truth. Moreover, Chatterjee’s claims betray a subjective perspective that has adopted many of the Enlightenment project’s fundamental assumptions: the oppressed colonial subject is described as a generic and homogeneous entity whose belonging to the collective upon which the anti-colonial national community is founded is taken for granted. This homogeneity precedes the colonial subject’s entrance into and experiences within the materialistic domain, and it allows him to undergo, as a single consolidated unit, processes of adaptation and transformation that do not undermine his fundamental stability or cohesiveness.

 The separation Chatterjee makes between the spiritual and materialist domains, and the potential for the oppressed to choose and manipulate the degree of the colonial colonizer’s cultural and political influence, demonstrate how his discussion is based on his conception of colonial identities as being organized within an oppositional structure with clear contours and boundaries. The colonial difference between colonizer and colonized is indeed presented by Chatterjee as a Western ideological means of distinguishing between identities and demarcating the differences between them, but he views this difference as something constant and entirely external, and therefore capable of aspiring to its own negation or diminishment. He fails to examine how the colonial situation turns this difference into an inherent component of the identity of both colonizer and colonized, creating a hybridized, synthetic identity resisting any and all dichotomous classification. Thus, Chatterjee’s historical discussion is based on the existence of a narrow domain of distinct and oppositional identities, which fails to examine how the complex dialectical relationship engendered by the colonial situation forestalls any possibility of viewing these identities – and the national entities created through them – as separate from one another.

 Ultimately, in an effort to demonstrate how post-colonial nationalism is based on a national-cultural identity that comes into being beyond the reach of the West, Chatterjee gives up on a no less significant historical challenge: examining how post-colonial nationalism succeeded in subverting the structures of power and control it adopted as part of the total acceptance of Western supremacy. The creativity of the act of anti-colonial national imagination is identified by Chatterjee with the spiritual domain, whereas the materialist domain is described as one of conformity, in which the colonial oppressed accept upon themselves the edicts of the modern Western state’s structures of power and control. Chatterjee fails to examine how postcolonial national consciousness succeeded in challenging the nationalist structures of power and control inherited from the colonial empire, in giving them new interpretations, and in exposing the failures and contradictions of Western modular forms. Chatterjee’s claim that anti-colonial nationalism took the original national-cultural identity it created and recast it into an existing political structure transforms this nationalism into a by-product of the forms of colonial power to which it formed itself in opposition, raising the question asked by Foucault in a different context: does it not constitute “part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces […] by calling it ‘repression’” (10)?

 Indian-American sociologist, author, and cultural scholar Homi K. Bhabha’s essay “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation” is a sustained critique of the essentialist and homogeneous conceptions of the nation identified with Western historiography. Nations, Bhabha argues, should be seen as texts, as narrative structures, and he acknowledges Anderson’s contribution to the possibility of conceiving of the nation as a symbolic, representation-producing system composed of various practices of signification. But it is not enough, Bhabha argues, to rely on an analysis of the nation according to its own accounts, or according to the narratives created within the context of its own act of national imagination. Rather, the mechanisms of signification at work within the context of these narratives should be examined, as well as the way in which the nation, as text, is left open to the processes of disruption, subversion, deferral, and deconstruction that characterize – as the postcolonialist and deconstructivist perspective would have it – all linguistic expressions or symbols. Bhabha disagrees with Anderson’s homogeneous conception of the processes of national imagination, and disputes the possibility of imagining the nation as a cohesive, continuous historical entity. In his eyes, the nation is a locus of difference, duplication, ambivalence, and hybridism, and cannot be viewed as if it coalesces into one imagined center; rather, it is characterized by constant fluctuation between adherence to processes of homogenization (pointed out by Anderson) and cooperation with processes that subvert the homogeneity of the national symbol. Bhabha points out the tension, and the irrepressible ambivalence, at the heart of national identity. He explains that the narration of the nation, meaning its creation and structuring as text, is based on a doubled, ambivalent, and divided movement of signification: the human beings who populate the national space are not static historical objects, and their signification as national subjects suffers from a constant crisis of meaning. Thus, the national conversation is characterized by two opposing practices of signification through which it is possible to understand the ambivalent tension latent within the task of narrating the nation: one pedagogical and one performative. Pedagogical national signification clashes with the contingent, arbitrary nature of performative signification, and seeks to suppress it. Nationalist pedagogy seeks to bestow an (imagined) historical continuity upon national existence, one characterized by linearity, coherence, and the existence of a clear and distinct historical source. Meanwhile, performative forces deconstruct and disrupt the coherence of the national narrative and its inherent subjectivity, exposing their heterogeneous and fragmentary nature. As a result of performative signification, nationalist subjectivity expresses the constant reiteration of difference (and not of similarity), and thus cannot be perceived as unified and continuous. This difference, Bhabha explains, would constitute a stumbling block for the attempt – included as part of the act of national imagination – to discern the obvious dual relationship between the I and the Other (for example, European and non-European), or to suggest a clear division between past and present, pre-modern and modern, and so forth. Pedagogical signification attempts to erase the aforementioned difference, presenting the connection between signifier and signified as non-arbitrary, natural, and self-evident. This signification conceals the relationship, characterized by deferral and difference, between signifier and signified (what Derrida calls “différance”), and endeavors to maintain the illusion of a constant, homogeneous nationalist subjectivity based on reiterations of, or variations on, a stable (and self-identical) nucleus of identity and meaning. Pedagogical signification initiates dialogical and textual practices of chronology and causality, in an effort to ensure that the national story represses not only its own othernesses, but even those inherent to nationalist subjectivity itself. At the same time, Bhabha argues, the tension between opposing practices of signification presents the possibility of opposition as well; that is, to use performative signification as a means of exposing the arbitrariness of pedagogical signification’s codes and norms.

 Bhabha’s distinction between these two practices of signification implies a call to arms against Anderson’s suggested conception of homogeneous temporality. It is pedagogical signification that makes possible the nation’s horizontal solidarity and the homogeneous temporality of processes of national imagination. Yet in practice, Bhabha argues, nationalist temporality, as a consequence of these processes of signification, is always ambivalent and divided. Nationalist pedagogy seeks to construct a subject with a sense of continuity within time and space, whose national existence has a clear historical origin. At the same time, performative signification expresses the erasure of the existence of origin or any prior essentialist presence, exposing the singular, non-recursive, and non-accumulative production of nationalist signification. This performativity disrupts homogeneous temporality’s sense of linear continuity, which links past, present, and future, and safeguards the existence of an unchanging nucleus of national identity, which is imagined as preceding all cultural experience. As Bhabha demonstrates, the act of imagining the nation as a sociological organism moving through history is necessarily undermined due to the historical presence of the subjects who comprise the imagined national collective, whose national-identity-constructing performativity clearly demonstrates nationalist signification’s inherent heterogeneity and lack of coherence. For this reason, Bhabha argues that the nation, as Anderson depicts it, is subject-less – it overlooks the way in which nationalist performance, as carried out by those constitute part of the imagined national community, must necessarily undermine the possibility of telling the nation’s story as if it were homogeneous. Ultimately, Bhabha explains, the national space is not based only on the cultural diversity of subjects defined as each other’s Other, but also on cultural diversity, which is inherent to the structure of the national subject and comes before any symbol, icon, or national content presenting itself as stable, unified, and consistent.

 Unlike Chatterjee’s, Bhabha’s thought subverts the assumption that the identities participating in the colonial situation can be mapped or dichotomously differentiated. Bhabha argues that while, in the pre-colonial era, colonizer and colonized existed in separate cultural and geographical spaces, the colonial era saw the creation of a new space, a “third space,” which placed colonizer and colonized in the same boat and altered both their perspectives and their self-consciousness (The Location of Culture 53-56). The identity of the oppressor – not just of the oppressed – is forcibly rebuilt as a result of contact with the culture of the oppressed, which leaves its stamp on it. This hybrid situation, as Bhabha demonstrates, subverts the desire of both sides – colonizer and colonized – to maintain both a homogeneous cultural identity and the belief that these cultural identities are organized using stable, unchanging binary oppositions.[[2]](#footnote-2) With these expressions of Bhabha’s thought in mind, I wish to return to Anderson’s description of the historical process of development by which nationalism emerged, and critically examine it.[[3]](#footnote-3)

 The first model of nationalism, Anderson argues, was realized in Latin and South America by creoles – whites of purely European origin – who could no longer continue defining themselves as Europeans in light of their birth far from the European continent. Anderson is surely aware that Europe’s settlements in America were not uninhabited spaces fashioned into precise copies of the European metropolis. Yet this awareness of the facts fails to find expression in Anderson’s description of creole national consciousness’s emergence. Anderson’s discussion of this national consciousness’s development exchanges the inherent heterogeneity and hybridism of colonial space for a conception of time established on a unified principle of homogeneity. In so doing, Anderson removes from his historical discussion the influence of the material and concrete characteristics of colonial geographic space on the creation of the imagined national community.

 The creole model of nationalism is described as the product of a dual process of integration carried out by creoles with both the European continent (since the attempt to self-define as an autonomous unit was necessarily made before, and under the influence of, the European mother country) and other creoles (themselves of purely European origin). By way of “pilgrimages”[[4]](#footnote-4) through American colonial space, the creoles succeeded in defining similarities and shared interests among discrete administrative units, and thus in imagining themselves as a single national community. As Anderson’s descriptions make evident, the only encounters in the colonial space of the American continent itself that influenced the emergence of national consciousness were those between fellow creoles. The process of establishing and creating national consciousness is this depicted as essentially selective: it demands an Other as a point of relation and comparison, through which it becomes possible to imagine and develop collective affinities – but this Other can only be Western, whether European or creole.

 Anderson depicts the space in which these creole “pilgrimages” took place as a kind of autonomous and neutral enclave; a homogeneous, sterile, uncomplicated, and crisis-free territory. Anderson’s descriptions therefore create a de-politicization of space – they avoid depicting it as a dense network of hierarchies and power structures, in whose light and against whose background the processes setting the stage for the emergence of creole national consciousness occurred. Anderson overlooks the fact that national consciousness coalesced among the creoles in a space that frequently brought ruler and subject, master and slave, colonizer and colonized, into direct contact with one another – a third, heterogeneous space of unbidden and ambivalent connections and mutual attraction and rejection. All of these factors conspired to subvert the possibility of an ontological separation between “I” and Other, between European and non-European, creating a hybridized hodgepodge of identities that refused to be joined into a uniform national collective. Why then would such a hybrid space aid in the creation of the concept of homogeneous, empty time, which is fundamentally European and Western? Why does the physical and concrete space of colonialism not constitute an active element in the formation of a conception of time that undermines the notion of the uniformity and temporal homogeneity of the national community?

 In fact, throughout his entire discussion, Anderson creates a consistent disconnect between the category of time and the category of space, which reveals how homogeneous, empty time inevitably suppresses geographical and physical space, which is neither homogeneous nor empty. This suppression allows Anderson to offer a judgment and historical account of the emergence of the imagined national community and a temporal perspective – Western, homogeneous, and free of any traces of hybridism – that can be imported and assimilated, with great ease and without significant barriers, into the context of the European space.

 Beyond the encounters between creoles from different administrative units of the colonial empire, Anderson discusses the significance of the distribution of newspapers throughout colonial space as a condition for the creation of a homogeneous conception of time, which contributed to the emergence of a firm and steady sense of simultaneity within the imagined national community. Anderson, who endeavors to show that the nationalist phenomenon is not endemic to the European continent, in fact ascribes the possibility of the national’s community’s act of imagination to an invention (namely, modern journalism). He describes this invention as a European achievement, one which expresses economic and social transformations that occurred, first and foremost, in the European realm. In so doing, he expresses the presumption at the foundation of his scholarship: that the ability to carry out the act of national imagination (not only the actual practice of nationalism) is an achievement of the European West. This act of imagination’s ability to occur outside the European continent is dependent on the “importation” of a material cultural object, the newspaper, through which can be “imported” certain modern and Western concepts of temporality as well.

 The postcolonial criticism of Chatterjee and Bhabha exposes the blind spot, and the fundamentally European slant, of *Imagined Communities*. In concluding my discussion of the Anderson’s historiographical project, and in response, however partial and non-comprehensive, to these criticisms, I wish to point out what seems to me to be a subversive, deconstructivist dimension inherent to the act of imagining the national community. Anderson begins his book by presenting a fundamental example of the imaginative strategy that allows for the creation of the national collective – tombs of the Unknown Soldier:

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments **precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them**, has no true precedents in earlier times. To feel the force of this modernity one has only to imagine the general reaction to the busy-body who 'discovered' the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the cenotaph with some real bones. […] Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings [emphasis mine] (9).

With this example, Anderson’s comments point out a fundamental, inherent characteristic of the act of national imagination: it is necessarily based on the existence of an anonymous and empty space, lacking the final, decisive signified. It is the inability to point to the signified that might constitute the final purpose of act of imagination or the goal that sentences said act to ceaseless and indecisive movement through a chain of signifiers, and exposes the fundamental instability of national consciousness and the identity constructed in its aftermath. Therefore, the homogeneity presented by Anderson is not an obvious result of the act of imagination, but rather a testament to the ideological attempt to stabilize the infinite movement up and down the chain of signifiers before which and through which the national collective is constituted. This is an exception that seeks to obscure the rule – the way in which the act of imagination is based on the existence of a space that shies away from signification, or, in other words, on what cannot be fully imagined. The constant exclusion of the concrete signified transforms national imagination into a locus of leakage, disruption, indistinctiveness, and instability, imbued from the outset with the potential to fill the empty space of signification with identities that pay no heed to the ideological demand for national homogenization, and forestall the possibility of imagination according to any such categorical imperative. More than anything, the emptiness of the imagined space of signification testifies that, ultimately, national imagination – both in its characteristic anonymity and in the act of abstraction in which it is bound up – forestalls, by dint of its very existence and by virtue of its definition, any possibility of a specific individual occupying the position of absolute national subject, a position that, at least partially, refuses to be imagined.[[5]](#footnote-5)

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1. Chatterjee even subverts the automatic identification of modernity with the West with his argument that the disintegrated, contradiction-filled domain of colonialism turned the post-colonial world into the clearest exemplar of modernity’s heterogeneous time: “In those places, one could show industrial capitalists waiting to close a business deal because they hadn't yet had word from their respective astrologers, or industrial workers who could not touch a new machine until it had been consecrated with appropriate religious rites.[...] Or ministers who openly boast of having secured more jobs for people from their own clan and having kept the others out…” ("Anderson's Utopia" 131-132). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Following in the footsteps of Derrida’s concept of language, Bhabha demonstrates that ruler and subject, European and native, function as a pair of signs between which there exists non-separation and a constant trickle of meaning. The difference between these signs, which is to say between colonizer and colonized, is not external to them, and thus is neither the property nor inheritance of the Other, the colonial subject, nor is it subject to the administration of the Western colonizer. This is an inherent difference constituting an integral part of the identities of those participating in the colonial situation. Much like Derrida’s subversion of the binary oppositions identified with the logocentric Western tradition, Bhabha demonstrates that any attempt to structure West and East, colonizer and colonized, self and Other, as binary oppositions is reductive, and that these oppositions are unstable and must eventually collapse on one another. This is also the root of Bhabha’s opposition to the possibility of the existence of political separatism between colonizer and colonized, as maintained by the politics of identity that accompany many national movements. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bhabha devotes most of his discussion of Anderson to the critique of homogeneous temporality demanded by his conception of the nation and national identity as text. I make use of this conception of Bhabha’s in order to examine the other, historical, part of Anderson’s discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The use Anderson makes of the pilgrimage metaphor hints at a teleological and progressive conception of this movement, and thus at its status as a means of spatial organization and the validation of European values and concepts. This usage of the conception of the pilgrimage even exposes the tension, inherent to the national existence (rejected by Anderson in his treatment of nationalism as a phenomenon heralding the end of the religious community), between enlightenment and theology and religiosity. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I rely here on the principle implied by Deleuze’s famous statement in an interview with Antonio Negri: “majority is nobody, minority is everbody.” Deleuze’s statement demonstrates that the striving for the standardization of a uniform and coherent position of the subject, existing within the context of a defined and stable arena of power relations, is based on an abstract and nonexistent model of hegemonic subjectivity, which no one can fully and absolutely fulfill ("Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Antonio Negri"). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)