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Nationalized Childhood: Tensions of the "National" Discourse in the BNCC and the Curricular Policy of Subject Formation[1]

Infância nacionalizada: tensões do discurso do "nacional" na BNCC e a política curricular de formação de sujeitos

Infancia Nacionalizada: Tensiones del Discurso de lo "Nacional" en la BNCC y la Política Curricular de Formación de Sujetos

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Abstract

This article problematizes the effects of the signifier "national" in the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), especially in its relationship with the production of a normative project of childhood and citizenship. Based on the understanding of curriculum as a field of disputes, we articulate Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, Bhabha's cultural

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studies, and Derrida's contributions on language and indeterminacy. The documentary analysis of the BNCC reveals how the discourse of the "national" seeks to construct a homogeneous, stable subject aligned with a democratic and civilizing ideal. However, in its attempt to fix meanings and shape identities, the curricular text exposes its own condition of incompleteness and vulnerability. Childhood, far from being a stable or universal category, emerges as a floating signifier, performed and crossed by local, cultural, and political tensions. We argue that the curriculum, by summoning childhoods for a project of the future, often erases their multiple and present experiences. Therefore, we advocate for a shift: to think of the curriculum as a territory of invention and resistance, where other childhoods can emerge — less constrained, more plural.

Keywords: Childhood. BNCC. Curriculum. Discourse. Difference.

Resumo

Este artigo problematiza os efeitos do significante "nacional" na Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC), especialmente em sua relação com a produção de um projeto normativo de infância e cidadania. Partindo da concepção de currículo como campo de disputas, articulamos a teoria do discurso de Laclau e Mouffe, os estudos culturais de Bhabha e as contribuições de Derrida sobre linguagem e indeterminação. A análise documental da BNCC revela como o discurso do "nacional" busca construir um sujeito homogêneo, estável e alinhado a um ideal democrático e civilizatório. No entanto, ao tentar fixar sentidos e moldar identidades, o texto curricular expõe sua própria condição de incompletude e vulnerabilidade. A infância, longe de ser uma categoria estável ou universal, emerge como significante flutuante, performada e atravessada por tensões locais, culturais e políticas. Argumentamos que o currículo, ao convocar infâncias para um projeto de futuro, frequentemente apaga suas experiências presentes e múltiplas. Por isso, defendemos um deslocamento: pensar o currículo como território de invenção e resistência, onde outras infâncias possam emergir — menos enquadradas, mais plurais.

***Palavras-chave**: Infância. BNCC. Currículo. Discurso. Diferença.*

Resumen

Este artículo problematiza los efectos del significante "nacional" en la Base Nacional Común Curricular (BNCC) de Brasil, especialmente en su relación con la producción de un proyecto normativo de infancia y ciudadanía. Partiendo de la concepción del currículo como un campo de disputas, articulamos la teoría del discurso de Laclau y Mouffe, los estudios culturales de Bhabha y los aportes de Derrida sobre lenguaje e indeterminación. El análisis documental de la BNCC revela cómo el discurso de lo "nacional" busca construir un sujeto homogéneo, estable y alineado con un ideal democrático y civilizatorio. Sin embargo, al intentar fijar sentidos y moldear identidades, el texto curricular expone su propia condición de incompletud y vulnerabilidad. La infancia, lejos de ser una categoría estable o universal, emerge como un significante flotante, performativa y atravesada por tensiones locales, culturales y políticas. Argumentamos que el currículo, al convocar infancias para un proyecto de futuro, frecuentemente borra sus experiencias presentes y múltiples. Por ello, defendemos un desplazamiento: pensar el currículo como territorio de invención y resistencia, donde puedan emerger otras infancias —menos encuadradas, más plurales.

***Palabras clave:** Infancia. BNCC. Currículo. Discurso. Diferencia.*

1. Situating the Issue

Over the past three decades, within the context of Brazilian public policy production in the field of education, we have observed an increasing convergence between national curricular regulations and a broader project of citizen formation. At the outset, we align ourselves with Lopes and Macedo (2011) in recognizing that the main educational reforms in Brazil have been forged within the domain of curriculum. When examining curricular discourses produced since the 1990s—such as the National Curricular Parameters (Brazil, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines (Brazil, 2013), and, more recently, the National Common Curricular Base (Brazil, 2018)—we identify that a nation-building ideology permeates not only the nomenclature of these policies but also projects meaning onto curricular practices (Rodrigues, 2020).

Although the focus of this article is the field of curriculum, and specifically the BNCC, it is important to note that the discourse mobilized by the signifier national also appears in other educational policies, such as the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (Brazil, 2012), the National Literacy Policy (Brazil, 2019), and the recent National Commitment to Childhood Literacy (Brazil, 2023).

By foregrounding the signifier "national" in curricular policies directed toward childhood, we seek to problematize how nation-building projects also operate as projects of childhood and citizenship. Anchored in a universalizing rationality, these projects aim not only to articulate identities around national symbols (flag, territory, language), but also to establish ethical, moral, and behavioral standards legitimized as desirable.

It is important to emphasize that, within the specificity of the discussion undertaken in this work—structured around the axis curriculum–nation–human rights—the notion of the Nation-State has been increasingly challenged in the field of the social sciences in an unstable geopolitical context, as Appadurai (2004) points out. We refer here to the rise of a world framed as globalized, in which separatist movements, ethno-religious wars, and disordered and chaotic migratory flows circulate, revealing, to a certain extent, the collapse of the global organization of political life into Nation-States. At the same time, nationalist discourses, border closures, and policies aimed at containing migration at points of arrival appear as desperate attempts to alleviate the agony of political borders.

Considering these issues, however briefly outlined, we agree with Appadurai (2004) that modern links between territory, languages, nation, and identities are in a state of disjunction. On this point, Appadurai (1997, p. 39) argues:

> These disjunctions in the links between space, place, citizenship, and nationality result in several far-reaching implications. One of them is that territory and territoriality are increasingly becoming the critical logical basis for the legitimation and power of the state, while conceptions of nation are being drawn ever more toward discourses of loyalty and affiliation—sometimes linguistic, sometimes racial, sometimes religious, but very rarely territorial.

Based on these conjectures regarding what a national discourse implies for curricular policies and subjects within the dimension of citizenship, we structure our analysis around three axes. In the first, we problematize the meanings of *nation* and *national* in their relationship to the constitution of subjectivities. In the second, we discuss how national discourse projects mean onto the National Common Curricular Base, articulating an ideal of citizenship and unity. In the third and final section, we turn to the interface between the national and the curriculum, highlighting how this articulation produces a policy that idealizes a citizen aligned with a universalizing normativity.

We conclude by arguing that the promise of a stable curricular subject—citizen, national, moral—cannot be sustained in the face of the fissures of language and the multiplicity of childhood experiences. In the ambivalence between the desire for totality and the impossibility of closure, notions of subject, nation, people, and childhood emerge as elements in constant dispute, shaping and contesting the meanings of educational policies. In this scenario, it becomes necessary to reclaim the curriculum as a space of invention and resistance, where other childhoods—less aligned and more generative—may emerge.

2. What Is a Nation? What Is a Subject?

To initiate a debate on the idea of nation or national in any theoretical field implies epistemological challenges of immeasurable scope. From one's positionality, through ideological, political, cultural, and alterity-related questions, what can one ultimately intend when assuming a discourse around the signifier *Nation* or *National*? Without aspiring to answer such a question, reflecting on this type of inquiry becomes pertinent insofar as the attempt to fix a meaning of nation as a political assertion is inherently volatile. Thus, if what is intended is plenitude, such an endeavor becomes doomed to failure and, at the same time, mobilizes new struggles.

In this article, we are interested in examining the political process by displacing the search for fixed meanings around the idea of nation and attending to the perception of the volatility of this process, as indicated by Laclau (2011). Our aim is to problematize, drawing on post-structural theoretical contributions, how an ideal of nation is something that simultaneously constitutes a discursive force and an illusion of plenitude—dissolving into the immateriality of a "disjunctive spacetime" (Bhabha, 2013).

In this context, we aim to examine how the national signifier, when operating through the curriculum, attempts to shape subjects according to an ideal of identity. It is at this juncture that we also position childhood as a discursive and political subject summoned by this logic. Nationalized childhood—projected as a future destiny and stabilized as a promise—emerges as the effect of an attempt at identity capture, yet one that is continually tensioned by its inherent multiplicity and the impossibility of closure. To develop this argument, we draw on the concepts of *anxiety* and *différance*, respectively from Bhabha (2013) and Derrida (2005), as the starting point for a problematization of the nation–national axis, which here intersects with the ways in which childhoods are named and constituted within curricular discourse.

Derrida (1995), in discussing the name and the act of naming, emphasizes that these processes unfold within a paradoxical discursive movement. For Derrida (1995), the name is something that seeks to establish a reference while simultaneously constituting a void.

According to Costa (2018, p. 25), the "name, despite being a movement in search of reference to truth, is nothing more than the possibility of being an example of something else, for it reveals no essence to either the giver or the receiver." Considering the issue of naming in these terms, we argue that the imperative to name something—anything—although an act that inevitably leads to emptiness, signals an anxiety for definition, for referential demarcation, for precision, and for the security of meaning.

If the anxiety of naming oscillates within a space shaped by desire and the impossibility of plenitude, any name or act of naming can be easily replaced by others. This occurs, as Costa (2018) in dialogue with Derrida observes, because *différance* is what destabilizes the mention—the name.

To think in this way is to recognize that "nation" or "national" are acts of naming that, at best, account only for fragile references—a desperate search for referentiality. Thus, reference to something construed as national does not guarantee access to a homogeneous corpus of meaning. For us, national discourse is configured as a movement suspended between the thing and the name, or, in Derrida's terms (2005), as a desire that cannot help but be tempted to believe.

From this perspective, we turn to the nation as something without a foundation, reiterating it as a name subjected to continuous processes of signification—a name that seeks to be forged through an anxious reference and equivalence between space and society. It is, however, a system without essentialisms, attempting to connect discourses such as race, ethnicity, ideology, culture, space, and citizenship within an equivalential assertion, which aims to produce an illusion of homogeneity in the face of something external, represented as a threat.

In this sense, we understand that it only makes sense to speak of nation, national, or national identity if these names are tensioned according to a double—disjunctive—temporality. We propose a reading of nation and national as ambivalent discourses, constituted by the logic of difference (*différance*). The impurity that characterizes the dynamics of difference transforms the discourse of the nation into something symbolic, which only acquires meaning when time

is understood not as linear, but as tensioned between present and past. In this way, national discourse emerges as an impure and committed narrative of the past, which contingently seeks to connect with the present and with space.

It is within this intertwining of time and discourse that we also locate childhood, which, summoned by curricular policy, appears as a promise of the future, yet is always already signified by an idealized past. The subject "child/childhood" is thus called to occupy a place within the national project—a subject of the future—while simultaneously being required to perform an identity that is already marked, already imagined, and already expected.

To advance a problematization of the relationship between society, identity, history, and territory—elements that commonly converge in the constitution of "national" discourses—we find it productive to engage with Edward Said (1990). Although articulated from a critical-humanist perspective, Said, by framing the debate on nation within a spectrum of unstable significations, allows us to open the question to alternative ways of thinking about the formation of subjects and communities. As a Palestinian scholar based in the United States, Said devoted a significant part of his intellectual production to denouncing hegemonic processes that constitute discourses and ideals of civilization—which also allows us to consider how the "national" educational project operates through logics of silencing, erasure, and standardization of childhoods. For Said (2005, p. 69):

> No culture or civilization exists in isolation from others; none understands the concepts of individuality and Enlightenment as entirely exclusive. And none exists without the fundamental human attributes of community, love, and the valuing of life and all else.

These constitutive processes position the debate around a national ideal as a central issue within an agenda that directly impacts the curricular field and the ways in which childhoods are signified. We align with Said (2005), who warns that national consciousness can become a risk if "unprepared or distorted," even after struggles for independence or movements of resistance—thus opening space for new illusions. In assuming his position as a Palestinian, Said compels us to problematize the disputes of meaning mobilized by national agendas and alerts us to the stereotypes and prejudices that can be engendered and perpetuated, often grounded in ignorance toward the contributions of marginalized cultures.

For us, this argument is crucial: the identification of a nation or a nationality inherently carries constructions of stereotypes that are also projected onto childhoods and their curricula. Said's warning resonates within our analysis, as it reveals how national discourses seek to shape stable identities—and, in doing so, frame childhoods within an ideal of belonging. Paying attention to such stereotypes, articulated within complex geopolitical contexts, reinforces the importance of understanding childhood as a discursive category traversed by power struggles.

What Said seeks to argue—and what is of predominant interest in this article—is that a national ideology embodies a strategic dimension of power and a need to materially organize the world. In Said's (1991) terms, there exists an *imaginative geography* sustained by representations. To place under suspicion the ideas of East and West, North and South—not in a cartographic sense, but within the sphere of economic imbalance, cultural domination, and power asymmetry—constitutes a crucial gesture in this debate. The mutual recognition between one and the other, in a cyclical *vis-à-vis* relation, cannot be exhausted in the subjectivity of the individual gaze. These processes identified by Edward Said (1990), while deeply geopolitical, also serve as illustrations of historical and discursive conjunctures.

Thus, by observing the various lexicographies and geographies inscribed in national discourses, we propose to problematize the notion of "nation" as a construction to be continually contested—an invention/narration that acquires political force insofar as it connects to the attempt to fix identities. This perspective does not deny the power of national discourse but rather emphasizes that such constructions are always marked by difference and by the anguish of incompleteness. For us, to name something as national—and, consequently, to project a "nationalized" childhood—entails recognizing the discursive struggle that permeates this process of meaning-making. Within this context, the curriculum emerges as a territory of contestation, invention, and resistance, where normative projects of nationhood confront the multiplicity of possibilities that resist closure.

In this sense, in challenging the national ideal, we do not do so apart from a conception of curriculum that we also refuse to understand as a closed prescription or a linear script of implementation. On the contrary, we conceive of the curriculum as a practice of cultural enunciation — a border space-time in which meanings are continuously negotiated, translated, and reinscribed, even as hegemonic forces attempt to stabilize them.

Inspired by the contributions of Macedo (2003; 2006), we understand the curriculum as a discursive and cultural production — hybrid, marked by ambivalence and incompleteness. From this perspective, the curriculum is not merely a repository of content but a territory of symbolic disputes in which projects of nation and childhood confront, (re)construct, and elude attempts at totalization.

We argue, therefore, that every attempt at curricular prescription — such as those materialized in the BNCC and its digital policy networks — inevitably encounters the imponderable that permeates teaching practice and school experience. This is why we insist: education belongs to the realm of aporia, not of calculation. Difference, translation, and hybridity are the very conditions of the curriculum as a living practice. In this sense, when we examine the processes of the nationalization of childhoods, we situate them at the heart of a broader curricular dispute — between projects of capture and homogenization, and the everyday fissures that challenge prescription and open the curriculum to resistance and invention.

3. The Nation and the BNCC: Between the Subject and the Citizen

The articulation of this discussion within the theoretical framework of our study arises from a concern that proved decisive throughout the political process of drafting and consolidating the BNCC. From the earliest public debates in 2014 to the final text for primary education, the idea of "nation" was continuously evoked as a referential benchmark and a strategy to legitimize a supposedly democratic value. Not incidentally, as Rodrigues (2020) notes, the term "national" appears 425 times in the ratified document — a repetition that is far from random, serving to sustain a discursive architecture linking reference, alignment, and the full development of education at the national level. This architecture is already evident in the BNCC's introductory text:

> National reference for the formulation of curricula for the educational systems and networks of the States, the Federal District, and the Municipalities, as well as for the pedagogical proposals of educational institutions, the BNCC integrates the national Basic Education policy and will contribute to the alignment of other policies and actions at the federal, state, and municipal levels, concerning teacher training, assessment, the development of educational content, and the criteria for providing adequate infrastructure for the full development of education (Brazil, 2018, p. 8, emphasis added).

This discursive strategy is not limited to providing pedagogical guidelines: it mobilizes the idea of the "national" as universal and totalizing, shifting the meaning of "common" toward that of "unique." The effect is the production of a curriculum presented as a fixed metric, a closed cartography capable of capturing the multiplicity of educational experiences under the label of "full" and homogeneous development.

Through a qualitative analysis of this context, we understand that the BNCC discourse sustains a dual premise regarding the "national": on the one hand, the belief in the possibility of a consensus that erases difference; on the other, the notion that objectives such as improving education or promoting skills and competencies must operate under a unified framework. This aspiration for alignment is reflected in the curriculum as both prescription and contestation.

By challenging this logic, we argue that it is precisely in the tension between prescription and contingency that the curriculum demonstrates its vitality: not as a neutral instrument, but as a cultural practice and a border space-time where meanings are constructed, resisted, and reinvented. Within this territory, childhoods — diverse, hybrid, and irreducible — challenge attempts at totalizing capture, opening fissures in the normative project and affirming alternative possibilities for existing and learning.

Thus, by problematizing the place of the "national" within the BNCC, we reaffirm our defense of a curriculum recognized as a political arena, a cultural hybrid (MACEDO, 2003; 2006), and a field of negotiation in which childhoods are not merely recipients of prescriptions, but agents who actively reshape the curricular field itself.

In this regard, we draw inspiration from Axer (2022), who places the child at the center of curricular disputes, recognizing them as a curriculist, meaning-maker, translator of knowledge, and co-author of practices. For Axer, considering childhood as curriculist is to acknowledge that the child tensions and translates the curriculum, generating movements of displacement that elude the claim of a fixed national identity.

By acting as a force of translation and creation, the child destabilizes the idea of the nation as a homogeneous unit — an idea that documents such as the BNCC attempt to fix through repeated invocations of the "national" as a measure of consensus. When we assert that the curriculum is a cultural practice, we reiterate that it is traversed by plural voices, among which childhood occupies a strategic position: not merely as a recipient of a national citizenship project, but as an agentive subject who reimagines the very meaning of being a citizen, shifting identity boundaries and questioning the "common" as synonymous with the "unique."

Thus, thinking about curriculum and childhood entails problematizing the discourse of the nation as projected totality and creating space to recognize children as authors of everyday translations that destabilize prescriptions, challenge homogeneous alignment, and invent alternative possibilities for community. It is in this interstice — where the national seeks to impose itself as consensus but encounters the living force of childhood that translates, tensions, and creates — that we locate the political potential of contesting the curriculum as a space-time of resistance, reinvention, and openings for the unpredictable.

Another dimension we highlight in this analysis is the intentional alignment, present in the BNCC's political discourse, between national policy and the promise of a democratic design. This second premise establishes a direct relationship between democracy, homogeneity, and equality, as if it were possible to pave a single educational path through processes structured within a fixed space-time metric.

The relationship between equality and democracy, within the complexity of political dynamics from a discursive perspective, becomes a turning point. In this regard, Mendonça and Vieira Júnior (2014, p. 122) note:

> In this regard, the presumption of equality among differences constitutes the very subversive effect of democracy. Establishing social relations based on natural hierarchies becomes meaningless. This implies that there is no transcendental idea of universality — something true and accepted beyond any socio-political context. On the contrary, the universal emerges precisely from the particular and is therefore always partially occupied by some particularity that has attained a hegemonic structural position.

Aligned with Laclau (2014), we understand that any idea of equality is constituted through agreements that are rarely subjected to evaluation. We consider it relevant to reiterate, as Mendonça and Vieira Júnior (2014, p. 133) note, that democracy is not a presumption of equality, but rather, as "[...] for Laclau, the unstable articulation between universalism and particularism — necessarily represents the insurgency of a segment of society against established political orders.

To interrogate national identity as an attempt to close a universal metric, from a discursive perspective, is to destabilize the political strategies that seek to fix meanings. Following Homi Bhabha (2013), we understand the nation as a narrative — an invention that mobilizes the metaphor of home and belonging to fill the void left by the uprooting of communities and social ties. In this metaphorical key, the idea of the "nation" becomes a rhetoric aimed at transcending differences and cultural distances, producing the illusion of a homogeneous "nation-people." On this point, Bhabha (2013, p. 228) argues:

> The nation fills the void left by the uprooting of communities and familial ties, transforming this loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the term suggests, conveys the meaning of home and of

> feeling at home through mediation or across the steppes of Central Europe, traversing those distances and cultural differences that transpose the imagined community into the concept of nation-people.

To look at the nation, as Bhabha (2013) suggests, is to perceive it first and foremost as a narrative. When the Indian author indicates that the idea of the nation is constituted metaphorically—transfiguring the notion of home-community into the abstraction of the national—or, in Laclau's (2011) terms, through the rhetorical movement between metonymy and metaphor, Bhabha (2013) draws attention to a discursive process in which a national rhetoric is elaborated.

Bringing this problematization into the curricular field, we ask: what kind of childhood is sought when the national discourse operates as a horizon of alignment? Whose interests are served by this promise of an imagined community that transforms the plurality of childhoods into a single national childhood? It is here that we reaffirm the power of the curriculum as a space-time of dispute and creation, where children are not only shaped but also shaped, as Axer (2022) proposes.

Thus, by destabilizing the myth of a single and cohesive nation, we argue that the school is also a site of translation, where multiple and vibrant childhoods put into crisis the attempt at homogeneity. Each gesture, each act of translation performed by children, strains the aspiration of a totalizing national narrative, reopening the curriculum as a living cultural practice—full of fissures, negotiations, and displacements. It is in this in-between space—between the metaphor of home-community and the concrete practices of childhoods that create other senses of belonging—that we recognize the power of thinking curriculum, childhood, and nation in conflict, to insist on an education that embraces difference as a condition of democracy.

he idea of the nation as a narrative is sustained by Bhabha (2013, p. 230) through his awareness of the "metaphoricity of peoples and imagined communities." In this dialogue with Bhabha, it becomes crucial to relieve historicism of its burden as the only framework capable of offering a linear and cartographic explanation of nations. This inflection allows us to understand the people, the national entity, and the nation itself as categories in constant displacement — never static but discursively produced.

Mitigating the weight of historicism, however, does not mean denying it. Considering the Cartesian dimension that the nation-state possesses is fundamental to understanding the contemporary world. Hobsbawm (2013) highlights central features of this historical and political character by defining the nation as "a classificatory system that defines the relations between the state and its members and among them; nationalism is the use of the symbol 'nation' for the realization of a political project that grounds it" (Hobsbawm, 2013, p. 272).

Without disregarding this historical dimension, Bhabha (2013) argues that, when taken as the exclusive axis of analysis, historicity tends to reduce the national discourse to "a linear equivalence between event and idea" (p. 229). This interpretation, however, does not exhaust the debate. The author observes that "[...] the narrative and psychological force that nationality displays in the production of culture and the projection of politics is the effect of the ambivalence of the 'nation' as a narrative strategy. As an apparatus of symbolic power, this produces a continuous slippage of categories such as sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing the nation" (Bhabha, 2013, p. 229).

Bhabha's analytical proposal, in assuming the nation also as a narrative, resonates with a concern that he himself identifies in Said's work. In agreement with Said, Bhabha maintains that the question of the nation should be placed on a theoretical and scientific agenda as a hermeneutics of "worldliness." To take the nation as narrative, therefore, means to look at the discourses that constitute it as a signifier — that is, as a field of disputes and symbolic translations.

One of the alternatives that Bhabha (2013) finds productive for going beyond the hermeneutics of worldliness is his attention to disjunctive temporality. Thus, the nation cannot be explained merely through a linear equivalence between events and ideas, but through the discontinuous web of meanings that reconfigure themselves, challenge boundaries, and displace categories.

It is therefore necessary to recognize that, within this perspective that understands the nation as a narrative, a political and strategic character is also engendered through the various forms in which the national discourse manifests itself. Up to this point, the calibration of argumentative devices mobilized in the analysis leads us to understand the "nation" as a narrative of what is possible — a discursive construction articulated with the perception of disjunctive time and with the notion that national belonging does not depend on territorial demarcation or external recognition. As exemplified in Said's discussion of Palestine, it is also an endogenous, non-spatialized process.

Viewing the nation as a narrative, in dialogue with Said (2005), displaces the understanding of the "national" as synonymous with fixed territory or external recognition. As the Palestinian case illustrates, it is an endogenous and discursive construction—one that remains alive even without a delimited ground, as it draws from imaginaries, memories, and struggles. For us, bringing this perspective into the curricular field means recognizing that the curriculum, as a cultural practice, is itself a narrative—and, for that very reason, always open to translation, difference, and insubordination.

Within this entanglement, we position childhood not merely as a recipient of a national narrative, but as a force that, within the school, disrupts linearity, inhabits disjunctive temporalities, and reopens the normative project. Drawing on Axer (2022), we affirm that children, as *curriculists*, displace the singular narrative, rewrite the national in everyday life, and produce other possible cartographies. Thus, while the national discourse seeks to project itself as universal and homogeneous, the curriculum—when inhabited by childhood—exposes the precarious nature of this claim, opening cracks through which difference erupts and transforms the imagined community into a field of contestation.

Therefore, to assume the nation as a narrative—as proposed by Bhabha and Said—is to insist that the curriculum is a territory where such narrative becomes visible, contested, and resignified. And that childhood, in its inventive potency, makes the school a space of translation that displaces boundaries and affirms democracy as a practice of difference rather than of homogeneity.

However, the nation may also be interpreted as a discourse of power. In interrogating the nation and perceiving it as narrative, it is crucial to acknowledge that no discourse—including the national—constitutes a neutral cultural representation. On the contrary, every discourse of nationhood defines boundaries of meaning, establishes symbolic frontiers, and activates apparatuses of power that operate through classification, belonging, and exclusion.

Even when assumed as a contested narrative, the reiteration of national discourse adheres to political agendas of multiple kinds, becoming a vehicle for projects that bind social actors, spaces, subjective symbols, and collective neuroses. In this sense, national discourse produces a metaphorical linkage between space and society, grounding imagined communities sustained by a pedagogy of belonging.

This delimitation of spaces—geographical, symbolic, or curricular—invites us to question how the "national" connects to the relations of power that also shape the educational field. For our purposes, it is crucial to highlight how the national discourse operates within the curriculum as a strategy of identity formation, linking the performative event (the nation that manifests itself as a symbolic act) with pedagogical designations (childhood that must be shaped according to this ideal).

Regarding the tension between these dimensions, Bhabha (2013, p. 240) clarifies that the pedagogical establishes its narrative authority on a tradition of the people, constructed as a historical continuity that presents itself as a self-generated eternity. The performative, in turn, intervenes in this sovereignty by casting a shadow over the myth of self-generation, revealing the people as an unstable image, always strained by the encounter with the Other.

Thus, we turn our attention to the nation as a discourse that seeks to produce a metaphorical link between space and society. The delimitation of this space, largely engendered by national discourse, is the element that brings to light issues concerning power relations. It represents an attempt to bind the event of the performative order to the designations of the pedagogical order. Concerning the tension between pedagogical and performative dimensions, Bhabha (2013, p. 240) elucidates:

> The pedagogical grounds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people, described by Poulantzas as a moment of becoming self-designated, encapsulated within a succession of historical moments that represent an eternity produced through self-generation. The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's self-generation by casting a shadow between the people as image and their signification as a differentiating sign of the Self, distinct from the Exterior Other.

Transposing this framework to the curriculum, we argue that the pedagogical act—when it absorbs the national discourse—seeks to fix the student as a model citizen of a unified person. Yet the performative act, embodied in the living presence of childhoods within the school, unsettles this image, displacing the "people" as a closed sign and reopening the nation to ambivalence.

From this perspective, the curriculum is not merely a repository of national content, but a territory where the boundaries between Self and Other, inside and outside, belonging and exclusion are inscribed and undone. It is precisely childhood—plural, unpredictable, and a producer of displacements—that embodies the performative power to destabilize the pedagogy of consensus.

Thus, in problematizing the link between nation, power, and curriculum, we reiterate: every attempt at identity closure is daily challenged in the school, where children reinscribe meanings, forge openings, and affirm difference as a condition for democratic reinvention. To embrace the tension between the pedagogical and the performative in the debate on the nation, as articulated by Bhabha (2013), reinforces the understanding of the nation as narrative: a representation without a fixed foundation, one that calls into question deterministic perspectives grounded in historicism and linear tradition. This inflection, for us, is essential to denaturalize the force of national discourse in the curricular field, as it exposes its precarious and ever-unfinished basis.

For Bhabha (2013, p. 238), the tension between the pedagogical and the performative turns the reference to a "people"—regardless of political or cultural position—into a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of national authority. The people are neither the starting point nor the endpoint of the national narrative: they occupy the unstable boundary between totalizing powers that project a homogeneous community and the forces that, from within, expose interests, disputes, and inequalities.

At this point, we draw attention to the ambivalence of national discourse: although it is constituted through fragility, needing to anchor itself in other signifiers—people, race, language, flags—it becomes powerful as a political strategy of domination and colonization of subjectivities. The term "nation," as we adopt it in this analysis, does not stand on its own; its efficacy—always incomplete—operates through articulation with these other chains of meaning. And it is precisely this fragility that opens cracks for contestation within the curriculum.

It is important to emphasize that, as Bhabha (2013) highlights, a colonizing discourse mobilizes notions such as nation, people, and identity to exercise control, fix boundaries, and legitimize hierarchies. In the educational field, this operation materializes in curricula that attempt to normalize ways of being a citizen, to mold childhoods as representatives of an imagined community, and to reiterate consensus in the name of national unity.

However, by recognizing the tension between the pedagogical and the performative, we affirm that the school is not merely a place for the transmission of a national narrative, but also a stage where that narrative wavers. It is in the performative act—in the gestures, speeches, and translations of childhood that the imagined people reveal themselves as a tenuous boundary, permeated by interests and identities that elude control.

Thus, while national discourse seeks to anchor the curriculum in a pedagogy of homogeneity, children, as curriculists (Axer, 2022), activate the performative power that makes the narrative oscillate, challenges the universal, and reinscribes the school space as a territory of difference and reinvention. In this movement, that which intended to be totalizing proves unstable, and childhood, in its inventive force, reaffirms the curriculum as a living political practice.

4. For Now, the Ellipses...

For now, the ellipses we leave open point to the central tension we seek to problematize: there is a movement that attempts to fix meanings around a given idea of nation and, consequently, of the citizen. This political strategy relies on the force of a pedagogical logic that seeks to link people, times, and spaces into a single narrative, anchored in the promise of cohesion. Yet, this very strategy reveals its fragility, for it operates within the impossibility of halting meanings. Life in society, as we recall from Derrida (1996), belongs to the order of the performative, to that which emerges from the Other—without a pre-fixed horizon, without a promise of totality.

Thus, when national discourse presents itself as a finished image, we ask: how should we approach this discursive strategy that seeks to capture the unspeakable, the other, the unpredictable? Returning to Laclau and Bhabha, we reaffirm that nation and national are empty signifiers: sites of contestation, never fully filled, traversed by attempts at fixation that unravel in practice.

It is in this interstitial space that we situate the curriculum as a symbolic and political arena. If an identity never exists a priori, as Bhabha (2013) affirms, but is constituted as a desire for completion—a never-ending quest for fixity—then the curriculum, as cultural practice, is itself this problematic process, always in translation. For us, the tangible is mimesis: the repetition that is never identical, the representational attempt that exposes its own cracks.

At this point, childhood assumes a strategic position: by inhabiting the curriculum, children not only occupy the national narrative, but destabilize it. Their performative presence reinvents meanings, displaces boundaries, and renders desire visible as the engine of political struggle. It is they who, within the school, undermine the image of totality, reminding us that all identity is mimetic, contingent, and permeated by displacements.

Considering this, we conclude that the curriculum, traversed by the inventive force of childhoods, is both fissure and event. It is politics in action territory where empty signifiers such as nation, people, and citizen are continuously reinscribed, contested, and reimagined. And it is precisely within this spiral of contestation, translation, and mimesis that we glimpse the potential to affirm other childhoods, other forms of belonging, and other possibilities for justice.

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