

## THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CURRICULUM STUDIES

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What about the notion of Magic/Religion/deities that persists in many forms in Latin America, as a counternarrative to Enlightenment thought? In Brazil, how does Candomblé, for example, practiced by many former Marxists and positivists who teach in prominent universities and may well help to shape science programs in schools, affect the argument and the context of the argument about Enlightenment thought in the curricula? (Review of an article sent to a Journal)

The above personal example brings some questions about the internationalization of curriculum studies that I would like to address in this paper. It situates me first as a Brazilian, what is familiar, and then as a Latin American, what is strange. As a Brazilian woman, I only think of myself as a Latin American when I'm outside of Latin America, especially when I am in the US. It is almost as odd as classify myself as a Hispanic to enter US. We do not have, as Brazilians, this feeling of belonging to such a community perhaps because we do not speak the same language, perhaps because our colonization and cultural formation is too different from our neighbours'. These explanations would, though, construct other fictions of totalized ideas of colonization, cultural formation and even language. There is, thus, a first question we should address: Why am I so uncomfortable of being classified as Latin American and Hispanic at the same time I accept very quickly the idea of being Brazilian? In other words, why is nation a so powerful tool of identification? What does it mean in the contemporary world where space is more virtual than physical?

The second and biggest discomfort that the review brought to me is related to the allusion to Candomblé, a religious practiced by some groups in Brazil. Why should I consider Candomblé in a paper I analyzed science curriculum discourses? I read the paper again to see if I was not just resisting the critic because it is a critic or worst because it approximates me to a black religion instead of to our major belonging to Catholic traditions. I did not think so at the time and still do not. It is true and I have to acknowledge that Protestantism in US plays a great role in the curriculum, especially considering science curriculum. If the author had made such a comparison, it seems to me Candomblé should be understood as an obstacle to science education and it does not seem to be the argument of the review. I could only understand the claims for Candomblé as a post-colonial desire to see the exotics associated to Brazil and (write it) Latin America. Continuing in the sentence, perhaps we can understand a little more

the reference to Candomble as it is presented as “practiced by many former Marxists and positivists”. Does this mean that the Marxists and positivists could practice the Candomble only because they are no longer Marxists and positivists? Do they have to open up their epistemic “universal” positions to assume a Latin American identity as Candomble’s practitioners? This introduces another question on the discussion about internationalization of academic fields. It is not only a matter of discussing the relationship between national fictions and international practices, but of understanding this related to knowledge. Our Modern heritage has taught us that knowledge, not only in Marxist and positivist approaches, is universal. It has, therefore, nothing to do with nations.

Continuing in my attempt of understanding how problematic it is to analyse internationalization of academic fields such as curriculum, I would like to bring some examples from the International Handbook of Curriculum Research, edited by William Pinar (2003), after briefly considering a similar work from Michael Apple and Kristen Buras (2005). Both are collections of articles from different countries, leading with the international from a national perspective. Entitled “The subaltern speaks”, Apple’s and Buras’ book attempts to answer yes to Spivak’s (1993) question: can the subaltern speak? The format of a collection of essays from different countries, however, brings a national accent to the idea of subaltern. It is not only the fact that the cases narrated deal with subaltern’s experiences in many countries that is being stressed, but also that the papers authors are themselves subalterns speaking for a large audience. If not, why do most of the experiences come from geo-political periphery? Are not there subaltern experiences in US or in major European countries? Returning to our discussion about academic field, why are some authors considered subalterns in their academic fields? Does this have something to do with a special citizenship?

My dialogue, however, is with Pinar’s (2003) handbook, described by the editor as “the first move in postulating an architecture of a worldwide field of curriculum studies, [what] (...) do not mean uniform” (p.1). Continuing, Pinar (2003) asserts that “curriculum studies tend to be embedded in their national and regional settings” (p.1). This assertion can explain the organization of the book, where authors from different countries give a “photographic blow-up” (p.2) of the field in their nations. In this perspective, the international could be seen as a “complicated conversation” established from a mosaic of national visions. The question that we could ask is if it would be possible to think of such a handbook differently? A question that would bring us back to the two points I have made considering the review of my article. What is the status of national in an international discussion and how does it dialogue with knowledge production?

As an author of a chapter in this Handbook, I remember that it was more difficult for me and my co-author to define what we could name curriculum than Brazilian. Not surprisingly, many of the other authors seemed to have faced the same situation. Almost none of us discussed the obvious reference to our countries<sup>1</sup>, but many articles began with a discussion of what is curriculum as a field of studies. In our attempts to characterize the field, most articles acknowledged the influence of American curriculum theory in their own fields (and other major traditions, in some few cases). Some papers stated that the field is underdeveloped, others that it has experienced a great boom in the past decades. But we all seemed to share a belief about what curriculum is that has a lot to do with American tradition from Tyler to reconceptualization and contemporary worries brought by cultural studies. I would suggest that almost all of us had an international perspective as a starting point of our local analyses of our national curriculum field. It seems we share some beliefs about what our field is and, though it makes some references to national specificities, there are also some aspects that are somehow beyond what we call national.

I brought these examples to emphasize some questions that I think should be addressed in considering internationalization. I will try to deal with these questions, pondering that national curriculum fields are fictions as it happens to any community. They are, though, necessary fictions to construct meanings and to act politically, as asserted by Hall (2003) and Spivak (1993). Considering this, my proposal in this paper would be to invert the logics that the international presupposes the national, trying to defend that an international curriculum field precedes the national ones.

### **From the international to the national**

Many authors have been describing our present moment as marked by a global culture which is distinguished more by its organic diversity than by its uniformity. In such culture, the systems of meanings and expressions have not yet been homogenized nor is it possible to expect them to be some day. Our contemporary world is becoming a net of social relationships, while the flow of meanings, people and goods being processed within its different areas can be clearly observed. In this scenario, the cosmopolitan perspective expresses itself basically through the relationships which are carried out with a variety of different cultures. It implies a certain positioning vis-à-vis diversity, the willingness to

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<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of the articles that briefly examines this idea are from geographical areas where the notion of nation is still in debate.

become involved with the other. It does not imply, however, to renounce to nation as an important identitarian source, as the examples I brought before have shown.

The current discussion about internationalization of curriculum studies happens in this scenario and it is, though, quite different from the former attempts that relates internationalization with homogenization. At the same time, however, homogenization is not completely out of question in academic fields where big narratives, although questioned, are still there in many areas. Even in less totalized frameworks, we have been facing some identities that actually function as fixations trying to address ourselves. The examples I brought in the beginning aimed to present some of these identities considering the internationalization of curriculum studies. We can stress two of the major ones: the belongingness to an academic field and to a nation.

Obviously, these senses of belonging are inter-related as the academic discourse is greatly influenced by national states — with their economic and social policies that make academic exchanges easier or more difficult — as well as by national cultural features such as language and by stereotypes of the national Other. In the curriculum field, the relationship between academic production and the idea of nation is perhaps stronger than in many other areas, as curriculum is, as Barriga states in his chapter in the Handbook, an “outstandingly practical domain” (p.443). The field is hardly influenced by national policies having some theorists stressed that curriculum theory should answer to major questions posed by state intervention. As an immediate consequence, it is not easy to think of curriculum theory without considering national boundaries.

On the other hand, however, as any other academic field, curriculum studies seem to have a transnational, universal character. In the Handbook, for example, as curriculum theorists, we shared an identitarian discourse that turns us into an academic community. It was a powerful discourse that seems to be even capable of articulating us despite of our national beliefs. Although Pinar stressed that internationalization does not mean a homogeneous group, we have to share some assumptions about what curriculum is in order to initiate the complicated conversation. We do share some assumptions because we are all engaged, despite the existence of any organized process, in an international exchange of ideas that is inscribed in the academic tradition and practices.

We have to acknowledge, however, that this is a partial explanation. The historical process of constitution of this shared believes is traversed by power. Although power is not linear, it is impossible not to consider the fact that most of us have described our own national fields referring to US curriculum authors. Considering Brazilian experience, the emergence of

the field was greatly influenced by Dewey and social efficiency, followed by Tyler and Taba, the reconceptualization (especially Pinar), critical theorists (like Apple and Giroux) and more recently, post-structural approaches and cultural studies. Two of the Brazilian chapters in Pinar's Handbook offered a historical approach of the field that stressed these influences. None of them even cited, for example, Freire's work. Most curriculum courses in undergraduate or graduate courses in Brazil would never consider Freire as a curriculum theorist, such as Pinar, Apple or Giroux. It is impossible not to consider that the options Brazilian theorists have made to define curriculum was greatly influenced by international organisms such as World Bank, research supporting agencies and editorial market. Far from intending to ask about Candomblé as a counternarrative, I was only emphasizing this example to indicate that the decision about what are curriculum studies is not simply a matter of constituting an academic community.

Instead of amplifying this point, however, I will focus on what does it mean to internationalize the standpoint of national curriculum fields. I consider that the tools used to discuss a national identity should also be applied on the comprehension of an academic identity. I will fix the discussion in the former, because I would like to suggest, based on the examples I presented in the beginning of this paper, that we are more aware that academic identities are fictions than we do concerning national identities. Of course, in dealing with the idea of national vis-a-vis the internationalization I am going to consider the field of curriculum studies. I will not, therefore, abandon the discussion of an academic field but emphasize the adjective national.

It is time to return to the naturalness we deal with national identities, in such a way that internationalization is frequently treated as a result of a more or less contested relationship among national entities. Post-colonial theorists, for example, have been contesting this naturalness stressing that nation has forgotten subaltern histories from the margins, but at the same time when we discuss diasporic experiences we many times refer to countries such as Caribe (Hall, 2003) or India (Raj, 2006). The idea of organizing an International Handbook from a national point of view presupposes that, despite the international flux of ideas that characterizes an academic discussion, there are some national specificities. Although our definition of curriculum studies barely touched the national, we answered Pinar's proposition of such a Handbook considering that there is something national in our field what is easily comprehensible as nation is a so strong basis for identification.

I would like to understand this movement considering the meaning of national and international in the domain of cultural exchanges. For this, I am going to define culture as a

flow of ideas and practices. Former analyses of educational exchanges using imperialist or neo-culturalist approaches share the idea that national cultures are “things” that changes as they get in contact with other “things”. Based on post-colonial recent discursive discussions, I would like to question the fantasy of perfect representation that is on the basis of these interpretations of national cultures in order to defend that national identity is a discursive culturally specific construction. Its creation involves the arrest of the infinite flux of meanings that characterizes cultural domain as a flux. That is why I would like to argue that an international or better a transnational flux of meanings precedes a national curriculum field as an identitarian entity.

My position is supported by Derrida’s notions of *differance* and *supplement*. Both notions point out to the impossibility of fixing the meanings, as a signifier do not refer to something with some special characteristics, but to another signifier in a chain that articulates signifiers infinitely. Thus, meanings are unstable, deferred and infinitely supplemented and the structure must be seen as de-centered. As a consequence, it is impossible to exhaustively define a national curriculum field, because some meanings will always escape and any definition could be supplemented. The identity based on fixed meanings will be challenged by the infinite substitution of meanings that happens in this play of meanings. Obviously, a de-centered structure of meanings always deferred would drive to a complete relativism in which all signifiers have the same power to represent the invented totality in a extent that a share of meanings would be an impossible task. The concept of *brisure* (Derrida, 2004) could be useful to avoid the relativism as it allows us to understand how the de-centered structure is momentarily fixed around a provisory nucleus which is not linked to an original presence. By this means, it becomes possible to construct a representation such as national ones.

Appadurai (2001), as much as Bhabha (2003), works with cultural as a signification process where the signification is always deferred and supplemented. For them, there is a flux of meanings that can never be completely captured and what we call a specific culture is only a fantasy of essence that fills up our claims for a period of time. Culture is, therefore, a flux of meanings and what we use to call “a culture” is a momentary repression of infinite possibilities of meanings. Considering the national representation, Bhabha (2003) tried to understand how it works promising unity and creating a community out of difference and why it is a so powerful source for cultural identity (see the former examples). He characterizes national discourses as strategies to stop the flux of meanings by making reference to historically described origins, but emphasizes at the same time that the promised homogeneity is fragmented by an ambivalence that is inscribed in their core. To really exist, the nation

should be performed by people and though should be recreated daily. This performative dimension introduces a temporality Bhabha (2003) calls an in-between space by which ambivalence is introduced in national representations.

I suggest that this discussion can be appropriated to understand what we have been calling national curriculum fields. As contingent and agonistic fixations of flux of meanings, they are useful fictions but bring up an ambivalence that is responsible at the same time for its power as a representation and for its impossibility. National curriculum fields, although making references to shared tradition — national and non-national as we have seen in Pinar's Handbook —, have to perform them in order to exist. This act is an act of creation where “national” signs will be infinitely supplemented in a process that makes their incompleteness explicit. National curriculum fields are, therefore, hybrids where former signs and shared traditions are recreated. The movement towards mixing that is ordinarily related to internationalization and globalization is, thus, a movement that happens in what we call national fields. Both, “national” and “international” field could be conceived as processes of representation that involve constant actualizations, always differed, of historical meanings.

Although fictional, national curriculum fields exist as a symbolic place (and time) in which we speak (as subaltern, Candomble practitioners or not) and act as groups. As they do not have any essential meaning, however, their existences are based on a provisional stabilization of meanings that Hall (2003) proposes can be understood as hegemonic processes as discussed by Laclau and Mouffe (2004). I suggest this proposition is useful to help us understand the closeness of de-centered structures that create fictions like national curriculum field as well as the constitution of subjects within these fictions.

The point Laclau and Mouffe (2004) are making is that a de-centered structure could never be closed and stabilized what would drive to the impossibility of closeness and signification. In other words, they tried to understand the brisure as a hegemonic process and, differently from Derrida (in Mouffe, 1998), the constitution of subjects as decision-makers within temporary closed structures. In an opened, differential and de-centered structure, the closeness, and the consequent constitution of a temporary nucleus, is dependable of an exterior that must be presented as a difference different from all the others, what Laclau and Mouffe (2004) called a radical difference or a constitutive outside. It is by means of this radical difference that the differential elements of a structure are traversed by an equivalential

order and the structure can be said momentarily closed<sup>2</sup>. Thus, national identities, to be stabilized, need a constitutive outside that function as an antagonist capable of approximating the differences within nations. In Žižek's (2000) words, Others that we accuse of having stolen the national thing that have never existed. In Brazilian curriculum studies, these Others were presented, in different spaces and moments, for example, as other fields like Didactics or as other national experiences.

If national curriculum fields have no essential meaning, how we conceive our role as curriculum theorists is also under suspicion. Our action as intellectuals cannot be directly related to a belonging to a field. Differently, our identities would be created by our action defining the structure. As intellectuals that look for signifiers that can express ourselves within the symbolic order, we perform a signification act that would never be completely possible. As subjects that intend to fill up our constitutive lack, we try to solve the crisis of dislocated structure by our identification with one possible project in the undecidable space.

Of course, and fortunately, there are many and contradictory possibilities of action and thus many subject positions. So, the solution for the crisis of dislocated structure, that creates for example a national field, is endlessness and will always involve hegemonic processes constantly reorganized. The provisional and agonistic fixation of national curriculum fields, such as the ones we presented in our "photographic blow-up", are myths that fill up, for some time, the dislocated structure. In the Handbook papers, these myths referred primarily to a historical background that tried to drain the flux of meanings to create national fields as entities that, although sometimes presented as controversial, have a specific meaning. It is not surprisingly that we have emphasized history as a metaphorical dimension capable of condensing different meanings as it is one of the most powerful discourses to sustain the existence of a shared identity. No matter how strong this discourse is, however, we could also see in the papers that, as intellectuals, we recreated them in many different forms, allowing difference to slightly appear. We could say that there is not an essential historical definition of the national fields, but a contingent construction of their meanings by theorists that acts in order to make their demands hegemonic. National fields as we have presented in Pinar's Handbook are provisional fixations of possible meanings that transcends the proper idea of national.

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<sup>2</sup> As the constitutive outside is constructed by the expansion of the differential order at the same time creating an equivalential one, it is not possible to apply a causal logic to its comprehension. The relationship between equivalential and differential orders could be described as Derrida's undecidable.



### **In sum...**

I have tried to address, very briefly, some points I think we have to face in considering the internationalization of curriculum studies. Of course, being here or writing in Pinar's Handbook indicates that I believe it is a relevant task. A task that, in my view, implies the attempt to emphasize the flux and the hybridism of what we have accustomed to call culture. The idea of hybridism rejects binaries positions and highlights the porosity and the flux. It draws special attention to cultural translation that is, at the same time, impossible and necessary.

The process of negotiating with the Other is problematic because it expresses the incompleteness of our systems of signification (Bhabha, 2003). In our view, to really happen, a negotiation must be thought as something that cannot ever be completed, as an agonistic process of construction of new meanings. In the internationalization of curriculum studies, the agonistic negotiation presupposes the difference but also the disputes. Instead of destroying the "Other", these disputes should articulate momentarily a difference that is capable of recognizing the legitimacy of the Others' existence. Obviously, the acquaintance between different positions is not pacific; it involves an articulation between these positions that should continue to be different but that can act together due to a constitutive outside. As any articulation, this process implies a momentary fixation of meanings, that is not capable of eliminate difference in favor of an equivalential order. The difference continues existing in the international curriculum text as the excess of meanings that cannot be domesticated.

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