

2. The Thematic and the Problematic

Do not conduct a war before studying the layout of the land — its mountains, forests, passes, lakes, rivers, etc. *The Art of War*, a treatise on Chinese military science compiled about 500 BC

I

In his book *Orientalism*,¹ Edward W. Said has shown how the post-Enlightenment age in Europe produced an entire body of knowledge in which the Orient appeared as a 'system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire'. As a style of thought, Orientalism is 'based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'. On this basis, an 'enormously systematic discipline' was created 'by which European culture was able to manage — and even produce — the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period'. Orientalism *created* the Oriental; it was a body of knowledge in which the Oriental was 'contained and represented by dominating frameworks' and Western power over the Orient was given the 'status of scientific truth'. Thus, Orientalism was 'a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient'.

The central characteristics of this dominating framework of knowledge have been described by Anouar Abdel-Malek as follows,² and this characterization has been adopted by Said. Abdel-Malek identified the *problematic* in Orientalism as one in which the Orient and Orientals were

an 'object' of study, stamped with an otherness — as all that is different, whether it be 'subject' or 'object' — but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character... This 'object' of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or 'subject' which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined — and acted — by others.

At the level of the *thematic*, on the other hand, there was an

essentialist concept of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology...

According to the traditional orientalists, an essence should exist — sometimes even clearly described in metaphysical terms — which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered: this essence is both 'historical', since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, 'the object' of study, within its inalienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples, and cultures — as a product, a resultant of the vection of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution.

Thus one ends with a typology — based on a real specificity, but detached from history, and, consequently, conceived as being intangible, essential — which makes of the studied 'object' another being with regard to whom the studying subject is transcendent; we will have a homo Sinicus, a homo Arabicus (and why not a homo Aegypticus, etc.), a homo Africanus, the man — the 'normal man', it is understood — being the European man of the historical period, that is, since Greek antiquity.

Abdel-Malek does not elaborate on the precise meaning of his distinction between the problematic and the thematic. Presumably, he uses them in the sense in which the terms *problématique* and *thématique* (or *thétique*) have been used in post-War French philosophy, especially in the 'phenomenological' writings of Jean-Paul Sartre or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. However, it is worth pursuing the possibilities opened up by his distinction of 'levels' within the structure of a body of knowledge, because this could give us a clue to the formulation of our problem in which nationalist thought appears to oppose the dominating implications of post-Enlightenment European thought at one level and yet, at the same time, seems to accept that domination at another.

Let us then recall that in Aristotelian logic, the term 'problematic' is used to indicate the mode or modality of a proposition. A problematic proposition is one that asserts that something is possible; it will contain modal terms like 'possible' or 'may'. We need not, of course, restrict ourselves to the syllogistic framework of Aristotelian logic. But let us open our analytic towards the ground for play that this definition offers. We also know the sense in which the term 'problematic' has been used in contemporary philosophy of science, viz. to indicate the common thrust or direction of theoretical inquiry implied by the posing of a whole group or ensemble of problems in a particular scientific discipline. Finally, we have the sense in which Louis Althusser has used the term, to mean the theoretical or ideological framework in which a word or concept is used, to be recovered by a 'symptomatic reading' of the relevant body of texts.³

The term 'thematic', on the other hand, has been used in widely varying senses. In Greek logic, 'themata' are rules of inference, i.e. rules which govern the construction of arguments out of arguments. In contemporary linguistics, the 'theme' or the 'thematic' is used in the analysis of sentences (or, by extension,

of discourse) to refer to the way in which the 'relative importance' of the subject-matter of a sentence (or discourse) is identified. In Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, the 'thematic' is that which poses something as an intentional object of mental activity, whether implicitly in a non-reflective mode or explicitly in the reflective mode of thought. But these are merely fragments from the history of this philosophical term, which we can cite so as to indicate the range of meaning it can suggest; we need not be bound by any of the stricter definitions of the term as they occur in particular logical or theoretical systems.

Our present concern is to make a suitable distinction by which we can separate, for analytical purposes, that part of a social ideology, consciously formulated and expressed in terms of a formal theoretical discourse, which asserts the existence, and often the practical realizability, of certain historical possibilities from the part which seeks to justify those claims by an appeal to both epistemic and moral principles. That is to say, we wish to separate the claims of an ideology, i.e. its identification of historical possibilities and the practical or programmatic forms of its realization, from its justificatory structures, i.e. the nature of the evidence it presents in support of those claims, the rules of inference it relies on to logically relate a statement of the evidence to a structure of arguments, the set of epistemological principles it uses to demonstrate the existence of its claims as historical possibilities, and finally, the set of ethical principles it appeals to in order to assert that those claims are morally justified. The former part of a social ideology we will call its *problematic* and the latter part its *thematic*. The thematic, in other words, refers to an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework of elements and rules for establishing relations between elements; the problematic, on the other hand, consists of concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic.

By applying this distinction to our material, we will find that the problematic in nationalist thought is exactly the reverse of that of Orientalism. That is to say, the 'object' in nationalist thought is still the Oriental, who retains the essentialist character depicted in Orientalist discourse. Only he is not passive, non-participating. He is seen to possess a 'subjectivity' which he can himself 'make'. In other words, while his relationship to himself and to others have been 'posed, understood and defined' by others, i.e. by an objective scientific consciousness, by Knowledge, by Reason, those relationships are not acted by others. His subjectivity, he thinks, is active, autonomous and sovereign.

At the level of the thematic, on the other hand, nationalist thought accepts and adopts the same essentialist conception based on the distinction between 'the East' and 'the West', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same 'objectifying' procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.

There is, consequently, an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking, because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate. It is this contradictoriness in the domain of thought which creates the possibility for several divergent solutions to be proposed for the nationalist

problematic. Furthermore, it is this contradictoriness which signifies, in the domain of thought, the theoretical insolubility of the national question in a colonial country, or for that matter, of the extended problem of social transformation in a post-colonial country, within a strictly nationalist framework.

II

At first sight, the distinction between the thematic and the problematic might seem analogous to the distinction in structural linguistics between *langue* and *parole*, where the former refers to the language system shared by a given community of speakers while the latter is the concrete speech act of individual speakers. It might also appear analogous to the distinction in the analytical philosophy of language between an understanding of meaning in terms of the subjective *intentions* that lie behind particular speech acts and meaning as codified in linguistic *conventions*. Thus, it might seem that what we are trying to suggest about the lack of autonomy of nationalist discourse is simply that it puts forward certain propositions about society and politics whose syntactic and semantic structure — more generally, whose meaning — is fully governed by the rules of the 'language' of post-Enlightenment rational thought. In other words, nationalist texts are 'meaningful' only when read in terms of the rules of that larger framework of thought; the former, therefore, merely consists of particular utterances whose meanings are fixed by the lexical and grammatical system provided by the latter. Alternatively, it may be supposed that what we are trying to establish at the level of the problematic are the subjective 'reasons' behind particular assertions made in nationalist texts, to establish *why* nationalist writers wrote what they wrote, the 'meaning' of those assertions, of course, being established only in terms of the 'conventions' laid down at the level of the thematic, i.e. the theoretical framework of post-Enlightenment rational thought.

These are not, however, the sort of problems we will need to tackle here. Our particular distinction between the thematic and the problematic must serve a purpose which the seemingly analogous distinctions in other fields are not designed to serve.

First of all, a strictly linguistic study will be premature if we have not adequately delimited the particular conceptual or theoretical field in which our nationalist texts are located. Given the sort of problems we have raised in the previous chapter, it is obvious we will need to find our preliminary answers by looking directly in the field of political-ideological discourse. Although this field will be constituted for us by the material provided in a variety of ideological texts, a linguistic study of these texts cannot immediately be of much use for us. That is to say, even if we assume that we can give to a body of ideological texts a reasonable macro-structural semantic form (which itself is a very large assumption because the linguistic study of discourse is still concerned with short sequences of sentences⁴), a strictly linguistic study can only give us the general syntactic and semantic conditions determining to what extent this

discourse is well-formed or interpretable. But before one can proceed to that level of textual analysis, one must first constitute the discursive field in its own theoretical terms, viz. in the terms of a *political* theory. That, therefore, is the first requirement which our proposed analytical framework must fulfil.

Second, to address ourselves to the interpretation of nationalist texts as a body of writings on political theory necessarily means to explore their meaning in terms of their implicit or explicit reference to things, i.e. their logical and theoretical implications. It means, in other words, to conduct our analysis not at the level of language, but at the level of *discourse*. It would not do to prejudice the issue by declaring straightaway that since this discourse is only a product of ideology, its content must be purely tautological and thus unworthy of being studied as content. On the contrary, it is precisely the relation between the content of nationalist discourse and the kind of politics which nationalism conducts which will be of central concern to us.

What will be required, therefore, is an explicitly critical study of the ideology of nationalism. Both sociological determinism and functionalism have sought to interpret nationalist ideology by emptying it of all content — as far as nationalist politics is concerned, their assumption is that 'thinkers did not really make much difference'. Our position, however, is that it is the content of nationalist ideology, its claims about what is possible and what is legitimate, which gives specific shape to its politics. The latter cannot be understood without examining the former.

Indeed, our approach in this study admits an even stronger formulation: nationalist ideology, it will be evident, is inherently polemical, shot through with tension; its voice, now impassioned, now faltering, betrays the pressures of having to state its case against formidable opposition. The polemic is not a mere stylistic device which a dispassioned analyst can calmly separate out of a pure doctrine. It is part of the ideological content of nationalism which takes as its adversary a contrary discourse — the discourse of colonialism. Pitting itself against the reality of colonial rule — which appears before it as an existent, almost palpable, historical truth — nationalism seeks to assert the feasibility of entirely new political possibilities. These are its political claims which colonialist discourse haughtily denies. Only a vulgar reductionist can insist that these new possibilities simply 'emerge' out of a social structure or out of the supposedly objective workings of a world-historical process, that they do not need to be thought out, formulated, propagated and defended in the battlefield of politics. As a matter of fact, it is precisely in the innovative thinking out of political possibilities and the defence of their historical feasibility that the unity is established between nationalist thought and nationalist politics. The polemical content of nationalist ideology is its politics.

It is this aspect that we seek to identify at the level of what we have called the problematic. It is the level, let us recall, where nationalist discourse makes certain claims regarding the historical possibilities which it thinks are feasible; it also makes claims regarding the practical forms through which those possibilities could be realized. *Historical* possibilities, *practical* realization. The claims of the ideology are directly located on the terrain of politics, the field

of contest for power, where its claims are challenged by others emanating from an opposite discourse. It is at the level of the problematic then that we can fix the specifically historical and the specifically political character of nationalist discourse. It is there that we can connect the ideology to its 'social bases', relate its theoretical claims to the state of the social structure and its dynamics, to the 'interests' of various social classes, their opposition as well as their coming together. It will also become evident that the problematic need not remain fixed and unchanging. As 'historical conditions' change, so are new political possibilities thought out; the problematic undergoes a transformation within the same structure of discourse. With the help of the problematic, then, we seek to establish the political location as well as the historicity of nationalist discourse.

But political-ideological discourse does not consist only of claims: those claims also have to be justified by appeal to logical, epistemological and above all ethical principles. In politics, people have to be persuaded about not only the feasibility but also the legitimacy and desirability of ends and means. Consequently, along with its claims, political-ideological discourse also has its structures of justification. It must present credible evidence in support of its political claims, build a logical structure of argument to show how that evidence supports the claims, and try to convince that the claims are morally justified.

It is at this level that we can consider the content of nationalist discourse as having logical and theoretical implications. The sociological determinist, of course, ignores this aspect of nationalist ideology altogether, dogmatically asserting that in this respect its logical principles and theoretical concepts are wholly derived from another framework of knowledge — that of modern Western rational thought. It will be a major task of this study to show that this dogmatic refusal to take seriously the content as well as the logical and theoretical forms of nationalist thought not only leads one to miss out on the *fascinating story of the encounter between a world-conquering Western thought* and the intellectual modes of non-Western cultures, it also results in a crucial misunderstanding of the true historical effectivity of nationalism itself.

At the level of the thematic we will be necessarily concerned with the relation between nationalist discourse and the forms of modern Western thought. But this, we will show, is not a simple relation of correspondence, even of derivation. First of all, nationalist thought is selective about what it takes from Western rational thought. Indeed it is deliberately and necessarily selective. Its political burden, as we have said, is to oppose colonial rule. It must therefore reject the immediate political implications of colonialist thought and argue in favour of political possibilities which colonialist thought refuses to admit. It cannot do this simply by asserting that those possibilities are feasible; the quarrel with colonialist thought will be necessarily carried into the domain of justification. Thus nationalist texts will question the veracity of colonialist knowledge, dispute its arguments, point out contradictions, reject its moral claims. Even when it adopts, as we will see it does, the *modes of thought* characteristic of rational knowledge in the post-Enlightenment age, it cannot

adopt them in their entirety, for then it would not constitute itself as a *nationalist* discourse.

Taken together, in its dialectical unity, the problematic and the thematic will enable us to show how nationalism succeeds in producing a *different* discourse. The difference is marked, on the terrain of political-ideological discourse, by a political contest, a struggle for power, which nationalist thought must think about and set down in words. Its problematic forces it relentlessly to demarcate itself from the discourse of colonialism. Thus nationalist thinking is necessarily a struggle with an entire body of systematic knowledge, a struggle that is political at the same time as it is intellectual. Its politics impels it to open up that framework of knowledge which presumes to dominate it, to displace that framework, to subvert its authority, to challenge its morality.

Yet in its very constitution as a discourse of power, nationalist thought cannot remain only a negation; it is also a *positive* discourse which seeks to replace the structure of colonial power with a new order, that of national power. Can nationalist thought produce a discourse of order while daring to negate the very foundations of a system of knowledge that has conquered the world? How far can it succeed in maintaining its difference from a discourse that seeks to dominate it?

A different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another: that is my hypothesis about nationalist thought. It is, on the face of it, a paradoxical formulation. But surely that is what ought to emerge from a critical study of a body of ideological doctrine which claims for itself a certain unity and autonomy. The object of the critique is not to produce a new 'theory' which presumes to explain nationalist ideology by reducing it to something else. Rather, the object is to ask: 'What does nationalist discourse presuppose? Where is it located in relation to other discourses? Where are the cracks on its surface, the points of tension in its structure, the contrary forces, the contradictions? What does it reveal and what does it suppress?' These are the types of questions with which I propose to conduct this study, not with a positive sociological theory.

There is a second reason why the relation between nationalist thought and the framework of colonialist knowledge cannot be a simple one. This reason has to do with the very historicity of thought. Like all other systems of ideological doctrine, nationalist thought has evolved over time. Hence, there is a *historical* process through which nationalist discourse constitutes itself. At the level of the problematic, the political opposition to colonial rule goes through specific programmatic phases, marked by innovations in political objectives, in strategy and tactics, in selecting the types of issues on which to focus its ideological sights and concentrate its polemical attack. Shifts at the level of the problematic may well call for a reconsideration of the logical or theoretical underpinnings of the ideology. It could lead to a change in the sorts of theoretical ideas which nationalist thought had borrowed from Western rationalism, giving up older theories and adopting, even devising, new ones. There could be new theoretical resources which become available at the level of the thematic, for like nationalist thought Western rationalism too has a continuing history. On the

other hand, the very logical and theoretical structure of the thematic may influence the formulation of the problematic, constrain the identification of political possibilities, make some possibilities appear more desirable or feasible than others. Indeed, the thematic will tend to apply a closure on the range of possibilities, and many possibilities will be ignored and some not even recognized. At the same time, this process of mutual influence between the thematic and problematic of nationalist discourse — the periodic dissociations and coming together — could even produce at critical junctures a thoroughgoing critique of the thematic itself, points at which nationalist thought will seem to be on the verge of transcending itself.

The complexity in the relation between nationalist and colonialist thought therefore must also be tackled in terms of a theory of *stages* in the constitution of a nationalist discourse — not necessarily chronological stages, but rather a logical sequence in the evolution of its full ideological structure. But is a theory of stages not one which assumes a certain linearity of evolution, a certain teleology? We need to face this question, because it has to do quite centrally with the way in which we propose to relate a political theory of nation-state formation with the ideological history of that state.

III

We have already introduced at the end of the previous chapter Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution'. Since this is the central concept around which we will build our political analysis of 20th century nationalism, it is necessary to explore the location of this concept within the Marxist theory of state and revolution, and its possible uses in our field of inquiry. In particular, we will need to show how, given the contradictions between the problematic and the thematic of nationalism, passive revolution becomes the historical path by which a 'national' development of capital can occur without resolving or surmounting those contradictions.

Antonio Gramsci himself locates this concept on the theoretical ground defined by two propositions stated by Marx in his Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*: 'No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve . . .'⁵ Gramsci applies the two propositions to the history of bourgeois-national movements in late 19th century Europe, particularly the history of the Italian Risorgimento, and is led to the identification, in all their concreteness, of two inseparably related aspects of those movements: one, the historical impediments to bourgeois hegemony, and two, the possibilities of marginal change within those limits.

What are these limits? Gramsci analyses them in terms of three moments or levels of the 'relation of forces'.⁶ The first is that of the objective structure, 'independent of human will'. In countries such as Italy in the second half of the 19th century, the level of the development of the material forces of production

and the relative positions and functions of the different classes in production were not such as to favour the rapid emergence of a fully developed system of capitalist production. The political position of the older governing classes; a backward agrarian economy; the weakness of the national capitalist class in relation to the advanced levels of productive organization in the world capitalist economy — all of these were constraints at the level of the 'objective structure'.

The second moment is the relation of political forces, 'the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness and organization attained by the various social classes'. Here the question of ideology and organization is not simply that of the economic-corporate organization of particular productive groups or even the solidarity of interests among all members of a social class. The crucial level is the 'most purely political' one where 'one becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too'. It is at this level that

previously germinated ideologies become 'party', come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society — bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. It is true that the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups — equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interests.⁷

This is the 'moment' to which Gramsci paid the greatest attention in his *Notebooks*, analyzing in concrete detail the political history of the Risorgimento to show how the ideology and organization of bourgeois hegemony in its twin aspects of coercive power embodied in the state and intellectual-moral leadership in society at large necessarily remained incomplete and fragmented.

The third 'moment' is that of the relation of military forces, consisting of the technical military configuration as well as what might be called the 'politico-military' situation. In the case of the direct political occupation of a country by a foreign armed power, for instance,

this type of oppression would be inexplicable if it were not for the state of social disintegration of the oppressed people, and the passivity of the majority of them; consequently independence cannot be won with purely military forces, it requires

both military and politico-military. If the oppressed nation, in fact, before embarking on its struggle for independence, had to wait until the hegemonic State allowed it to organise its own army in the strict and technical sense of the word, it would have to wait quite a while . . . The oppressed nation will therefore initially oppose the dominant military force with a force which is only 'politico-military', that is to say a form of political action which has the virtue of provoking repercussions of a military character in the sense: 1. that it has the capacity to destroy the war potential of the dominant nation from within; 2. that it compels the dominant military force to thin out and disperse itself over a large territory, thus nullifying a great part of its war potential.⁸

In this aspect too Gramsci noted 'the disastrous absence of politico-military leadership' in the Italian Risorgimento.

Considering together all three 'moments' of the political situation, the conclusion becomes inescapable that in conditions of a relatively advanced world capitalism, a bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in a new national political order cannot hope to launch a 'war of movement' (or 'manoeuvre') in the traditional sense, i.e. a frontal assault on the state. For such a bourgeoisie, a full-scale, concentrated and decisive attack on the existing structure of political rule in the fashion of the French Revolution or the Revolutions of 1848 is impossible. Instead, it must engage in a 'war of position', a kind of political trench warfare waged on a number of different fronts. Its strategy would be to attempt a 'molecular transformation' of the state, neutralizing opponents, converting sections of the former ruling classes into allies in a partially reorganized system of government, undertaking economic reforms on a limited scale so as to appropriate the support of the popular masses but keeping them out of any form of direct participation in the processes of governance.

This is the 'passive revolution', a historical phase in which the 'war of position' coincides with the revolution of capital. But this 'interpretative criterion' Gramsci applies 'dynamically' to the history of the Italian Risorgimento. In the process, he is able to make some observations of great significance in the analysis of the emergence of nation-states in the period of a relatively advanced world capitalism.

Talking about the relationship between Cavour, a classic exponent of the 'war of position', and Mazzini who represented to a much greater extent the element of popular initiative or 'war of movement', Gramsci asks: 'are not both of them indispensable precisely to the same extent?' The answer is: yes, but there is a fundamental asymmetry in the relation between the two tendencies. Cavour was aware of his own role; he was also aware of the role being played by Mazzini. That is to say, Cavour was not only conscious that the change he was seeking to bring about was a partial, circumscribed and strictly calibrated change, he was also conscious of how far the other tendency, that of a more direct challenge to the established order by means of popular initiative, could go. Mazzini, on the other hand, was a 'visionary apostle', unaware both of his own role and that of Cavour. As a result, the Mazzinian tendency was in a sense itself appropriated within the overall strategy of the 'war of position'. 'Out of the Action Party and the Moderates, which represented the real "subjective

forces" of the Risorgimento? Without a shadow of doubt it was the Moderates, precisely because they were also aware of the role of the Action Party: thanks to this awareness, their "subjectivity" was of a superior and more decisive quality.¹⁰ On the other hand, if Mazzini had been more aware of Cavour's role and that of his own, "then the equilibrium which resulted from the convergence of the two men's activities would have been different, would have been more favourable to Mazzinianism. In other words, the Italian State would have been constituted on a less retrograde and more modern basis."¹¹ Instead, what happened was that the forces of 'moderation' succeeded in appropriating the results of popular initiative for the purposes of a partially reorganized and reformist state order. The dialectic was blocked, the opposition could not be transcended. The passive revolution allowed

the 'thesis' to achieve its full development, up to the point where it would even succeed in incorporating a part of the antithesis itself — in order, that is, not to allow itself to be 'transcended' in the dialectical opposition. The thesis alone in fact develops to the full its potential for struggle, up to the point where it absorbs even the so-called representatives of the antithesis: it is precisely in this that the passive revolution or revolution/restoration consists.¹²

In exploring the relation between passive revolution and the 'war of position', therefore, Gramsci is not proposing some invariant, suprahistorical 'theory' of the formation of nation-states in the period of advanced world capitalism. Indeed, he begins from the premise that there are two contrary tendencies within such movements — one of gradualism, moderation, molecular changes controlled 'from the top', the other of popular initiative, radical challenge, war of movement. The equilibrium that would result from the struggle between these two tendencies was in no way predetermined: it depended on the particular 'moments' of the relation of forces, especially on the relative quality of the 'subjective forces' which provided political-ideological leadership to each tendency.

If we are to apply this 'interpretative criterion of molecular changes' to anti-colonial movements in the non-European parts of the world, movements seeking to replace colonial rule with a modern national state structure, we would be led into identifying at the level of the overall political-ideological strategy the two conflicting and yet mutually indispensable tendencies. The specific organizational forms in which the two tendencies appear in particular national movements, the manner in which the struggle takes place between them, the particular form of resolution of the struggle — all of these could be documented and analysed in order to provide a more varied and comprehensive treatment of the problem of the formation of national states in recent history. For the case of the Risorgimento, Gramsci illustrates the fundamental asymmetry between the two tendencies by noting that while conditions did not exist for the popular initiative to take the form of a 'concentrated and instantaneous' insurrection, it could not even exert itself in the 'diffused and capillary form of indirect pressure'.¹³ Consequently, while there did exist 'the enormous importance of the "demagogic" mass movement, with its leaders

thrown up by chance . . . it was nevertheless in actual fact taken over by the traditional organic forces — in other words, by the parties of long standing, with rationally-formed leaders . . ."¹⁴ It would be an interesting exercise in itself to explore what form this relation between 'demagogic' and 'rationally-formed' leaderships takes in a non-Western cultural context in which the very notion of a 'rational' structure of political power is likely to be associated with the ideology of colonial rule.

But there is another aspect to this asymmetry between the 'subjective forces' in the passive revolution which is of even greater significance in understanding the ideological history of nation-state formation in colonial countries. Besides the relative quality of the two leaderships in the Risorgimento, Gramsci also relates the asymmetry to certain 'organic tendencies of the modern state' which seem to favour the forces which carry out a protracted, many-faceted and well-coordinated 'war of position' rather than those which think only of an instantaneous 'war of movement'. And it is at this level of his argument that Gramsci draws out the implications of his analysis of the Risorgimento in relation to the political struggle of the proletariat against the capitalist order.

These 'organic tendencies of the modern state' are set under historical conditions in which the question of socialism and the possibility of socialist revolution have been already raised and demonstrated. Thus, in a fundamental historical sense, the capitalist state can no longer retain the same character as before. What it does now is intervene in the process of production in a far more direct way than was the case under the classical liberal state. The state now 'finds itself invested with a primordial function in the capitalist system, both as a company . . . which concentrates the savings to be put at the disposal of private industry and activity, and as a medium and long-term investor . . .' Once the state assumes this function, it is then inevitably led

to intervene in order to check whether the investments which have taken place through State means are properly administered . . . But control by itself is not sufficient. It is not just a question of preserving the productive apparatus just as it is at a given moment. It is a matter of reorganising it in order to develop it in parallel with the increase in the population and in collective needs.

Besides, there are other elements which also compel the state to become interventionist: 'increasing protectionism and autarkic tendencies, investment premiums, dumping, salvaging of large enterprises which are in the process, or in danger of going bankrupt; in other words, as the phrase goes, the "nationalisation of losses and industrial deficits" . . .'¹⁵

Gramsci of course discusses this interventionist capitalist state in the context of 'Americanism' and 'Fordism'. Here the state retains the formal character of a liberal state, 'not in the sense of a free-trade liberalism or of effective political liberty, but in the more fundamental sense of free initiative and of economic individualism which, with its own means, on the level of "civil society", through historical development, itself arrives at a regime of industrial concentration and monopoly.'¹⁶ Gramsci then continues the argument about the

interventionist capitalist state into the stage where it attains the specific form of fascism.

We need not concern ourselves here with the debate on the relevance of Gramsci's analysis for an understanding of the state in the advanced capitalist countries of today. Instead, let us piece together some of these fragments of his analysis into an argument about the historical character of capitalist nation-states which have emerged from successful anti-colonial movements in countries of the non-European world.

First of all, at the level of the 'objective structure', an aspiring bourgeoisie in a colonial country faces the two-fold problem, now well known in the literature on 'underdevelopment', of a low level of development of the forces of production at home as well as the overwhelming dominance, both economic and political, of an advanced metropolitan capitalism. The problem takes on a particularly intractable structural form in countries with a large and backward agrarian economy. The principal task for a nationalist bourgeoisie in such a country becomes one in which it must find for itself sufficient room for a certain degree of relatively independent capitalist development. For this it must engage in a political struggle with the colonial power as well as with forces at home which impede the structural transformation of the domestic economy. How can it project this two-fold struggle as something going beyond the narrow corporate interests of the bourgeoisie and give to it the form of a 'national' struggle? That becomes its principal political-ideological task.

The task is still more formidable if at the 'politico-military' level the possibility of a 'concentrated and instantaneous' armed assault on the colonial state is remote. Thus if the 'politico-military' basis of the colonial state itself is strong enough not to permit the formation of a rival armed force, then the nationalist leadership will not have before it the viable option of a purely military solution. It must rely on a 'politico-military' strategy based on the coordinated, and perhaps protracted, action of very large sections of the popular masses against the colonial state.

The nationalist leadership in such situations cannot resort to a 'war of movement'; a 'war of position' becomes inevitable. To conduct this 'war of position' it must bring under the sway of a nationalist ideology and political programme the overwhelming part of the popular elements in the nation, and particularly the vast mass of peasants. It is here that the politico-ideological problem would get intertwined with a more fundamental cultural problem. The structural 'underdevelopment' of the agrarian economy would be associated with the cultural 'backwardness' of the peasantry — its localism, immobility, resistance to change, subjection to a variety of pre-capitalist forms of domination, etc. Will the 'war of position' be one in which a 'modernization' of these cultural institutions precedes the phase of independent capitalist development and formation of the nation-state, or is the replacement of the colonial state by a national one itself the precondition for capitalist development and 'modernization'?

The characteristic form of 'passive revolution' in colonial countries follows the second path. That is to say, the 'war of position' implies a political-ideological

programme by which the largest possible nationalist alliance is built up against the political rule of the colonial power. The aim is to form a politically independent nation-state. The means involve the creation of a series of alliances, within the organizational structure of a national movement, between the bourgeoisie and other dominant classes and the mobilization, under this leadership, of mass support from the subordinate classes. The project is a reorganization of the political order, but it is moderated in two quite fundamental ways. On the one hand, it does not attempt to break up or transform in any radical way the institutional structures of 'rational' authority set up in the period of colonial rule, whether in the domain of administration and law or in the realm of economic institutions or in the structure of education, scientific research and cultural organization. On the other hand, it also does not undertake a full-scale assault on all pre-capitalist dominant classes; rather, it seeks to limit their former power, neutralize them where necessary, attack them only selectively, and in general to bring them round to a position of subsidiary allies within a reformed state structure. The dominance of capital does not emanate from its hegemonic sway over 'civil society'. On the contrary, it is its measure of control over the new state apparatus which becomes a precondition for further capitalist development. It is by means of an interventionist state, directly entering the domain of production as a mobilizer and manager of investible resources, that the foundations are laid for the expansion of capital. Yet the dominance of capital over the national state remains constrained in several ways. Its function of representing the 'national-popular' has to be shared with other governing groups and its transformative role moderated to reformist and 'molecular' changes. It is thus that the passive revolution acquires the dual character of 'revolution/restoration'.

IV

To be sure, there are many differences in the specific forms which the post-colonial state has taken in various countries of Asia, Africa and Central and South America. There also exists a large literature which explores these forms from the standpoint of political economy or political sociology. Even if one were to look at the character of the dominant ideologies associated with these state forms, one would find diverse mixes of free enterprise/state control, electoral democracy/authoritarianism and a variety of populist doctrines. An empirical description or classification of these forms would justify the comparative methods of study on which much of this sociological literature has been based.

What I propose here, however, is a study of the ideological history of the post-colonial state by taking as *paradigmatic* the most developed form of that state. That is to say, I give to nationalist thought its ideological unity by relating it to a form of the post-colonial state which accords most closely to the theoretical characterization I have made above of the passive revolution. I trace the historical constitution of this unity in terms of certain stages, which I will call *moments*, each having a specific form of combination of the thematic

and the problematic and each bearing certain distinct historical possibilities in terms of the relation of 'subjective forces'. I use as my material certain nationalist texts from India, but the theoretical import of the argument is general.

In fact, to sustain my analytical framework, I will need to argue that 'passive revolution' is the *general* form of the transition from colonial to post-colonial national states in the 20th century. The various stages of movement in the realm of ideas which accompany the historical process of this passive revolution are also an aspect of this general argument. The precise historical location of the transitions from one stage to another, or even the specific ideological content of each stage, will of course need to be fixed separately for each particular nationalist movement. I do not even try to locate, in comparative terms, some of these specific variants even for illustrative purposes, because I do not have the same familiarity with nationalist texts from any other country. But the theoretical structure of my argument must stand or fall at the general level, as an argument about nationalist thought in colonial countries and not as an argument about Indian nationalism. That is one of the main theoretical uses to which I wish to put Gramsci's remarks on 'the organic tendencies of the modern state'.

The question of identifying the different ideological strands or 'subjective forces' in nationalist thought cannot, however, be answered by applying any simple criterion such as progressive/reactionary, elitist/populist or indirect/direct assault on the colonial state. In fact, even Gramsci's interpretative criterion of war of position/war of movement cannot be used to separate out two distinct and opposed ideological tendencies in all nationalist movements. In one of his stray remarks on India, for instance, Gramsci himself says: 'India's political struggle against the English . . . knows three forms of war; war of movement, war of position and underground warfare. Gandhi's passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare.'¹⁷ Here, therefore, a straightforward identification of the two 'subjective forces', as in the case of Cavour and Mazzini in the Italian Risorgimento, is not possible. We will consequently need to devise other, more general, analytical means to make sense of the various ideological ensembles we will encounter in our study of nationalist thought.

I tackle this problem by breaking up the presumed unity of nationalist thought into three stages or moments. I call these, respectively, the moments of departure, manoeuvre and arrival. The argument is that for nationalist thought to attain its paradigmatic form, these three are *necessary* ideological moments.

The *moment of departure* lies in the encounter of a nationalist consciousness with the framework of knowledge created by post-Enlightenment rationalist thought. It produces the awareness — and acceptance — of an essential cultural difference between East and West. Modern European culture, it is thought, possesses attributes which make the European culturally equipped for power and progress, while such attributes are lacking in the 'traditional' cultures of the East, thus dooming those countries to poverty and subjection. But the nationalist's claim is that this backwardness is not a character which is

historically immutable: it can be transformed by the nation acting collectively, by adopting all those modern attributes of European culture. But would this not obliterate those very differences which mark the national culture as something distinct from Western culture? Nationalist thought at its moment of departure formulates the following characteristic answer: it asserts that the superiority of the West lies in the materiality of its culture, exemplified by its science, technology and love of progress. But the East is superior in the spiritual aspect of culture. True modernity for the non-European nations would lie in combining the superior material qualities of Western cultures with the spiritual greatness of the East. I illustrate this moment in the formation of nationalist thought by a study of the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, an early nationalist thinker.

This ideal, however, necessarily implies an elitist programme, for the act of cultural synthesis can only be performed by the supremely refined intellect. Popular consciousness, steeped in centuries of superstition and irrational folk religion, can hardly be expected to adopt this ideal: it would have to be transformed from without. This is where the central political-ideological dilemma of capitalist transformation occurs in a colonial country, whose solution, as we have outlined above, is passive revolution. It requires the mobilization of the popular elements in the cause of an anti-colonial struggle and, at the same time, a distancing of those elements from the structure of the state. This is achieved at the *moment of manoeuvre*, a crucial moment with many contradictory possibilities. It combines in one inseparable process elements of both 'war of movement' and 'war of position'. It consists in the historical consolidation of the 'national' by decrying the 'modern', the preparation for expanded capitalist production by resort to an ideology of anti-capitalism — in other words, 'the development of the thesis by incorporating a part of the antithesis'. This moment I illustrate in the course of a discussion of the thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

The *moment of arrival* is when nationalist thought attains its fullest development. It is now a discourse of order, of the rational organization of power. Here the discourse is not only conducted in a single, consistent, unambiguous voice, it also succeeds in glossing over all earlier contradictions, divergences and differences and incorporating within the body of a unified discourse every aspect and stage in the history of its formation. This ideological unity of nationalist thought it seeks to actualize in the unified life of the state. Nationalist discourse at its moment of arrival is passive revolution uttering its own life-history. I illustrate this final point in the argument with a study of the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru.

At each stage, I attempt to use the distinction between the level of the problematic and that of the thematic to point out the inherent contradictions in the structure of the ideology, the range of possibilities and the logic of the development towards the next moment. True enough, assertions and justifications lie intertwined in the same body of doctrine. Indeed, this is precisely what gives to an ideology its unity, for it is also a characteristic of ideological thinking that the solution is already thought of at the same time as a problem is formulated.

But, for that very reason, it is by following the disjunctures between the claims and their justifications that I propose to identify the ambiguities and contradictions in the doctrine of nationalism, show how the assertion of political possibilities conditions the choice of a structure of justification, how on the other hand the justificatory structure itself may condition the identification of possibilities, how some possibilities are emphasised, others erased, how the marks of disjuncture are suppressed and the rational continuity of a progressive historical development established.¹⁸ The distinction between the thematic and the problematic will offer us a means of access into the internal structure of nationalist discourse and the relation between its theory and practice. It will also give us a standpoint for the critical analysis of the complex relation between nationalist thought and the discourse of colonialism.

This critique, as I have said before, is not one which stems from an alternative theory claiming to provide better answers to the problems which nationalism poses for itself. Rather, the object is to look into the manner in which those problems were posed by nationalist thought. In a sense, therefore, we too will need to locate texts in their own historical contexts, an interpretative procedure which some recent historians of political thought have recommended in opposition to the view that the classic texts of politics can be read as part of some timeless discourse of human wisdom.¹⁹ But we will need to do more. We will not attempt to suppress the marks of our own engagement in a political-ideological discourse. The critical analysis of nationalist thought is also necessarily an intervention in a political discourse of our own time. Reflecting on the intellectual struggles of nationalist writers of a bygone era, we are made aware of the way in which we relate our own theory and practice; judging their assessment of political possibilities, we begin to ponder the possibilities open to us today. Thus, analysis itself becomes politics; interpretation acquires the undertones of a polemic. In such circumstances, to pretend to speak in the 'objective' voice of history is to dissimulate. By marking our own text with the signs of battle, we hope to go a little further towards a more open and self-aware discourse.

Notes

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
2. Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes*, 44 (Winter 1963), pp.102-40.
3. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, tr. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969); Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, tr. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970).
4. See for a survey of linguistic research on this subject, Teun A. van Dijk, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1977).
5. Karl Marx, 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*'

in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, vol.1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), p.504.

6. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp.180-5. For discussions on Gramsci's concept of passive revolution, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'State, Transition and Passive Revolution' in Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Social Theory*, pp.113-67; Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, tr. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), pp.290-324; Anne Showstack Sassoon, 'Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform' in Sassoon, ed., *Approaches to Gramsci* (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), pp.127-48.

7. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp.181-2.

8. *Ibid.*, p.183.

9. *Ibid.*, p.108.

10. *Ibid.*, p.113.

11. *Ibid.*, p.108.

12. *Ibid.*, p.110.

13. *Ibid.*, p.110.

14. *Ibid.*, p.112.

15. *Ibid.*, pp.314-5.

16. *Ibid.*, p.293.

17. *Ibid.*, p.227.

18. This kind of exercise in the history of ideas has now become much more acceptable than before in academic circles, not only because of the impact of hermeneutic philosophy and the writings of that diverse group of French intellectuals clubbed together under the ungainly label of 'post-structuralists', but also because of the many uncertainties even among Anglo-American professional philosophers regarding the 'givenness' of a scientific method. See for instance, Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). It is only proper for me to acknowledge the influence on my thinking of the works of many of the former group of writers, in particular Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. I cannot, of course, attempt here a systematic discussion of these writings or of the relation which they bear to the historical method of Marxism. But I must state that my intellectual attitude towards the relation between nationalism and the universalist claims of 'science' stems from a completely different source, namely, the cultural predicament of one whose practice of science means not only a separation from his own people but also invariably the intellectual legitimization of newer and ever more insidious forms of domination of the few over the many.

19. See, for instance, Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), pp.3-53; Skinner, 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', *Political Theory*, 2 (1974), pp.277-303; John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas' in P. Laslett, W.G. Runciman and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Series IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.158-73; Dunn, 'Practising History and Social Science on "Realist" Assumptions' in C. Hookway and P. Pettit, eds., *Action and Interpretation: Studies in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.145-75.