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The question of linguistic minorities and the debates on cultural sovereignty

Josu Amezaga-Albizu, josu.amezaga@ehu.eus

Josu Martínez-Martínez, josu.martinez@ehu.eus

NOR Research Group

University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)

Leioa, 48940

Basque Country, Spain

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Abstract

When observing certain global debates in recent decades on the defence of national cultural and linguistic spaces, one finds what seems to be a paradox. The paradox that states which were historically constructed by homogenizing cultures and stifling languages in their territory (even states that were until recently accused of promoting cultural imperialism), now seem to be resorting to defensive arguments traditionally used by threatened minorities. This reaction is based on the perception that flows linked to globalisation, migratory movements and the development of telecommunications are threatening the linguistic and cultural space of the nation, and therefore the nation itself, and could thus suggest a confluence of arguments between states and minorities.
As in any paradox, we are not only faced with statements that apparently depart from common sense, but instead with a complex reality, whose understanding poses a challenge. In this article, we will try to analyse, from the point of view of the linguistic minorities, the limits of the arguments wielded by the states in defence of their national space, as well as the possibilities those minorities have of resorting to the discourses constructed at a global level in defence of diversity.

Introduction

In recent decades, the world of politics has witnessed a series of debates on the implications entailed by the plurality of languages and cultures in processes of nation-building and national reproduction. The French Revolution had already posited this plurality as a problem when it attempted to create a political community – the nation; a high degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity throughout the territory was considered indispensable to achieve this end. Nearly two centuries after the Revolution, still in the political sphere, numerous agents – many of them states that had achieved their independence after the colonial period – claimed their right to build their own political and cultural communities, confronting what came to be called cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976). The debate thus acquired a planetary dimension, and it could not be otherwise precisely because the threat did not proceed so much from each territory's cultural heterogeneity, as from the flows of information, communication and culture circulating throughout the world (MacBride, 1985). Following the logic of the market, which appears to be inexorably swallowing everything up – even politics – the ensuing debate on the plurality of cultures incorporated an economic character: it was a question of protecting national cultural markets, not only as a means for reproducing the nation but also as an economic strategy. Here we saw countries that shortly before had been denounced as former colonial powers that imposed their models on their former dominions, now raising their voices against the new cultural hegemony. In this way plurality and difference apparently ceased to be a threat to the nation, and became an argument precisely for defending it against those who were imposing homogenisation from abroad (Delacroix and Bornon, 2005).

Finally, it is precisely those who hold that cultural hegemony, those accused of imposing homogenisation, who seem recently to have become worried and now propose to leave political and cultural spaces that they themselves contributed to create – or, simply propose to build walls thousands of miles in length – out of fear of losing their own cultural space (McDonald, 2017).

How should these debates be considered from the viewpoint of those linguistic and cultural communities that from the outset were minoritised, i.e., excluded from the possibility of creating their own space of reproduction? Are we witnessing a convergence of interests, or at least of arguments, between powerful states that are now claiming their right to a language and culture of their own, and communities that have being doing so for centuries – precisely in the face of many of those states? Or is this no more than an illusion?

In this article, we analyse some of the debates that have taken place in recent decades at the world level on the right of nations to conserve their own cultural and linguistic space. As a prior step, we refer to the focus given by the French Revolution to the issue of linguistic plurality in nation-building, since we consider that some of the positions that emerged at that time continue to be in force in the present day. Next, four big debates (NWICO, cultural exception, cultural diversity and today's re-nationalising movements), are analysed, focusing on the place occupied in those debates by minoritised languages within states. Finally, we draw some conclusions.

The French Revolution: the threat lies below

When the French revolutionaries, after an initial period of debate on plurilingualism, posited the need for nation-building based on a single language, they started a debate that has lasted up until the present. Abbot Henri Gregoire, in his renowned *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française* [Report on the need and the measures to destroy the *patois* and make the use of the French language universal], describes a panorama of the country that was certainly complex for those who, basing themselves on the ideas of the Enlightenment, were attempting to spread Reason – that is, the Revolution. A country in which, according to Gregoire's estimations, six million citizens were completely ignorant of the language of Parisian culture and the revolutionaries, French; another six million were unable to hold a conversation in that language; and a mere three million spoke it correctly. A country in which another twenty-seven forms of speaking – *les patois* – could be found (Grégoire, 1794, p.5).

This linguistic plurality was seen as a problem by some revolutionary sectors, a view that was influenced by the conjunction of a series of ideas. On one side, there was the idea that the Revolution was based on certain ideals emanating from the Enlightenment which should be transmitted to the citizens as a whole – the citizens of France, Europe and the world – to liberate them from tyranny, as part of a proselytising tradition: the Revolution as *la fille aînée de l'Eglisse* [the eldest daughter of the Church] (Lafon, 1994, p.5). On the other, there was the ideal of a new regime based on the social contract amongst the – male – citizens. In addition, there was the perception that the linguistic fragmentation of the kingdom of France had been used by the monarchic regime to divide the population and thus maintain its domination; and that the clergy was preaching the counter-revolution in the vernacular languages. Finally, there was the consideration that the Revolution had resulted in the disappearance of the figure that had until then represented and unified the nation – the king. This conjunction of ideas appears to have underpinned the decision to impose a single language. This occurred in a context in which French was striving to replace Latin as the *lingua franca*. It had an important presence in international relations and in the world of European high culture; and, moreover, it was the common language in the physical spaces where the Revolution was being forged. All of this helps to explain why a policy of nation-building was enforced that consisted, amongst other elements, of linguistic standardisation in French. However, it should not be thought that this standardisation was an inevitable outcome of the Revolution. Some authors even point to the contradiction between the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality and the later policy of linguistic imposition (Urrutikoetxea, 2018). They also draw attention to the different discourses and practices on linguistic plurality that accompanied the Revolution, including its initial multilingual policy, expressed in the translation of laws and decrees into other languages spoken in the territory (Certeau et al., 1975). In any case, the doctrine that was finally imposed was that of uniformity. The new state thus undertook a task of cultural unification, both between the cities and the countryside and amongst the different territories of the Hexagon. A task in which, together with transport and communications, the school (and the language transmitted through it) played a fundamental role. An arduous task, on the other hand, that would not end until the beginning of the 20th century, helped by the processes of industrialisation and compulsory military service (Weber, 1976).

This identification of nation and language is what currently dominates a large part of the ideologies on the nation-building, not only in France but in most of the current nation states (May, 2013).The monolingual nation thus becomes the ideal of many of the nation states of the planet, with the possible exceptions of sub-Saharan Africa and some other regions.

It is certainly a complex question to determine whether the construction of a nation requires a common language, or can be carried out on a multilingual basis. Some authors argue that one of the elements that can help a nation-building process that avoids conflicts is a unified educational system that disseminates a common language among the population (Wimmer, 2018). Others, however, argue that it is not only possible but desirable to look for other models (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015). In any case, it is not the aim of this article to evaluate the merits and demerits of the monolingual model, but to analyse how numerous states are reacting in the face of what is perceived to be a questioning of that model. One example of the importance of this way of approaching national construction is the fact that only 1.5% of the world's languages enjoy any official status (as a national or regional language) recognized by a state (May, 2013). This policy, as well as its reflection in many other processes of building the nation state, has been widely studied (Heller, 2008; Hobsbawn, 1996; Anderson, 1983).

This policy of nation-building through, amongst other paths, the choice of a single language as the state language and the pretension to make it into the language of the population, thus made the rest of the languages spoken in the corresponding territories into minoritised languages (Cormack and Hourigan, 2007). This has given rise to several movements in favour of the linguistic communities marginalised from the building of the nation state, which claimed their right to exist.

However, the assertion of one's own language has not been exclusive to the marginalised minorities of nation states. In recent decades, it has been possible to observe different debates and movements in which it is the states themselves, not the minoritised linguistic communities, that are claiming that right: not, of course, the right to impose their language on minorities but – in a quasi-natural way – to defend their own language from the imposition of other languages. Hence, the debates on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) of the 1970s, on "cultural exception" of the 1990s, on cultural diversity of the 2000s, or on the immigration policies that many wealthy states have been adopting in recent years, all show an increase in defensive positions. However, an analysis of the discourses and practices that accompany these debates and movements suggests that these defensive positions are not so defensive when it comes to minoritised languages. Furthermore, it could be thought that these defensive positions of the states in many cases mean a strengthening of their positions facing minorities.

The debate on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)

When certain voices were raised in the 1960s, warning of how a new world communication order was being shaped in which a few states would benefit greatly at the cost of the rest (Schiller, 1976), it cannot be said that they were revealing anything new. A. Mattelart shows how this debate had already existed in the 1920s and 1930s. Examples of that are the denunciation of the Americanisation of the world made by Antonio Gramsci, or the protectionist cultural policies of Canada, Germany and other

countries (Mattelart, 2005). What gave a boost to the debate on the NWICO was the confluence of at least three other factors: on one side, the existence of new states, which emerged from the decolonisation processes and also wished to construct their own national space, following the patterns of the already established nation states. These new states encountered difficulties in this process due to their position of dependence with respect to the world powers (some of which had been their former metropolises) in the field of culture and communications. A second factor was the configuration of the world into great blocs (capitalist, socialist and non-aligned) that fostered a game of alliances and agreements amongst states. In addition, there was the technological factor, with the rapid development of electronic media and communications technologies, especially the satellite. All of this was accompanied by the growing influence of certain powers in the cultural field.

It was in this context that a group of states (grouped in the movement of non-aligned countries) set in motion the mechanisms for an international debate on the new communication order. This debate was finally promoted by UNESCO and resulted in what is known as the MacBride Report (MacBride, 1985) and the Resolution approved by consensus by the member countries of that organisation in 1980.

It is necessary to underscore that while the initiative in this debate was in the hands of states (many of them established on multilingual territories and with policies of imposing their official language over the rest), the linguistic question and the question of minorities were present throughout the debate and in its conclusions. In this sense, while the debate on the NWICO is often interpreted as a reaction by the dependent countries against cultural imperialism (which would be the equivalent of a debate on *international relations*), some authors draw attention to the importance that *national policies* (that is, inside the nation state) acquired within it. Thus, questions on the freedom of the press, the protection of journalists, the plurality of media, or attention to minorities, all appear in the 1980 Resolution (Carlsson, 2017).

The MacBride Report points this out very clearly when it speaks of the need for a balanced relationship amongst cultures:

> *To secure this* [equal exchange among cultures]*, it will often be necessary to protect and strengthen the threatened culture, develop communication at a local level, and open up alternative forms of communication as an antidote to the pressure of the big media. It should be stressed, too, that the problem does not arise solely in the relationships between one nation and another; often, it takes its sharpest form and presents the most pressing dangers within nations whose population includes cultural minorities* (MacBride, 1985, pp.I–24).

The fact that a report and a resolution derived from an initiative amongst states came to include references to internal policies that these latter should follow was perhaps due to the composition of the committee responsible for drawing up the report and making recommendations. This was certainly a plural committee, not only with respect to blocs and continents but also to professions: journalists, academics, civil servants, writers (all of this with a serious exception: the inclusion of only one woman amongst the 16 members) (Osolnik, 2005).

Numerous works deal with the concrete results of this debate and the resolution approved in 1980 (Nordenstreng, 2013; Thussu, 2005). Many of them underscore the

difficulty of putting those recommendations into effect. This was due to pressure from powerful communications agents or from states like the USA (which was not a member of UNESCO in 1980), the neoliberal policies promoted by Reagan and Thatcher, and the advance of telecommunications, which meant a much more complex framework for national communications policies. What is undeniable is that the debate placed the right of each country – and to a certain extent each people – to have its own cultural space on the agenda.

The World Trade Organisation and cultural exception

It was noted above that since the first half of the twentieth century, in certain states that had apparently been fairly successful in forming their national communities, signs of concern had appeared about the influence that foreign cultural products might have on their interior. For example, in the 1930s the *Rapport Petsche* spelt out the need for a policy of state support for French cinema in order to confront dependence on American films (Choukroun, 2004). Europe was also on the alert, as shown by the approval by the Council of the European Economic Community in 1989 of the Directive on "Television without Frontiers", which legitimised quota policies by member states for the defence of European audio-visual production.

However, this concern surely reached its peak in the discussions on the rules that should govern international trade and that resulted in the birth of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. It was during these debates that France, Canada, Belgium and other states called for cultural exception; that is, the right of nation states to exclude cultural products from international free trade (Farchy, 2004).

A large part of the arguments used in favour of the exceptional character of culture within the global flow of goods and services was based on its strategic character, comparable to other sectors also exempted from free trade, such as health for example: "*la culture n'est pas une marchandise comme les autres*" [culture is not a piece of merchandise like the rest], in the words used by Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission, during the debates (Cfr. Polo, 2003, p.149). However, cultural exception is not only a movement in favour of the defence of culture or national identity. It is also, and especially, a defence of the national market. In J.F. Polo's analysis of the cinema policy of Jack Lang, the French Minister of Culture and one of the staunchest defenders of cultural exception in international debates, what stands out are the effort to combine culture and the economy – overcoming a left-wing tradition largely based on the arguments of the Frankfurt School, which considered this to be an unresolvable contradiction – and the view that the cultural market was a strategic economic sector. In the words of this author, "*il ne s'agit plus de condamner la contamination de la culture par l'économie, mais seulement de condamner sa monopolisation par une seule nation*" [it is no longer a question of condemning the contamination of culture by the economy, but of condemning its monopolisation by a single nation] (Polo, 2003, p.132).

Naturally, since states were the protagonists in the debate on international trade and cultural exception, they focused on both the debate and the application of agreements from their own viewpoint. It should be recalled that, as such, cultural exception in the agreements of the 1990s was more of a principle than a juridical regulation (Petit, 2012). In this way, a principle that could have been shared by many cultural and linguistic communities (the right to preserve one's own linguistic and cultural space)

was distorted, insofar as many of these linguistic communities do not have any mechanism of political power for applying that defence. Even if it is difficult to generalise since not all minorities enjoy the same level of accommodation in the state model, those that have achieved a certain political or economic power find that their initiatives clash with state policies (the Catalan or Basque cases, for example). Strictly speaking, the agreements derived from the negotiations enabled the application of policies in defence of their own culture and language at different levels within the nation states. This policy was used by the United States and Canada to establish different measures according to the region in which the regulations were applied. Thus, for example, the audio-visual policy applied in Quebec following the international agreements was different from that applied in the rest of Canada (Torrent, 2002). This possibility, however, was left in the hands of the states, which generally applied measures based on cultural exception according to their own logic.

We have one example in the case of Catalonia, where many of the arrangements adopted on the basis of the precepts emanating from cultural exception so as to guarantee the presence of the Catalan language in the cinema (production and consumption) have encountered opposition from the Spanish law courts (Catalan News Agency, 2017), the European Union (Aguilera-Vaqués, 2014), and even the United States (Bernier, 2001).

Another example of how the policy of cultural exception is interpreted is found in the fact that defence of French national cinema – that is, cinema in French – enables production to be supported that can be, and is, exported to other countries as part of a philosophy of spreading French culture around the world, especially to countries that form part of the *Francophonie*. All of that is the result of a policy that integrates cultural action abroad into diplomatic relations, and that ends up reproducing French cultural hegemony in countries that have many autochthonous languages (Delacroix and Bornon, 2005). These characteristics lead some authors to speak of the "*exception culturelle francaise*" [French cultural exception] (Lafon, 1994).

Cultural diversity

The debate on cultural exception in the 1990s gave way at the start of the twenty-first century to a new debate that was largely a continuation of the earlier one: cultural diversity. Some authors interpret this change as a new strategy that sought a greater consensus than had been achieved around cultural exception (Farchy, 2004). Indeed, facing the pressure of economic agents opposing policies of cultural exception, the rise of neoliberal deregulating policies, or the advance of telecommunications – which created difficulties for protectionism in culture – some states considered it more convenient to adopt a less defensive and more positive stance in favour of cultural diversity. Similarly, this change of strategy meant moving the site of the debate: from the WTO to UNESCO, which thus meant a return to discussion about the right of nations to their cultural development. However, this adaptation to the new times was not free of cost: it was done in exchange for a more diffuse formulation and, above all, with barely any normative weight in comparison with agreements on trade (Mattelart, 2005).

Thus, following several years of debates, reports, declarations, negotiations, etc., UNESCO approved the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005. In this way the right to particular cultures was in a certain

way ratified, facing the tendency towards the standardisation of markets at the world level.

Nonetheless, the question once again arises of who are to be responsible for defending diversity – or who are qualified to do so – and on the basis of what interests will they do this. Indeed, on one side the text of the Convention states that it seeks "*to promote respect for the diversity of cultural expressions and raise awareness of its value at the local, national and international levels*" as well as "*to reaffirm the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory*" (UNESCO, 2005, p.2). Even clearer from the point of view of minoritised linguistic communities, the preface defines linguistic diversity as a fundamental element of cultural diversity. However, as J. Guyot points out, this concept does not reappear in the rest of the document, which is significant with respect to the scant importance given to linguistic minorities in the agreement reached (Guyot, 2017). This deficiency, according to the author, is in clear contrast to many other documents of UNESCO that deal directly with the linguistic question, in which this organisation shows a much more sensitive attitudes towards such minorities. I. Bernier, another author who has analysed the debates that gave rise to the Convention on cultural diversity, explains the evolution that took place from the first negotiations until the final document (Bernier, 2009). Over the course of that evolution the references to endangered cultural expressions diminished in number to the point where the final text opens the door to what could very well be contradictions that work against minorities. Thus, taking up the Convention's principle of sovereignty ("*States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to adopt measures and policies to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory*") (UNESCO, 2005, p.3), any state that considers its national language or culture to be threatened by the pressure of the global market (as occurs regularly in the field of cinema, for example), is protected under the Convention to apply policies in defence of the threatened language and culture. This is the case even where the promotion of that language and/or culture might imply weakening other languages and cultures also present in the territory, which are usually under considerably greater threat.

An example of this is found in the case of cinema production in minority languages that extend beyond state borders. This is the case of the Basque language. With an original market of barely one million Basque-speakers, cinema in the Basque language has been experiencing a certain growth, and for over ten years one or two fictional feature films have been produced annually (some of which have achieved notable success in international film festivals), as well as a similar or greater number of both animated films and documentaries (Manias-Muñoz, Barreiro and Rodríguez, 2017). However, the policy of defending French cinema becomes an obstacle for the distribution of these products. The reason lies in the fact that 90% of Basque-speakers live in the Spanish part of the Basque Country, and that is where the great majority of films in Basque are produced. However, when it comes to distributing these films on the commercial networks of the French part of the Basque Country, the producers run up against serious difficulties, since their films are treated as foreign products (in spite of the fact that their films have been shot in a language that is also recognised as belonging to the heritage of France). The extreme case was the film *Xora* (2013). This was an initiative of a group from the French Basque Country. Facing the difficulty of obtaining funding in France, it went into coproduction with a company in the Spanish Basque Country and the film

was therefore considered a foreign production. This was in spite of its being shot north of the Pyrenees, involving local people and employing a Basque dialect only spoken in the French region of Soule (Martinez et al., 2015).

Thus, once again, the debate on cultural diversity is left in the hands of those who are in a position to apply the mechanisms to defend it.

The threat once again lies below: the re-nationalising movements of the cultural powers

It is striking that countries that were considered to be dominant in the second half of the last century, are now the ones raising their voices to claim the right to protect themselves from cultural invasion. An invasion that – unlike what happened in the debates on the NWICO, cultural exception or cultural diversity – no longer proceeds from above (i.e. from the big multinational corporations, powerful states, etc.) but instead from below: largely from immigration. This return to a downward gaze is highly reminiscent of the worries of the French Jacobins mentioned at the start of the article.

Already at the end of the last century, J. Tomlinson had warned of this in his critical analysis of the concept of cultural imperialism, which permeates the debates we are considering here. In his opinion globalisation is replacing imperialism and this also has effects in the cultural dimension: *"the effects of globalization are to weaken the cultural coherence of all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones – the 'imperialist powers' of a previous era"* (Tomlinson, 1991, p.175).

The context in which globalisation is affecting the cultural homogeneity of nation states is coloured by different phenomena: the increase of migratory movements (with populations that take their cultures and languages with them when they travel, and in their turn attract the providers of cultural content in their countries of origin towards the destination countries); the weakening of the states' capacity to control the cultural and communicative space, as a result of both neoliberal deregulatory policies and the advance of communications technologies; the appearance of new and powerful actors in the field of cultural production and distribution, proceeding from countries not previously included in the club of big states; the exacerbation of cultural differences and their importance for nation-building, linked above all to the military interventions of the great powers, the war against terror, and the responses generated by the latter. It is in this context that it can be said that states are encountering growing difficulties in using the cultural space as a space for nation-building (Guibernau, 2001).

Some examples can illustrate this fact: according to the United States Census, the percentage of inhabitants who speak a language other than English at home has increased from 11% to almost 22% in the last thirty years (US Census Bureau, 2016). This is not only due to an increase in immigration, but can also be considered in terms of a higher rate of maintaining their language of origin amongst immigrants. Similar data can be found in Australia, with an increase from 17% to 22% of speakers of languages other than English in the last 25 years and a greater use of those languages amongst the migrant population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This phenomenon is accompanied by the growing possibility of access by immigrant groups to the media of their country of origin or reference. The spread of television via satellite clearly shows the contradictory character of globalisation (Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham, 1996). Thus, the spread of television broadcasts from Anglophone

countries to non-Anglophone regions of the planet – a standard example of what was formerly criticised as cultural imperialism – was accompanied by an increase in the US market's power to attract the attention of foreign television companies: 1,000 signals broadcast to non-Anglophone countries and 900 signals in languages other than English directed at the United States (Amezaga Albizu, 2007).

The states' reactions to these phenomena also illustrate how the threat from below is perceived: from declarations by European government leaders such as A. Merkel or J. Cameron, proclaiming the failure of multiculturalism as a policy for national integration (Amezaga Albizu, 2011) to the creation in France of the *Ministère de l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire* [Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Solidary Development] between 2007 and 2010.

Similarly, some of the main arguments underlying the populist and nationalist phenomena that have recently shaken a large part of the developed world (from the rise of the extreme right in Europe to Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump) show a fear of losing national identity (McDonald, 2017; Ramswell, 2017), which is being brought about by the increase of cultural heterogeneity within societies that, it seems, had until now believed that "problem" to be resolved.

One of the measures being adopted by many of the states "affected" by this fear, and which has direct implications for the minority communities within those states, is the demand that linguistic requisites be met in order to obtain certain citizenship rights: from residence to nationality, and including the right to vote, family reunification, and others. While in 1998 less than a fifth of the states in the Council of Europe required that formal tests of knowledge of the official language should be taken for naturalisation, by 2010 the number of states requiring a formal test was over half (Bruzos, Erdocia and Khan, 2017). A survey conducted by the Council of Europe in 2013 found this requirement in three-quarters of the countries analysed (Council of Europe, 2014); subsequent to that survey, Spain adopted a similar measure in 2015, with the result that only 2 countries in the European Union (Ireland and Sweden) do not have this requirement. This tendency to demand linguistic requisites is motivated by the perception, mentioned above, that the policies for integrating immigrants have failed (Bauböck and Goodman, 2010). It should also be indicated that in the surveys cited there is a greater requirement for knowledge of the language than for knowledge of the civic values present in the society: in 2010, only 12 countries required this latter type of test, in contrast to 19 that required knowledge of the language.

It must be noted that in all the cases analysed in these surveys, the language of which a certain level of knowledge is required is the official language of the state.[1] In the cases where there are other languages besides the official state language, knowledge of the former is not required or even taken into consideration for obtaining nationality, even when such languages have a co-official status. This policy undervalues the potential capacity for social integration of minoritised languages. In this sense, the demands that linguistic requisites be met to obtain naturalisation do no more than reflect the states' linguistic ideology (Piller, 2001). Thus, the states' reaction in face of what they perceive to be a threat to national reproduction ends up marginalising not only the languages of

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[1] In the case of Belgium the requirement varies depending on whether it is the Flemish or Walloon part that is concerned. In the case of Switzerland the requirement varies according to the region and the canton.

immigration, but also the regional minority languages historically established in the territory, at least in those cases where the nation was built through the exclusion of those minority languages.

Conclusion

In the light of the findings of this article, the debate that started in the French Revolution about the possibility of building a nation on a plurilingual social foundation seems to still be unresolved. At that time, the defenders of the monist option that finally prospered identified the threat as proceeding mainly from below: concretely in the population that spoke a language other than French, who thus remained at the mercy of the Revolution's enemies. In the opinion of some authors (May, 2013), the changes that have taken place since then seem to question the foundations on which this option was based: from above, the states have given up part of their sovereignty and English is establishing itself as the dominant language, undermining the power of the national languages. Added to this are the migratory flows, which attract millions of people with their own language to countries where, apparently, cultural and linguistic homogenisation seemed to have culminated successfully. From below, there is a demand for territorial autonomy, sometimes based on ethnic factors and at other times on a territorial and economic foundation, although even in these cases the demands are linked to questions of identity and language (Keating and Wilson, 2014). On the other hand, in the debates on the New World Information and Communication Order, cultural exception, or cultural diversity, what is considered as a threat to nation-building is mainly situated above and abroad: cultural flows emanating from other countries are what threaten one's own nation.

However, in recent years the assertion of one's own space has taken on another character. Social and political movements in many of the richer countries are rejecting the idea of a pluricultural national society with increasing vehemence. This once again situates the threat down below, just as the Jacobin revolutionaries had done; in this case we are dealing with a below that is both interior and exterior at the same time, insofar as immigrant populations and their cultures are the object of rejection. Likewise, while what the abovementioned debates demanded, using different terms, was diversity – although with the paradoxical result of promoting the opposite inside the nation state – it is now homogeneity that is being called for instead.

In light of the states' responses that we have analysed, it seems that all these changes have not meant a modification of the principle on which national construction has been preferentially based: the congruence of the nation state, understood, in what refers to the language, as the hegemony of one language over the others. One might think, in this sense, that the strength of the state tradition (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015) continues to impose its reason. A reason fed by an ideology of the standard language that emerged, in Europe, even before the French Revolution and underlies many of the linguistic policies of today's states and supra-state organizations (Peled, 2012).

From the perspective of minoritised linguistic communities the debates in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the agreements reached, are of very limited usefulness. On the one hand, the linguistic question was barely developed in them – with the exception of the references cited above in the debate on the NWICO. In this respect, it is surprising that culture should have been discussed with barely any reference made to language. On the other hand, and this is possibly where the main

limitation lies, these debates, promoted by the states, speak almost exclusively of the latter's capacity to act in defence of their cultural integrity. What therefore emerges is the question of power, of who has the political or economic power to apply the measures derived from the international agreements. It is the right of states that has been debated in recent decades, not the right of peoples.

That has not prevented consequences being drawn that are positive from the point of view of minoritised linguistic communities. In Catalonia, for example, these debates were followed with great interest, and in fact, the first formulation of the concept of "communication space" to refer to a space built on the basis of a language, rather than to political power provided by a state, arose from an interpretation of the debate on the NWICO made from a stateless nation (Gifreu, 2005). Subsequently, cultural exception was to become a referent for certain aspects of Catalan linguistic policy, as was the later UNESCO Convention on cultural diversity. In this sense, it cannot be denied that these debates have a certainly practical usefulness, in addition to their serving at specific moments as an element for political legitimation (Viso and Guimerà, 2012). In any case, it should be recalled that we are dealing here with a minoritised linguistic community that enjoys a certain measure of political power, which has enabled it to convert the abovementioned debates into concrete measures. Once again, we are talking about cultural diversity amongst those who have some political power to defend it. Somewhat like the argument about the freedom of the press for the bourgeoisie, as Lenin would say.

From what we have observed, the way in which states implement the regulations derived from the right to preserve cultural integrity is a reflection of their own ideology and linguistic practice. In addition, these can – and, in fact, do – vary from the more or less open multiculturalism of some countries to the homogenising and culturally ethnocidal centralism of others. We have already seen that the same principle (like that of cultural diversity) can be invoked both to defend linguistic plurality within a state, and to strengthen a single language (threatened from abroad) that ends up being imposed on the other languages of the territory. Also, that languages that clearly threaten others appear as among the victims of linguistic oppression (Moore, 2015). At the same time, it can be confirmed that some of the re-nationalising policies, implemented in face of what is considered a threat to national cohesion because of immigration, end up becoming a further step taken against "autochthonous" minority languages.

For all of those reasons, the movements and debates, both within states and at the global level, on the right to shape one's own cultural space should be followed with interest. However, this monitoring should not be done from the perspective of the state, but also from the perspective of the minoritised linguistic communities – whether these are regional or arise from immigration – which are going to find themselves affected by those debates.

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