

The Nation and its Politics: Fanon, emancipatory nationalism and political sequences¹

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The colonized's challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute (Fanon, 1990:31, *translation modified*).

To make a period illegible is much more than to simply condemn it. One of the effects of illegibility is to make it impossible to find in the period in question the very principles capable of remedying its impasses. If the period is declared to be pathological, nothing can be extracted from it for the sake of orientation, and the conclusion, whose pernicious effects confront us every day, is that one must resign oneself to disorientation as a lesser evil (Badiou, 2010).

Introduction

In order to make our period legible, it is important to also make earlier periods legible. The sequence of national liberation struggles in Africa which cohered around a particular set of political subjectivities emphasising freedom, justice, equality and the affirmation of a total humanity has now ended and consequently it has become more difficult to orientate our thoughts around issues of emancipatory politics and their possible forms. The absence of emancipatory thinking today is having nefarious consequences as it is currently difficult to imagine an Idea of an alternative future in which the youth in particular, but not exclusively, could identify with a more humane society in which massive poverty and powerlessness were not considered inevitable features of life on our continent.

Sequences refer to (often discontinuous) historical periods understood as purely subjective. Political sequences are governed by modes of thought, discourses, names which are hegemonic and more or less contested. Sometimes these sequences are equivalent to and defined by specific modes of politics constructed beyond the state, at other times and more commonly these sequences are simply defined by and altered at the level of the state itself. For example we can see the 1950s and 1960s in Africa as forming a hegemonic subjective sequence in which questions of freedom, liberation, independence, Pan-Africanism, and equality dominated political discourse with categories such as nation, class and socialism orienting political thought; this sequence was not exclusively focussed on the state as the core of political consciousness. In the 1960s and 1970s politics were governed by terms such as development, industrialisation, dependence, class, nation-building and neo-colonialism, while in the 1980s and 1990s the hegemonic political sequence was now structured by names such as democracy, civil society, governance, de-regulation, basic needs and human rights. These latter two were overwhelmingly statist sequences (Neocosmos, 2010b). It can be

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noted then that the subjectivity of sequences is shaped by categories proper to it which are of course themselves shaped by historical and social context, and by state, foreign and critical discourses of various types emanating from various sectors of society. There is nothing within a sequence which implies a coherent totality with an essence; a sequence may be contradictory, incoherent, disorienting, illegible.

Each new sequence indicates within hegemonic modes of thought how political problems and solutions - i.e. political subjectivities - are organised in thought and deployed in practice. At times sequences may have a depth such that they name a particular form of state, at other times not. For example the sequence covering the 1960s and 1970s in Africa was characterised by a 'developmental state' by virtue of the centrality of the name development to state politics of whatever ideological persuasion. Today one can no longer qualify the state in such terms (Neocosmos, 2010). Delineating sequences in this manner (of course their precise dating is always open to debate) enables one to understand how thought is oriented or dis-oriented within a sequence. A sequence becomes legible and understandable in its own terms so that its problems and impasses can be understood from the vantage point of its own categories. In this way any political sequence need not be seen as a success or failure - which implies a judgement from beyond its categories - but rather simply as exhausting itself through a process of what Lazarus (1996) calls 'saturation'. For example, the end of the sequence 1960-1980 (the dates are approximate) in Africa need not be seen as one of the 'failure of nationalism' due to the supposed necessity of all nationalism to lead inexorably to authoritarianism, but as one of the saturation of the politics of national liberation and their gradual exhaustion as pure politics, as a pure political affirmation. In particular such saturation is reflected in the transformation of political subjectivities from an emancipatory affirmation of the nation into a statist form of politics, or in other words in the inability to sustain a purely political-affirmative conception of the nation. In similar ways, what Badiou (2008) has called the *Idea of Communism* can also be understood as traversing a number of sequences, only one of which was founded on 'the party' as the model for organising political activity. The exhaustion of the party form of the communist hypothesis does not imply for Badiou the exhaustion of the communist Idea as such; similarly the collapse of the emancipatory Idea of national liberation due to its equation with the politics of the nation-state does not necessarily exhaust the emancipatory content of nationalism; particularly within a period of globalization where Empire has simply taken on new forms but has in no way disappeared (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2001).

To maintain that nationalism in Africa has failed - or more subtly that it has deployed disastrous state politics which coerce particular interests, as does Chipkin (2007) for example - in current conditions when imperial domination and its attendant ideologies are still prevalent, and when these have altered their political form to stress a 'democratising mission' and humanitarianism, is simply to make it impossible to think new forms of nationalism, new forms of Pan-Africanism and consequently to think new forms of emancipatory politics on the continent. It means either a resignation to the propaganda of liberal democracy and to the idea of the end of history along with the final admission that 'capitalo-parliamentarism' with its massive levels of poverty and

oppression and its constant need for war is the best of all possible worlds with no possibility of change in sight, or a simple retreat into dogmatism which can only reduce nationalism to its statist variety. In actual fact, we need to constantly bear in mind that: 'we will never understand what constrains us and tries to make us despair, if we do not constantly return to the fact that ours is not a world of democracy but a world of imperial conservatism using democratic phraseology' (Badiou, 2006a:137). For those of us who live in Africa and in the countries of what has become known as 'the South' there is no path to emancipation which does not confront the power of Empire in whatever form it may take, which is only another way of saying that nationalism is not an obsolete emancipatory conception, far from it. The point is to distinguish it analytically and politically from the state itself.

But to affirm this is not sufficient. It is also important to analyse the character of the past sequence for which national liberation was the defining category in order to bring out the singularity of its politics and to understand its limits and decline in terms of its own categories; to make sense of why it became saturated and therefore why the Idea of freedom-in-the-nation lost its original emancipatory content. This requires more than is possible to do here but what I wish to argue below is that one reason for the saturation of a nationalist politics in Africa was the fact that it was not able to sustain an affirmative conception of the nation and that the latter gradually came to refer to a social category in the thought of politics as it unfolded over time. From a universal notion of national emancipation concerning humanity, which is in Badiou's terms 'anobjective', an 'incalculable emergence rather than a describable structure' (Badiou, 2009b:26, 28), we gradually arrive at notion of the nation founded on indigeneity according to state political criteria. It is through a discussion of the nation in Fanon's work that this transformation of politics can be established at its clearest as he was, with the possible exception of Amilcar Cabral, the most accurate observer and theorist of this sequence on the African continent from within its own subjectivity.

Fanon and the Nation

What is significant regarding Fanon's three books on the Algerian struggle for national liberation – which he refers to as a revolution - is that they were written from within the subjectivities of the sequence as Fanon was a direct participant in the emancipatory struggle – a mass struggle - in which he was totally immersed personally, intellectually and politically; Fanon then writes as an activist, a militant of struggle. His approach is therefore not an academic one asking what the essence (definition) of nationalism or the nation is, but rather confronting the much more political question of who constitutes the nation. In fact his work takes three related forms: first sociological analyses of the process of struggle and the transformation of popular consciousness (Fanon, 1989); second political analysis and publicism for his journalistic work (Fanon, 1967), and third his critical reflections on liberation and its outcomes in his deservedly most well known text (Fanon, 1990)². In all three cases the dominant theme concerns the change in

² The version of *The Wretched of the Earth* referred to here is the 1990 Penguin edition translated by Constance Farrington. Where I have judged that the translation is not particularly accurate, I have translated myself from the French edition (Fanon, 2002). In such cases my translation or modification is indicated.

subjectivity among the masses, the nationalist party, the state and intellectuals both in Algeria and in France. In particular it is a popular conception of the nation, which he sees as arising as ordinary people acquire the confidence of their power, of control over their destinies, which lies at the core of this work. It is this point which is made again and again in remarks such as the following:

The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent and enlightened praxis of men and women. The collective construction of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on a historical scale (1990:165, *translation modified*).

We have here therefore the twin idea that the nation is produced, not simply given, and that it is made – ‘imagined’ to use Anderson’s well-known term - from the actions of men and women, of people in general and not by any structural developments (markets, print capitalism, etc) or for that matter by any bourgeois intellectual narratives (Chatterjee, 1986). This process, which Fanon sees as people ‘making themselves’ as they make the nation, refers in Badiou’s terms to a ‘subjective becoming’. It amounts to a clear excess over what exists, over the simply extant; this process in Badiou’s ontology is an event for politics simply because it is ‘the appearing of that which is not there... [which] is the origin of every real subjective power!’ (Badiou, 2006b:3). Subjectivity is thus transformed in hitherto unimaginable ways. Something appears which had not previously existed (Badiou, 2006a:285). That which appears for Fanon is precisely the nation.

For Fanon then, the nation is constructed in practice, in political struggle by people themselves. We could say that it is simply ‘presented’ as a prescriptive affirmation and that it does not ‘re-present’ anything outside itself. There is no given colonial subject; subjectivation is a political process of becoming. However the construction of this subjectivity is not a spontaneous occurrence for Fanon but a revolution in thought. What is spontaneous is rather the Manichean dualism of the good embodied in the native versus the evil embodied in the settler. But the nation is not simply to be equated with **a social category of the native**. In fact many settlers ‘reveal themselves to be much, much closer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation’ (1990:116) while many natives are to be found on the side of colonial power; ‘consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited and unstable’ (117). It is militants who have found themselves thrown among the people of the countryside primarily who gradually both learn from and teach the rural masses the construction of a nation in action: ‘these politics are national, revolutionary and social and these new facts which the colonized will now come to know exist only in action’ (117, *translation modified*). In this manner the nation is constructed through agency and is not reflective of social entities such as indigeneity, ethnicity or race. It is a nation which is made up solely of those who fight for freedom; it is a uniquely political conception. Here the subject is actually created by an ‘excessive’ subjectivity, by the practice of liberation at all levels, collective, individual, social; hence Fanon’s studies of changes in the family, of the veil, of the effect of the radio and so on:

An underdeveloped people must prove, by its fighting power, its ability to set itself up as a nation, and by the purity of every one of its acts, that it is, even to the smallest detail, the most lucid, the most self-controlled people. But this is all very hard... The thesis that men change at the same time as they change the world has never been so manifest as it is now in Algeria (Fanon, 1989:24, 30).

Yet the role of the leader, of the 'honest intellectual' is not to impose a 'party line' or his supposedly superior knowledge but to be faithful to a politics of 'confidence in the masses':

To be a leader in an underdeveloped country is to know that in the end everything depends on the education of the masses, on raising the level of thought, on what is sometimes too quickly called 'politicisation'... To politicise the masses... is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to make the masses understand that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is also due to them, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man responsible for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. (1990:159, *translation modified*)

When Fanon refers to 'we Algerians' or to 'we Africans' as he does on many occasions (e.g.1990:159, 1989:32), it is clear that he is referring to a conception of the nation which is not based on 'nationality' as commonly understood. As noted already we are not in presence here of a notion of the nation founded on indigeneity, nor is it one founded on 'race'. Fanon was a foreigner and a non-Arab as well as not an African. Yet I also think it is important to point out that his biographer is quite mistaken to search for the source of this view in Sartrean existentialist theory and thus to maintain that: 'for Fanon, the nation is a product of the will, and a form of consciousness which is not to be defined in ethnic terms; in his view, being Algerian was a matter of willing oneself to be Algerian rather than of being born in a country called Algeria' (Macey, 2000:377-78). I think this position constitutes a misunderstanding because it fundamentally de-politicizes the question by reducing it to Fanon's psychology. This view was not simply Fanon's; it was also that of the people involved in a struggle for national liberation in which 'the women, the family, the children, the aged – everybody participates' as Adolpho Gilly puts it in his introduction to Fanon (1989:8); while continuing by noting that those who risked their lives for independence 'were not only Frenchmen or Arabs; they were also Spaniards, Italians, Greeks – the entire Mediterranean supported an Algeria in arms' (15). This subjectivity then did not belong to the subject Fanon alone, but was the subjectivity of the sequence; it was that which was 'obvious' because its obviousness had been produced by the politics of the situation. In any case this identity (Algerian) is not just chosen by Fanon; it also refers to how others saw him and the other 'foreigners' who were activists in the struggle. It is in fact a purely political identity. In Fanon then his conception of the nation is not a matter of a psychological act of will; it is rather a question of a **collective** subject being produced by a fidelity to the subjective politics of the (emancipatory) situation.

To further clarify this point it needs to be emphasised that the idea of equating politics with the will has a history; it is not 'natural'. It is an argument in fact which was foreign to ancient Greek thought and only originated with the Christian doctrines of Augustine in the late Roman Empire. In a very important essay, Hannah Arendt (2006) shows that – in the Western philosophical tradition - the de-politicisation of politics originates precisely in the equating of freedom with the will and hence in seeing political subjectivity as a question of psychology, an idea which was first actualised through the divorcing of freedom from agency and attaching it to simple consciousness. It was primarily Augustine who substituted the Christian 'free interiority' of the individual for the classical Greek understanding of freedom as human agency, a view which has persisted into democratic liberalism today³. For this notion, a subject can be totally politically passive and apathetic and still be an agent exercising her 'freedom' as the latter is a matter of will⁴. One must therefore detach the subject from its idealist underpinnings. As a result the subject must be de-psychologised; this can be done it seems to me by seeing subjects (individual or collective) as the products of specific subjectivities and not as given by their mere biological and conscious existence; individuals can then become 'militants of truth' to use Badiou's language⁵.

In sum, the point is to recognise that politics exists beyond identity and that it cannot therefore be reduced to the psychology of individuals. Such a politics consists fundamentally of a politics of affirmation which is at the core of all emancipatory politics and which is both singular and universal in nature. In fact it is only on this subjective basis that an inclusive society can be built, only a politics of affirmation can effectuate a conception of the nation which breaks completely from notions of indigeneity, thus: 'we want an Algeria open to all, in which every kind of genius may grow... *in the new society that is being built, there are only Algerians. From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian*' (Fanon, 1989:32, 152, *emphasis in original*).

Returning to Fanon's politics, it is apparent that for him national liberation was a universal politics concerning humanity as a whole and not a matter of the attaining of independence in a particular country; unsurprisingly national liberation could only be Pan-African in its vision and this Pan-Africanism could only be popularly based:

The optimism that prevails today in Africa is not an optimism born of the spectacle of the forces of nature that are at last favourable to Africans. Nor is the optimism due to the discovery in the former oppressor of a less inhuman and more kindly state of mind. Optimism in Africa is the direct product of the revolutionary action of the masses... The enemy of the African under French

³ Moses Finley cites Pericles (from Thucydides) as saying: 'we consider anyone who does not share in the life of the citizen not as minding his own business but as useless' (1985:30), a remark which illustrates clearly the Greek conception of politics as agency. Fanon's equivalent is: 'every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor' (1990: 161).

⁴ The similarity with the idea of 'market freedom' where the subject is said to exercise her freedom by being a passive consumer should here be clearly apparent.

⁵ This argument has been developed at length in the work of Badiou and Lazarus and is of central importance if one wishes to avoid an idealist conception of the subject; importantly the idea of subject is not restricted to individuals. See in particular Badiou, 2009a, Lazarus, 1996.

domination is not colonialism insofar as it exerts itself within the strict limits of his nation, but it is the form of colonialism, it is the manifestations of colonialism, whatever be the flag under which it asserts itself (1967:171).

In this affirmation regarding the universality of national liberation and freedom, one is reminded of a remark by Toussaint Louverture during an earlier sequence of emancipatory politics. Responding in 1801 to a concession from the French to put insignia on the regimental flags of Saint Domingue denoting the freeing of slaves, Toussaint retorts:

It is not a circumstantial freedom given as a concession to us alone which we require, but the adoption of the absolute principle that any man born red, black or white cannot be the property of his fellow man. We are free today because we are the stronger. The consul [Bonaparte] maintains slavery in Martinique and in Bourbon; we shall therefore be slaves when he is the stronger' (cit. Césaire, 1981:278, *my translation*).

This similarity between Toussaint and Fanon is not surprising after all we are, in both cases, in the presence of an excess over the extant and hence of the (re)assertion of a universal truth. But Fanon's thinking on the formation of the nation is not reducible to that of the formation of a state, and freedom for him is not synonymous with the simple fact of independent statehood. Rather, following Rousseau, the people are not considered as given as in various 'populist' positions, but have to first be constituted as a collective political subject⁶. For Fanon the core process in national construction is held to be precisely the formation of a people as the effectuation of a state is premised on this process. It is this which founds the universality of the human. For Fanon then, in Algeria, as had been the case in Haiti, it was people (*les gens*) who constituted the nation by constituting themselves as a people (*un peuple*), not the state. And the people did so through a form of politics which while not opposed to the state as such (but only to a particular kind of state, the colonial state), distinguished itself fundamentally from state subjectivity; it is in this sense then that any emancipatory politics can be said to always exist, in Lazarus' (1996) formulation, 'at a distance' from the state.

Yet at the same time as affirming a political universality of the human, Fanon's nationalism is precisely one which is founded on a category of the people as well as being closely linked to one of class; this creates a difficulty for politics for both are conceived as circulating categories - as sociological groupings as well as political subjects - with the result that we have a reductive relationship between the objective and the subjective. This becomes apparent when immediately after independence, a class whom he refers to as the 'national bourgeoisie' is seen as not able to contribute to the making of the nation as its interests link it closely to colonial power. In fact the 'national bourgeoisie' excludes itself from the nation, from the people as it is:

⁶ '...before considering the act by which a people submits to a king, we ought to scrutinize the act by which people become a people, for that act, being necessarily antecedent to the other, is the real foundation of society' (Rousseau, 1979: 59, *emphasis in original*).

only a sort of greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature... The national bourgeoisie... must not be opposed because it threatens to slow down the total, harmonious development of the nation. It must be stoutly opposed because, literally, it is good for nothing (1990:141).

It should be apparent here that the national bourgeoisie refers to a social category as well as to a political category. 'It' is a socio-economic entity which acts politically coherently; it is a political subject. It is this circulating notion of class – a category circulating between political economy on the one hand and the thought of politics on the other – which enables Fanon to analyse the decline of the emancipatory politics of the people-nation and their replacement by state politics, by the politics of the nation-state: 'nationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed' (163). It is then clearly - as Lazarus (1996:207) makes absolutely plain - not the advent of a state politics which destroys emancipatory politics, but the saturation of emancipatory politics which makes statism possible, for 'the return of a state logic is a consequence of the termination of a political sequence, not its cause. Defeat is not the essence of effectuation' (*my translation*). To understand the way Fanon analyses this process we have to look first at the role which the category of class plays in his argument and then at his understanding of the party. Both these categories show the limits of Fanon's emancipatory thought and more especially the subjective political impasse faced by the national liberation struggle mode of politics itself.

The collapse of nationalism into a statist project is accounted for by Fanon with reference primarily to the transformation of liberatory Pan-Africanism into a vulgar xenophobic chauvinism after independence: 'we observe a permanent see-saw between African unity which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form' (1990:126). The reason for this process is to be found for Fanon primarily (but not exclusively) in the economic interests of the national bourgeoisie who wish to move into the posts and the businesses vacated by the departing Europeans. As a result they assert a form of nationalism based on race and indigeneity in order to exclude; their concern is with access to resources, and a claim to indigeneity is, from their perspective, the only legitimate way of privately accessing such resources. Fanon notes that 'the racial prejudice of the young national bourgeoisie is a racism of defence, based on fear' (131). In any case, whether the concern is accumulation or whether it is asserting a 'narrow [racially-based] nationalism' (131), 'the sole slogan of the bourgeoisie is "Replace the foreigner"' (127, *translation modified*). As a result:

the working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, the small artisans and craftsmen for their part line up behind this nationalist attitude; but in all justice let it be said, they only follow in the steps of their bourgeoisie. If the

national bourgeoisie goes into competition with the Europeans, the artisans and craftsmen start a fight against non-national Africans... the foreigners are called to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked... (125).

The nation now refers to something else than a purely subjective affirmation; it refers to a social category founded on indigeneity. Who is and who is not an Algerian, a Ghanaian, an Ivorian, now becomes defined in terms of a state politics founded on asserting indigeneity: birth, history, race or ethnicity. We can note then that it is not simply a class politics which is at stake here, one representing economic interest, but more broadly a politics associated with ascribing the nation to an objective social category of the indigenous; a politics concerned with maintaining divisions, hierarchies and boundaries: in sum a state politics. It is thus the state which defines the nation in social terms and is unable to sustain a purely affirmative politics. The nation is now a representation, no longer a presentation. At the same time it becomes apparent that this statist way of defining the nation is gradually naturalized in thought, as given by history and communitarian 'belonging' (birth, descent, etc). Yet it should be abundantly clear not only that it is the effect of a state form of politics but that such naturalization is made possible by its social imbeddedness; for it is impossible to naturalize the purely subjective without first locating it in the social, without objectifying it⁷. Moreover of course, as is well known, the state also technicizes as it de-politicizes, something which Fanon deplures, emphasizing that : 'if the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then the bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat' (1990:162). Harsh words; Fanon's difficulty consists then in not being able to imagine a more appropriate political response to the technicism of the state, as faced with the decline of popular mobilization and the exclusive offer of technical solutions in the form of 'development', people will arguably think it better to have a bridge than none at all.

Fanon is thus fully aware of the collapse of a politics of popular affirmation into statist subjectivities, yet what he sees as the way out of this problem is limited precisely by his understanding of class politics and the role of political parties. His difficulty is no more than that of the politics of the national liberation struggle mode though. I have outlined some of the fundamental features of this mode elsewhere (Neocomos, 2009), here it is only necessary to note that its categorial features are such as to locate it squarely within twentieth century ways of conceiving politics. Broadly speaking, this mode is one which must be understood as following that century's conception which saw parties as the core term of politics (in the nineteenth century it had been insurrection and movements). Inaugurated and theorized by Lenin's text *What is to be done?* of 1902, the party was seen by all shades of opinion throughout the century as 'representing' socio-economic classes and groupings in the political arena (Lazarus, 2001, 2007). Parties were understood as the link between the social and the political domain structured around the

⁷ Here we enter the question of the 'correspondence' between the objective and the subjective. A huge area of debate is opened up here regarding the character of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities and their relation to the state, as their methodological procedures and protocols are largely concerned with objectifying the subjective. Unfortunately limits of space preclude discussion at this stage but see Lalu's (2009) notion of 'modes of disciplinary reason' which addresses some of the issues at stake.

state, and recruited their members from throughout the population. Their class character was thus determined less by the social origins of their membership than by their ideological positions said to 'reflect' class in political subjectivity. Mass parties of this type developed in Europe after and often as a reaction to the Paris Commune of 1871. For some social democratic parties it was a matter of organizing the working-class to avoid a similar disaster, for others it was about drawing workers into their organizations so as to enable the control of bureaucracy and elites⁸. Of course the objective of the party is for its leadership to 'capture' state power. Radical left-wing parties thus began with a contradictory character, one which exhibited a certain anti-state or mass 'revolutionary' content, along with an ambition to control the power of the state through which social programmes of various sorts could be technically effectuated.

Similar contradictions characterised the party in Africa founded upon and ultimately leading the disparate organisations of interests making up the 'national liberation movement'. In an African context, nationalist political parties were recognised (e.g. by the United Nations) as the sole 'genuine representatives' of the nation often long before independence itself, as colonial regimes and nationalist movements battled for legitimacy. It was through the party that freedom was to be actualised; both in the form of political independence and in the form of socio-economic development which was to provide the much needed economic independence from the West to the benefit of all in the nation. In Kwame Nkrumah's famous biblical aphorism: 'seek ye first the political kingdom and everything shall be given unto thee'. Freedom in the National Liberation Struggle mode could only be attained through control of the state as it was only the state which could drive the process of 'catching up' economically with the West which was the only guarantee of full independence in the long term. For Fanon, the party was a problematic but necessary form of organisation. Popular politics like class politics could only be effectuated through a party; the people or the class could only become a political subject through the medium of a party, and thus the nation could only become the agent of its own liberation through the state.

The party of nationalism for Fanon was highly problematic as it had gradually evolved at independence from an organisation which enabled popular expression to an apparatus of control: 'The party which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for the full expression of the people's will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control hastens to send the people back to their caves' (1990:147). It 'controls the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline' (146). In addition it seems clear to Fanon that the party itself becomes the vehicle for private enrichment which itself is both cause and effect of the formation of a 'national bourgeoisie' which chooses the option of a one-party state. Thus he notes: '... the bourgeoisie chooses the solution that seems to it, the easiest, that of the single party' (132) while 'the party is becoming a means of private advancement' (138). The party thus gradually becomes a vehicle for representing the interests of this new bourgeoisie rather than those of the people.

⁸ See David Beetham (1974, especially chapter 4) on Max Weber's conception of politics for example.

On the other hand the necessity of the party is proclaimed through adhering to the view that solutions to political problems are never thought outside the party conception of politics itself. Thus 'the party should be the direct expression of the masses... [and] the masses should know that the government and the party are at their service' (1990:151, 160). To actualise this situation and to curb the power of the 'national bourgeoisie' it is still a party form of politics which is being invoked: '... the combined effort of the masses led by a party, and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie' (140, *translation modified*). The notion of the party is at the core of the problem in his thought as is that of the masses/the people. Broadly speaking, Fanon's politics conforms to the prevalent view of the twentieth century that 'the people' are to be understood as the subject of history and that they effectuate their agency by being represented in the political arena by a party. For him, the party must represent the people accurately and after independence the state-party must have a humanist programme to enable a transformation of society in the people's interests; it cannot be a simple vehicle of enrichment: 'In fact there must be an idea of man and of the future of humanity; that is to say that no demagogic formula and no collusion with the former occupying power can take the place of a programme' (164).

The problem with Fanon's politics here is its inability to transcend politically the limits of the party-state despite Fanon's extremely accurate observations regarding its bureaucratic and controlling functions. In fact as Lazarus (2001) has observed, the party has the effect of fusing popular consciousness with that of the state as it is maintained in party discourse that popular consciousness can only be realised in practice through the party and its control of state power. In this way the party enables the fusion of the subjectivity of politics with the subjectivity of the state, meaning that the liberation of the people is to take place via the control of a set of institutions which cannot conceive liberation/freedom as their existence is premised on the reproduction of hierarchies of power and the social division of labour. It is this – the ideological fusing capacity of the party - which makes possible the transition from the nation as political affirmation to the nation as social category; which in other words makes possible the party-state and the nation-state, the latter being nothing but the final objective form of this subjective fusion. Whether there is one party or several here is of little significance; neither would it change anything to replace 'party' by 'movement' as both are said to represent the social. Rather, what is of importance is the subjective conception which maintains that politics can only be effectuated via the (party-)state.

Subjectively then, state politics is a reaction to what might be called, following Badiou (2009a), the 'event' of the popular emancipatory sequence. Fanon himself probably provides the best example of the subject whose fidelity to the event enables it to become a truth: 'The true is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonial regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation' (Fanon, 1990:39, *translation modified*). On the other hand, the reactive subject embodied in the state's political subjectivity is one which maintains that, although it did enable the formation of a newly independent state, the emancipatory sequence was little more than mindless violence. In Badiou's terms: 'the reactive subjective is all which orients the conservation of

previous economic and political forms... in the conditions of existence of the new body' which is constituted precisely by the popular upsurge orientated by emancipatory politics (Badiou, 2009b:108). Yet this is not all, Badiou also refers to an 'obscure subject' also resulting from the same event. Here he maintains: 'the obscure subject wants the death of the new body' (109), by which he means that for this subjectivity, any trace of change must be obliterated. In the realm of politics, Badiou associates this conception with fascism, although in the context of neo-colonialism it more accurately refers to the neo-colonial discursive powers of occlusion: the specificity of colonised formations does not exist, colonialism is now over and was beneficial anyway, independence was granted by the ex-colonial power, and so on. In this way the stage is set for the regular antagonism between state nationalism and neo-colonial oppression, as well as for the contradictory character of nationalism itself, partly critic and partly adherent of colonial and neo-colonial discourses (Chatterjee, 1986).

We can see the reactive and obscure subjects unfolding in subjectivity in the post-colonial period relatively clearly. In particular the project of 'nation-building' understood as a state subjectivity, constituted in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, amounts to a reaction to the nation as subjective becoming outlined so clearly by Fanon and which he wished to extend into a humanist project (Gibson, 2003). Fanon's humanist project which depended precisely on human agency ends up being replaced by a 'nation-building' project founded on a technicist – technicist because statist – project of national 'development' (Neocosmos, 2010b). Concurrently during the same sequence, the shift to xenophobic nationalism noted and deplored by Fanon is an indication of the rise of communitarian politics as obscurity is allowed to descend on a purely political conception of the nation. The nation now is modelled by a politics of exclusion itself founded on social indigeneity. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, such xenophobia was limited in its extent by a number of intervening conceptions in state politics such as a kind of recast statist Pan-Africanism, a statist nationalism which did however suggest a certain independence from neo-colonial prescriptions, and a conception of national development along with its frequent requirement for foreign migrant labour. Today, post-1980, these restraints are no longer present. The old statist idea of the nation has been largely undermined in a neo-liberal context where nationalism as a unifying project has been largely evacuated from thought. As a result an obscure subject of the nation has come much more prominently to the fore in Africa producing a simulacrum of Fanon's conception. In order to uncover this new sequence let me move to a brief discussion of the more recent South African experience.

The Obscure Subject of Neo-colonialism: some comments on South Africa

South Africa acquires its liberation (independence) from apartheid (colonialism) at a time of transition between two sequences⁹. Here it is worth referring to Badiou's notion of 'resurrection' where a subject can be reactivated 'in another logic of its appearing-in-truth' (Badiou, 2009a:65). The emancipatory content of the sequence of national liberation which Peter Hallward (2005) sees as having ended by 1973 with the

⁹ I take for granted here the idea of apartheid as a variant of colonialism in Africa (Mamdani, 1996). There is however as yet no equivalent for the term neo-colonialism which I will continue to use as 'neo-apartheid' is not in current use.

assassination of Amilcar Cabral, is resurrected in 1980s South Africa during the struggle against apartheid, where a mass popular upsurge involving whole (primarily urban) communities and places of work occurs in a fashion similar to that described by Fanon for Algeria (Neocosmos, 1998; Van Kessel, 2000):

The battle in the factories... has also given birth to a type of politics which has rarely been seen among the powerless [in South Africa]: a grassroots politics which stresses the ability of ordinary men and women, rather than 'great leaders', to act to change their world (Friedman, 1987:8-9).

There is no doubt that Fanon was being read in South Africa and that his ideas were influential particularly on those of Steve Biko whose concept of 'non-racialism' developed in the 1970s finds itself actualised and affirmed in mass politics during the 1980s (Gibson, 2008). In particular the setting up of the United Democratic Front (UDF) as a mass organisation makes possible from 1983 onwards a popular subjective formation of the nation founded on inclusiveness and affirmative politics (Neocosmos, 2009:299-313). This was in Allan Boesak's terms a politics governed by pure affirmation and belief in 'non-racialism' while 'the only real criterion' for membership of the UDF was precisely such belief (Boesak, 2009: 157). I have argued elsewhere (Neocosmos, 2009) that the period 1984-86 was an event in Badiou's sense in that it was able to completely reconfigure and rethink the basis of emancipatory politics in the country, and to systematically raise issues concerning the centrality of popular democracy ('the people shall govern') in an African emancipatory transformation. As it was put at the time: 'the key to a democratic system lies in being able to say that the people in our country can not only vote for a representative of their choice, but also feel that they have some direct control...' (Morobe, 1987:83). While it is indeed common today to hear this period referred to as that of the 'anti-apartheid struggle', this struggle was never simply defined, at the time, according to what it was against, but always also in terms of what it was for. This, for the majority of its activists, was never simply a neo-liberal state and a government elected by universal suffrage which passes socially sensitive legislation. It would have never had the mass support it did get had this been the case. It was always a struggle for a better world, a world where indeed people 'feel that they have some direct control' over their lives, hence for a politics founded on an axiom of equality.

Yet it can be shown that by 1986, this subjectivity was saturated and authoritarian practices were becoming dominant (Neocosmos, 2009). The new state form begins in 1990 (not 1994) with the entering of the ANC into power and when the politics of the popular mass movement had largely been defeated. The transition to democracy takes complex forms including not only a 'de-politicisation' and subjective disarming of activists through a reference to the exclusive power of the state-party returning from exile, but also by the (re-)constitution of the people and its activists in dominant discourse as 'victims of apartheid' rather than 'activists for a new nation' through a liberal-Christian process of reconciliation known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ultimately a politics of affirmation is replaced by a politics of supplication. In this transition it is the reactive state subject which becomes dominant as the event of

the 1980s is reduced to a violent episode of 'people's war' (Jeffrey, 2009) or understood as planned by the ANC in exile (Mbeki, 1996), or again as merely an opener for the ANC's coming to power (Chikane, 2003). It is this reactive subjectivity which recasts the nation as a social entity, via the state, as founded on supposedly 'objective' indigeneity; but in post-1980s Africa there is no longer a state project of nation-building based on development or anything else. Little or no attempt is made by state politics to construct a nation at all¹⁰, rather emphasis is placed more and more on so-called 'service-delivery' and 'stakeholder politics' whereby 'civil society' is brought within the ambit of state political subjectivity (Neocosmos, 2010b). 'Service-delivery' simply refers to the state provision of infrastructural resources (housing, electricity, water, roads) to desperate communities. Simultaneously the poor are abandoned to the rabble-rousing demagoguery of politicians (e.g. Buthelezi, Madikizela-Mandela, Peter Mokaba and more recently Julius Malema) while economically they are left prey to the forces of globalization and unbridled capitalism with the predictable effect of an increase in the poverty rate, while the rich accumulate very often through corrupt practices regularly reported in the press.

A politics of ethnocentrism gradually becomes hegemonic as the post-apartheid state introduces exclusionary legislation, politicians and the press utter xenophobic statements, and repression is deployed against those deemed to be foreign primarily by the police and the Department of Home Affairs (Harris, 2001). Simultaneously an increase in nativist ideologies and the systematic 'othering' of Africa and Africans gradually replaces a human rights discourse by a communitarian one (Neocosmos, 2010a). Following precisely the trajectory outlined by Fanon, in May 2008 xenophobic pogroms break out which leave 63 dead as those deemed to be foreign Africans are attacked by mobs of poor people clearly instigated by local businessmen, politicians and powerful local leaders who see them as restricting their access to jobs, housing and business opportunities. One remark is of particular significance; uttered by a local businessman it asserts: 'we are the ones who fought for freedom and democracy and now these Somalis are here eating our democracy'¹¹. The popular struggle for democracy and freedom now turns into its opposite, into a simulacrum of itself as mobs singing 'freedom songs' are filmed attacking people deemed to be aliens or foreigners and burn some alive. As Fanon would have said, from a struggle for non-racialism we have arrived at the vilest apartheid-type forms of 'ethnic cleansing'. The absence of a state-led nation-building project and its replacement by a free-for-all grabbing of resources in a period when social provisioning has become more and more difficult, along with a discourse of 'service delivery' where the most powerful acquire access to the most resources, make it possible for the crudest fascist-like forms of communitarianism to dominate popular consciousness. Some intellectuals are indeed so disoriented by this simulacrum of freedom that they even go so far as to see such xenophobic politics as authentically popular and democratic (e.g. Glazer, 2008).

¹⁰ In South Africa, the idea of 'ubuntu' which could have provided the basis for the construction of a nation founded on a moral community of active citizens was only referred to in a few judgements of the Constitutional Court and then rapidly disappeared from hegemonic discourse.

¹¹ Nafcoc - National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry - leader, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, *Mail and Guardian* September 5-11, 2008.

Of course such subjectivities do not go uncontested, voices of universal reason and equality are expressed; thus the Abahlali base Mjondolo (AbM) – the Durban shack-dweller movement - stress: ‘An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they may find themselves’¹². At the same time they distance themselves from party politics, refusing to affiliate to any party or indeed to vote. Yet the courageous politics of AbM are far from hegemonic and they are currently being persecuted by regional and local politicians. The rise of communitarianism has even pushed the discourse of human rights aside. The absence of an emancipatory alternative has simply allowed the obscure subject of apartheid to return in a new guise within a sequence of what some call the ‘postnational’ or ‘post-developmental’ state¹³.

Concluding Remarks

Politics as thought in practice – emancipatory politics – must exist ‘in excess’ of social relations and of the social division of labour otherwise any change from the extant cannot possibly be the object of thought; it cannot therefore be understood as a ‘reflection’ of existing social groupings, divisions and hierarchies. Without this ‘excessive’ character, politics is simply conflated with ‘the political’, with party, state and political community. This has been precisely the problem of national emancipatory politics in Africa. Emancipatory politics and hence the nation therefore can only be understood ‘in excess’ of state politics. As soon as such politics is ‘objectified’ and related to social categories, we become situated within a politics which is state-focused (e.g. through the medium of a party or a movement) and which contributes to making a sequence illegible. While in the immediate post-colonial period state politics at least had a national project, today the disappearance of any genuinely inclusive conception of the nation even at the level of the state itself, has allowed for the development of a communitarianism which feeds on the kind of free-for-all which the new forms of neo-colonial domination have enabled. Recent events in Kenya (2007), South Africa (2008) and Nigeria (2009, 2010) *inter alia* illustrate this rise in communitarian politics. It is in this context that what used to be known as the ‘national question’ is crying to be (re-) addressed; it is within this same context that nationalism today must be given new forms in order to recover the kind of subjective becoming which Fanon had extolled in the Algerian people’s struggle for freedom.

¹² See Abahlali base Mjondolo, 2008 and generally <http://abahlali.org>.

¹³ See Neocosmos, 2010b and the special issue of *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 7th, 2009 (44:10), where a notion of the ‘postnational state’ is deployed.

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