Civil society, citizenship and the politics of the (im)possible: rethinking militancy in Africa today

Michael Neocosmos

Preface and acknowledgements

This work was originally written as a report for the Codesria Multinational Working Group on Citizenship and submitted in 2007. It has been revised since then. The argument is deployed along the following lines:

The contemporary critique of neo-liberalism has concentrated overwhelmingly on its economic theory and socio-economic effects. Very little has been written so far on its political conceptions, particularly of the limited thinking which it imposes on political thought and practice. This work makes a contribution to the latter endeavour by making a case for thinking an emancipatory politics in contemporary Africa. It shows that civil society - the expression of the freedom of the citizen in neo-liberal discourse - must be understood, not as organised society, but as a domain of politics where the hegemony of a liberal, state mode of politics prevails. Politics also exists beyond, or at the margin of civil society. Neo-liberal politics predominantly produces passivity or rarely a politics of petitioning the state. This political passivity must be countered by an active citizenship which often exists beyond the domain of state politics including civil society itself. But this active citizenship - political agency - is not necessarily conducive to a politics of emancipation; it merely enables the possibility of the envisaging of alternative modes of thought and political 'possibles'. To initiate a discussion of the theorisation of emancipatory politics in Africa, this work briefly outlines the philosophy of change of Alain Badiou, and the anthropology of Sylvain Lazarus. In particular it concentrates on the latter's understanding of subjective 'modes of politics' and political 'prescriptions'.

Using this perspective, it becomes possible to identify a *National Liberation Struggle* (NLS) mode of politics as a sequential political subjectivity which dominated on the continent from the 1940s to the 1970s. The main characteristics of this NLS mode of politics are outlined. However, this manner of thinking emancipatory politics has now come to an end, so that emancipation has to be thought differently today in Africa. I then argue in some detail that the period 1984-86 in South Africa (re-) discovered the beginnings of a new mode of

politics, which in several important ways contradicted the core features of the NLS mode. In particular this was a politics which did not see its object as the seizure of power, but as the transformation of the lived experience of power. The monograph ends by comparing the politics of two current post-apartheid South African social movements - the *Treatment Action Campaign* and the *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. It shows that, despite appearances, it is the former which has operated within the domain of the state politics of civil society, and the latter which operates beyond those subjective limits. Hence it is the latter which shows the closest fidelity to the event of 1984-86, and which is thus the closest thing today, at least in South Africa, to being the bearer of a thought of emancipatory politics.

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Today the great majority of people do not have a name; the only name available is 'excluded', which is the name of those who do not have a name. Today the great majority of humanity counts for nothing. And philosophy has no other legitimate aim than to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it (Alain Badiou).

The possibility of the impossible is the foundation of politics (Alain Badiou).

To say that politics is of the order of thought is an attempt to conceive of politics after the end of classism and within another space than that of the state; but first and foremost, it is to say that politics is not given in the space of an object, be it that of the 'state' or that of 'revolution' ... The enterprise of conceiving politics from elsewhere than from the state or from the economy is an enterprise of freedom and of a domain proper to decision (Sylvain Lazarus).

We think. People must understand that we think (Abahlali baseMjondolo activist).

1. Introduction

Critical approaches to neo-liberalism in Africa have overwhelmingly concentrated on analysing the problems, both theoretical and empirical, of its economic arguments and policies. There are numerous texts and scholarly works criticising Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the ideology, practices and perspectives of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the disastrous effects of neo-liberal economic policies on Africa, and the inability of states to control their national economies and rethink development. Much less has been written about the neo-liberal politics which necessarily accompany the economics of neo-liberalism, apart from a few rare critical commentaries on the notion of 'civil society' and the state. This relative lack of attention to neo-liberal politics has had the unfortunate effect of restricting the development of an alternative popular-democratic discourse. Liberal conceptions of human rights, 'political' parties, civil society, the equating of politics with the state, the unproblematic notion of 'the rule of law' and especially formalistic political practices have regularly been taken over uncritically in radical-Left discourse,

which is simultaneously attempting to develop alternatives to economic neo-liberalism.

For example, one often hears the view expressed that economic neo-liberalism may be a disaster for most of humanity, but fortunately human rights enable the mobilisation of alternative popular forces around 'third generation' rights such as the 'right to development'. The unfortunate tendency has been to proliferate the number of human rights to be included in international conventions as if somehow this will legitimise people's struggles for an emancipatory future. An accompanying tendency has been a failure to subject state politics to a thoroughgoing critique, and hence to revert to proposing statist politics of a social democratic type as an alternative to neo-liberalism, simply because of the latter's familiarity, despite the obvious failure of social democracy to create the conditions for human emancipation in Europe and elsewhere.

Moreover, a critique is not enough; appropriate categories for the thinking of an emancipatory politics need to be developed as a matter of urgency. In the absence of the ability to think an emancipatory politics independently of state subjectivity, we necessarily revert to thinking through the prism of the state which is, to use a computer analogy, the 'default position' of any un-theorised politics. Much more work needs to be done on thinking emancipatory politics if a serious alternative to current hegemonic neo-liberalism (what Francophones refer to as 'la pensée unique') is to gradually be constructed both in theory and in practice.

In order to contribute to this project, this work attempts to help us think politics beyond the state. It begins from the axiom that politics is always plural and that different politics concern fundamentally different prescriptions. In so doing it attempts to do two things: first to think citizenship as an active citizenship, and in particular to contribute to the thinking of political agency on the African continent under conditions where the old emancipatory modes of politics - those associated with Socialist Revolutions, National Liberation Struggles, and Developmentalism - are defunct; second to think the 'politics of the possible', i.e. the idea that - in addition to an analysis of the existing, of the world as it is, it is also possible, indeed imperative, to develop an understanding of the possibility, of understanding the thought of a different future in this existing present - of the 'what could be' in the 'what is'. As we shall see, it is this activity which must be understood as a prescriptive subjectivity (Lazarus 1996, 2001).

The collapse of the modes of politics associated with socialism and national liberation into state politics, and thereby the loss of their emancipatory content, is well known. Today salvation is sometimes sought in social movements of an undifferentiated 'multitude' (e.g. Hardt and Negri 2001, Amin and Sridhar 2002, Bond 2004), hence in the exercise of citizenship rights by disparate sectors of the population making claims on the state for economic, social or political resources and entitlements. I have debated human rights discourse at length elsewhere and have argued that it cannot form the basis of an emancipatory politics (Neocosmos 2006b, 2009a); here I am more concerned to address issues surrounding the notions of 'civil society', 'social movement' and

'emancipatory politics' and to suggest alternatives to existing forms of conceptualising political agency. The purpose of this work is thus to open up conceptual space. I propose to do this by showing how currently hegemonic ways of thinking alternative politics within these terms remain limited to state conceptions, and how removing oneself from state subjectivity requires a re-conceptualisation of citizenship as active citizenship, as well as an understanding of emancipatory politics as prescriptive politics.

I shall first elucidate the kind of politics which the ideas of 'civil society' and 'social movement' tend to assume. I will then attempt a brief outline of some of the views of Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus in particular, who provide an alternative way of conceiving emancipatory politics, and will sketch how their ideas can be applied to an understanding of a National Liberation Struggle (NLS) mode of politics and its contestation in South Africa in the 1980s. I will argue here that the period 1984-86 witnessed an 'event' in Badiou's terms, with the consequence that fidelity to that event means that it is impossible, after its occurrence, to think emancipation in a statist manner on the continent.

I will end with two short case studies, assessing the existence of different modes of politics in two different social movements in South Africa during the post-apartheid period: one operating within the realm of civil society, and another maintaining itself firmly on the margins of civil society. I will suggest that it is with respect to the latter, that a fidelity to the event of 1984-86 is clearly apparent. Throughout the argument, the examples of the struggle for liberation and post-apartheid politics in South Africa are considered within an African context, as illustrative of and not exceptional to the African experience. South Africa is, after all, probably the most consistently politically neo-liberal of African countries, at least it is so in the eyes of Empire, as the latter regularly sets it up as a model for the continent. The contradictions of political neo-liberalism in that case therefore probably appear more clearly there than they do elsewhere.

2. State = political society + civil society[1]

Perhaps the best way to initiate a critical assessment of 'civil society' and what it names, is not so much through a return to a discussion of liberal theory, but rather to examine the way in which the term is conceived today in Africa. What is 'civil society' in Africa today? The answer is that although the term today names a list of organised interests organising beyond the boundaries of the state and the family and is usually reduced to NGO's, it is in fact best understood as a domain of politics, and more specifically a domain of state politics within society, and not simply as interest groups themselves. One of the fundamental features of democracy for neo-liberal theory has been its stress on a 'vibrant' civil society which can help keep democracy afloat (Gibbon 1996). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it had been trade unions which organised

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[1] See Gramsci 1971: 263.

workers at the point of production, which constituted the typical organisation of civil society which could create and maintain democratic norms (Rueshemeyer et al.1992). Today it is doubtful that trade unions can continue to play this role given the different forms of capital accumulation which, particularly, but not exclusively in the South, assume large numbers of unemployed, subcontracting, casualisation, increased insecurity and so on.

In this sense, political organisation at the point of production and particularly its expression by productivist theories gradually lose much of their earlier centrality and power. In South Africa (with a 43-45% unemployment rate), one recent argument (Buhlungu 2004) has been the suggestion that the trade union movement - which in the 1980s was at the vanguard of popular struggles against the apartheid state, and which was instrumental in the winning of liberal democratic rights - has today lost much of its 'vibrancy' with the de-politicization consequent on liberal-democratization. Moreover its location within state politics within various corporatist arrangements has made it unable to be the vehicle for an emancipatory alternative. Consequently its language is simply 'workerist' with little political content. In the post-apartheid period it is 'new social movements' or more broadly civil society organisations which are now seen by many as the bearers of an emancipatory future. How have these organisations fared in the post-apartheid period?

This question is analysed by Habib (2004). We are told that relations between state and civil society have taken three distinct forms in post-apartheid South Africa - marginalisation, engagement and adversarialism - and that this plurality of relations is good for liberal democracy and governance (2004: 239). Here the liberal notion of pluralism is extended by Habib from its usual meaning referring to a plurality of organisations, to a plurality of relations with the state. Yet this argument fails to go beyond its neo-liberal assumptions to show the possibility of alternatives. Political liberalism is the best form of democracy for Habib precisely because of its plurality of state civil society relations. His concern is thus to 'celebrate(s)' (2004: 228) pluralism, and he concentrates on this rather than on analysing it.

Let me briefly subject this celebration to critical scrutiny. The problems begin with the manner Habib understands civil society. This he sees as 'the organized expression of various interests and values operating in the triangular space between the family state and market' (2004: 228). It should be noted, despite attempts to anchor this in classical writings, that this is not a definition which corresponds to that of Hegel (or indeed to that of any of his predecessors), to which it only bears a superficial resemblance, although it is fully in tune with current neo-liberal thinking. For Hegel and the classics of political philosophy the term 'civil society' referred to the 'triangular space' itself, to a *realm of activity* (hence the term 'society') in which such organisations operate, rather than to those organised interests themselves. Of course, to provide a definition which does not conform to that of the classics is not a sin, yet there is an important theoretical reason for referring to civil society as a realm of social and political activity. This is simply because many organisations in society are

regularly excluded or exclude themselves from it.   To visualise civil society as a realm of activity enables an understanding of inclusion and exclusion, which an equating of civil society with organised interests themselves cannot. In our current context, those outside civil society are not seen as legitimate state interlocutors, those within are.

The neo-liberal position espoused by Habib fails to recognise this, as it understands civil society as the organisations themselves, organisations which are simply legally defined as outside the state and business ('non-profit' in the case of South Africa, see Swilling and Russell 2002). This makes it difficult if not impossible to understand the relations between organisations of society and the state. Was the Boeremag - an illegal Afrikaner organisation intent on overthrowing the post-apartheid state - part of civil society? Obviously not, because it was not a recognised organisation whose politics were legitimate in the eyes of the state.

A more recent example concerns the events which have shaken popular politics in South Africa. From end September to early October 2009, the organisation of shack dwellers known as Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM, see below) was systematically attacked by thugs (some advertising themselves as Zulu ethnics, others as ANC members) and the police under the direction of local and regional politicians in part of the Durban city area known as 'Kennedy Road'[2]. In what was quite an Orwellian statement, the regional ANC qualified the organisation which has mass support in the settlement as 'illegitimate' and the organisations which were imposed on the people in this violent manner as 'legitimate' (Abahlali Press Release Thursday Oct 15th 2009). Evidently this referred to legitimacy in the eyes of the state which was thereby excluding AbM from civil society in this violent manner, in other words from the category of those organisations which it considers legitimate. These are known in the country, and elsewhere, as 'stakeholders' (see Neocosmos 2009b).

In sum, the sphere of activity known as 'civil' society must be understood as limited by what the state sees as legitimate political activity and legitimate organising. This is why for neo-liberal theory there can be no civil society outside liberal democracy (e.g. under authoritarian state systems such as colonialism or indeed apartheid). Of course no 'revolutionary' organisation (however understood) could possibly form part of civil society as it would have as its political goal the overthrow of the state. Civil society therefore regularly excludes many popular organisations from its sphere of activity. Thus if the state does not legally recognise the existence of an organisation it cannot possibly form part of civil society. In South Africa, the state party itself, the ANC, distinguished clearly as soon as it captured power between 'genuinely representative organisations' and those which are not (ANC 1996). The latter were obviously not legitimate in its eyes. In the 1980s, the ANC aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) and other organisations fighting for liberation did so outside what was then civil society, and only became part of civil society after

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[2] See eg.www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/59322/.

1990 when their legitimacy among the people was recognised by the state. Civil society today is then it seems, simply society as viewed from the perspective of the state, the organised interests of society it sees fit to deal with. Any organisation challenging the monopoly of state politics - state universality - is therefore bound to be excluded. This becomes apparent in Habib's classification.

Habib's classification of civil society types is governed by their relationship to the state, from 'accommodationist' to 'adversarial'. The first group, as he accurately observes, is 'sub-contracted' by the state to fulfil a number of its functions wfrom which the latter has withdrawn. However he is not sensitive to the irony of referring to such organisations as NGOs when they are not only funded by government, but operate on the basis of the same subjectivity and technicism, and in fact precisely undertake state functions (Swilling and Russell 2002). These so-called NGOs are more aptly termed 'parastatals'. Of course one is entitled to question the whole idea of an independent civil society in this instance, as the distinction between such NGOs and state institutions is simply a legal one, a state distinction.

The second group referred to as 'adversarialist', is also conceived in relation to the state, as its defining feature is its antagonism to the latter. This group includes particularly the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). We are told little regarding the politics of such organisations and no comment is made as to why the only two alternatives vis-à-vis the state should be either adversarial or accommodation. If indeed this is so, it may tell us something regarding the character of the public sphere in South Africa, where creeping authoritarianism and the intolerance of disagreement seem more and more to have become the order of the day so that one is forced either into total subservience or into opposition to the state. Nevertheless, Habib points to an important feature of the state by noting that there exists a third group which consists of 'survivalist responses of poor and marginalised people who have no alternative but to organise in the face of a retreating state that refuses to meet its socio-economic obligations to its citizenry' (2004: 236-7). Yet one wonders about the extent to which these groups are not systematically excluded from civil society altogether by their very political marginalisation (and also by Habib's own definitions as many engage in economic activities) let alone by their 'informal' character.

More important however is the foreclosure in Habib's work of any possible alternative classification of civil society organisations, for example one which would not use the state as its reference point. If we admit that liberal democracy is not the only form of democracy, and that many popular organisations practice alternative popular forms of democracy, then why not classify such organisations in terms of the extent to which their vision of society, forms of operation and concrete demands may be democratic in ways which go beyond the limits of neo-liberalism? A much more useful typology could have been based on a distinction between statist/managerialist organisations on the one hand and popular-democratic ones on the other, as it would have enabled

the recognition and analysis of popular-democratic sites of politics beyond the state.

Perhaps the ruling ANC is right in maintaining, as it has on many occasions, that 'confrontational' organisations and social movements are indeed often unrepresentative and 'ultra-leftist', then again maybe their politics are indeed authoritarian, but maybe they are not. If a genuine left-democratic alternative is to be developed, it is surely here in sites of popular politics that it is likely to be found, whether in civil society or indeed outside of it. These sites need to be investigated critically, but Habib's typology disables such a possibility. Moreover, Ashwin Desai's and others' enthusiasm for so-called social movements of 'the poors' should not be taken at face value, without a critical investigation into the extent and character of the political alternatives proposed (see Desai 2002). After all just because an organisation or movement is opposed to the state, does not make it either democratic or 'progressive' (despite the possible justice of its demands). Its politics may simply be concerned with incorporation into the existing system, and/or with providing a simple mirror image of state politics, and not with transformation in a popular-democratic direction. Unfortunately however, Habib's liberalism forecloses the asking of such questions; his ends up being a highly conservative perspective.

Civil society must be understood as a realm of socio-political activity - of political subjectivity - in which contestation takes place between different political positions, but which ultimately constitutes the limits, structured by the state, of a consensual state domain of politics. Civil society is in fact the state in society. Politics can and does exist beyond the limits of civil society, beyond the confines of the state consensus. Broadly speaking, civil society has been introduced into our post-socialist world and emphasised by the Washington Consensus on political neo-liberalism as a way of increasing inclusiveness in response to rebellions against state authoritarianism in the 1980s and early 1990s in Africa, the period of the so-called 'Second Liberation' of the continent. The idea was to ensure that popular participation in politics would be broadened beyond activity in parties, to include within the ambit of power, organised interests.

Civil society is said to be made up of organised interests themselves, but it is more accurately understood as the *political domain* where citizenship rights are apparently realised through the forming of such interest groups. The popular movements in Eastern Europe and in the Third World of the 1980s lie at the root of this redirection which has had as one of its effects on the African continent, an insistence on a 'vibrant' civil society in order to ensure pluralism. Another effect has been the re-configuration of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU), the latter making provision for 'good governance' - usually equated with administrative efficiency combined with adherence to law and rights - and for civil society participation in the continental body. Civil society can thus be understood as naming political agency and subjectivity in society as visualised from the vantage point of the neo-liberal state (Beckman 1992; Gibbon 1996). It is in civil society that

citizenship rights are said to be realised; however these are to be realised in a manner which keeps them firmly away from any (emancipatory) politics which question the neo-liberal state itself as they take place at best within the framework of human rights discourse (Neocosmos 2006b). However, it is important to stress the fact that civil society is not the only realm of politics outside the confines of the state, and moreover it is possible to suggest that civil society in Africa today forms a realm of politics which is dominated by the state itself. To put the point simply, the politics of civil society are predominantly state politics, for it is the state which ultimately pronounces on the legitimacy of the organisations of civil society, which itself can only be in accord with state political subjectivities.

From the perspective of a democratic emancipatory project, the state should not be allowed to dictate whether popular organisations are legitimate or not, and neither can intellectual inquiry allow itself to narrow the concept to adhere to state prescriptions; only people themselves should be entitled to bestow such legitimacy. In this sense South Africa for example, can be said to have had an extremely powerful and 'vibrant', as well as politicised, set of popular organisations in the 1980s. But these never formed a civil society, and were not described as such in South Africa at the time, because of their quasi-illegal nature and their illegitimacy in the eyes of the apartheid state[3].

In fact, it was precisely the political distance of these organisations from the state, the fact that they had exited the state domain of politics and operated beyond the (obviously restricted) civil society of the time, which accounted for the 'vibrancy' of such popular organisations in the South African townships of the 1980s (Neocosmos 1998, 1999). Conversely, it can also be pointed out that the neo-liberal conception of civil society also implies recognition by civil society organisations of the legitimacy of the state and of the hegemony of its mode of politics. Popular organisations which reject this mode cannot be said to be part of civil society. For such a viewpoint therefore, these same opposition organisations in South Africa in the 1980s (UDF, Civics, Youth and Women's organisations etc), which were fighting the apartheid state as such and which were thereby constantly testing the limits of legality (their activities were often wholly illegal), could not be rigorously said to form a 'civil society'. Indeed they only were described in such terms in the 1990s, when the state had no option but to recognise their legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

For neo-liberalism therefore civil society exists solely under conditions of mutual recognition between it and the state, only under liberal democracy where the liberal mode of politics is consensual. Thus it is this mutual recognition which defines the parameters of the state consensus and is itself the result of struggle. Moreover it is the state which retains the monopoly of national universality. Civil society organisations can be tolerated but only if they represent particularistic interests. Any claims to such universality, in other

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[3] Of course they were considered as part of 'civil society' in the discourse of international liberalism.

words if a popular organisation is said to represent 'the people's interests' or 'the national interest', would mean that it is liable to be seen by the state as a threat to the latter's monopoly of universality.

A state 'national consensus' is structured within a state domain of politics comprising the political relations between the state and its institutions on the one hand, and the 'official' or 'formal' civil society of citizens on the other. A state political subjectivity is thus usually hegemonic within civil society. Other forms of politics are excluded because visualised as beyond the political consensus (e.g. they are said to be 'ultra-leftist', 'criminal', 'terrorist', do not 'follow channels', etc.) and are thus usually de-legitimised in state discourse. These organisations and politics therefore exist outside or beyond the limits (at best at the margins) of civil society. Because of such partiality therefore, civil society cannot be conflated with 'organised society' as the term necessarily implies some form of exclusion. The distinction between liberal democracy and say colonial/apartheid forms of authoritarianism can be said to concern *inter alia* the extent and forms taken by such exclusion, not the absence of exclusion as such.

Civil society has achieved popularity – and has come to be reduced to organisations themselves - in a context in which it is apparent that parties have distanced themselves from society and have become frankly state institutions. A worldwide trend, which has not excluded Africa, has been apparent now at least since the 1980s in which parties have become more and more bereft of politics, and rather simple vehicles for circulating elites around state positions (Neocosmos 2009a). In Europe in particular, this trend has been associated with the rise of the so-called 'post-political', whereby government has become purely managerial and emptied of politics. Arundhati Roy has argued cogently that the rise of NGOs has accompanied the spread of neo-liberal policies and has had a systematically depoliticising effect:

> *They defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance...It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neo-liberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs" (Roy 2004).*

At the same time, research shows overwhelmingly that NGOs in Africa are sociologically staffed by middle-class professionals for whom they provide vehicles for employment and social entrepreneurship; they substitute (sub-contract) for state functions; they are overwhelmingly funded by the state or by (foreign) donors and also regularly provide vehicles for the formation of a clientele by political patrons (e.g. Swilling and Russell 2002; Kanyinga and Katumanga 2003). Insofar as civil society is reduced to NGOs in particular (which it usually is), the evidence suggests that it contributes to the formation and extension of a state domain of politics structured around technico-legal practices and not politically emancipatory ones.

As we shall see below, this comment also applies to social movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa which is said to be one of the most 'successful' (and 'vibrant') of such movements in that it has been able to force the government to rethink its policy on HIV-AIDS. Recent research (e.g. Vandormael 2007a, 2007b) shows that in actual fact this success has been such as to de-politicise the debate on AIDS by forcing it squarely within the hegemonic bio-medical paradigm of science which expects people to passively be the recipients of medical technology. In fact it could be suggested that this apparent success of the TAC, has resulted precisely from the congruence of its ideology with the perspective of the world medical establishment supported by the media.

The thrust of the TAC's perspective has thus resulted in the incorporation of HIV-AIDS sufferers as passive citizens within an existing set of power relations (state, scientific, mass media, transnational corporations, etc) fundamental to the interests of capital and not in a questioning of such relations, which the Gay Movement in California in the 1980s for example had succeeded in doing to some extent, through its confronting of the medical establishment (Epstein 1996). It can be argued then that one effect of the TAC success has been, paradoxically, its disempowerment and de-politicisation of popular struggles through the incorporation of sections of the population into liberal power-relations and technical bio-medical discourse. The overall effect then has been a 'liberalisation' of struggle, a contribution to the reproduction of a passive citizenry rather than a contribution to the thinking of an emancipatory subjectivity.

Other less fashionable social movements in South Africa have had to struggle against dominant discursive power, not along with it as the TAC has, and have thus not been so obviously successful, thus remaining at the margins of civil society (Barchiesi 2004). We shall see below however, that success as measured by the ability to modify state policy in its particular interests is not the best indicator of a movement's politics. A variety of social movements sometimes attempt to re-introduce agency but often simply provide a mirror image of state politics. For a politics to provide the basis for emancipation, it has to be situated at a subjective distance from the state.

Citizenship exists at the interface of state and sociality, i.e. in that fluid realm structured by the active or passive relationship between state and society. An assessment of the politics of social movements would have to ascertain the extent of democratic universality and prescriptive politics which characterises them. In general however, it is apparent that they operate within the confines of a state political subjectivity. In sum then, civil society understood as a realm of political activity, constitutes, as Gramsci makes clear in the citation above, one of the subjective domains of state politics.

At this stage however we still need to assess a recent argument which recognises the existence of a realm of politics outside civil society and the state. The argument that politics actually exists in countries of the South outside the domain of civil society, has been made by Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee (2004),

following on his work with the *Subaltern Studies* collective has recently argued that, in the postcolony, there is a truly 'political society' beyond the state and civil society which is distinguished by its exclusion from the state domain and where activity is irreducibly political. He extends Foucault's conception of 'governmentality' to argue for the existence of another domain of politics beyond the limits of liberal rights and legal discourse.

Chatterjee argues that in the post-colonial context, there are two sets of connections to power: the relations connecting a civil society of citizens to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty, and those linking 'populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare' (2004: 37). Each of these, he argues, points to a distinct domain of politics. There is no need to go into details here other than to note that he makes the point that it is not in civil society that politics is to be found because here claims follow legal and administrative (i.e. technical) procedures whose access is limited to middle-class professionals; rather politics are to be found in what he calls a 'political society' of the poor where 'claims are irreducibly political' (2004: 60). It is therefore outside civil society that a politics of agency, an active citizenship is often to be found, at least in the countries of the South.

Chatterjee draws on Foucault's distinction between sovereignty and governmentality to specify two distinct modes of rule. Under sovereignty, the legitimacy of state rule takes place through a certain amount of participation by citizens in the affairs of state. Indeed classical liberal theorists of the state (in particular J.J. Rousseau and J.S. Mill) stressed the importance of active citizenship, as did the French Revolution of course. Under governmentality on the other hand, it is the provision of resources to the population which becomes the dominant mode of securing state legitimacy. This form becomes dominant in the 20th century for Chatterjee, although Foucault (2000) stresses its appearance much earlier. The provision of resources to sections of the population is what ultimately gives rise to the disciplines of demography and statistics (stat(e)-istics) as the population needs to be classified, categorised and measured in different ways.

This latter mode of rule it could be said, becomes central under colonialism in Africa (late 19th/early 20th c) which was as Cowen and Shenton (1996) show, dominated/ justified by a notion of 'trusteeship'. The state became a trustee of the welfare of its colonial (as well as of its metropolitan) charges. It is from within this political tradition that T.H. Marshall's (1964) three forms of citizenship rights (especially his notion of social citizenship), which provided the main theorisation for British social democracy, emanated. The social democratic (or 'Keynesian-classist') state secured its rule through the provision of social services, the 'delivery' (to use contemporary parlance) of particular social rights to the working people, on top of the civic and political rights central to all liberal-democratic states. In conditions of post-colonial Africa, this is

clearly reflected in the 'developmental state' whereby the latter secures its rule through the provision of development rights[4].

This argument reinforces that of the centrality of the technicisation of politics by the sate, as governmentality exerts pressures for such technicisation, so that ultimately politics becomes submerged under the sophistication of managerial calculations and 'delivery', the provisioning of rights, the formation of passive citizens. It also shows how politics is expelled from the state by technique, especially managerial technique. Civil society becomes part of a domain of state politics (as Chatterjee in fact argues) and the mutual relations between state and civil society become managerialist/ technicist/legalistic as they mutually condition each other so that a technicist (and thus apolitical) subjectivity becomes hegemonic. Yet although this understanding of a realm beyond civil society in which politics may exist is absolutely crucial for understanding Africa today, Chatterjee's claim that it constitutes a 'political society' is problematic, not only because the term is usually used to refer to the state, but more importantly because it gives the mistaken impression that politics is always in existence within that realm, something which cannot be shown. Rather it makes more sense to suggest that politics may or may not exist within various sites as we shall see below (Lazarus 1996). Finally, for Chatterjee, it is different modes of state rule which determine different connections to power; popular subjectivities have it seems, little choice in the matter.

3. Active citizenship: the formation of a "possible"

Citizenship, from an emancipatory perspective, is not about subjects bearing rights conferred by the state, as in human rights discourse, but rather about people who think becoming agents through their engagement in politics as militants/activists and not politicians (Neocosmos 2006b). In fact it is important to understand how these features were central to popular struggles (especially those for independence) and are still prevalent among many popular movements today. For example, both one of the first and one of the last national liberation struggles in Africa (Algeria and South Africa) exhibited such characteristics. Fanon's *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*[5] is a detailed study of different changes in social relations brought about by popular struggle. These include changes in the position of women in society, the effect of independent radio station and changes in the family. All three of the above characteristics are eminently illustrated in Fanon's account, but I merely wish to mention one of his comments on citizenship which contrasts radically with his later account of the same issue under postcolonial conditions. Written in 1959, i.e. during the

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[4] For a more detailed discussion of the subjectivities of the developmental and post-developmental states, see Neocosmos (2009b).

[5] A more apt title would have been: The *Sociology of the Algerian Revolution,* the original French title is *L'an V de la Revolution Algerienne.*

Algerian liberation struggle and before his work on *The Wretched of the Earth,* he states:

> ... *in the new society that is being built, there are only Algerians. From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian. In tomorrow's independent Algeria it will be up to every Algerian to assume Algerian citizenship or to reject it in favour of another (Fanon 1989: 152).*

In other words, the point is that during the period of popular national upsurge, citizenship is a unifying, inclusive conception. No distinction is made between people on the basis of indigeneity but only on the basis of their devotion to the struggle. By the time he writes *The Wretched* we have the following well known account of xenophobia under the post-colonial state:

> *On the morrow of independence [the] native bourgeoisie ... violently attacks colonial personalities...It will fight to the bitter end against these people 'who insult our dignity as a nation'. It waves aloft the notion of the nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes. The fact is that such actions will become more and more tinged by racism, until the bourgeoisie bluntly puts the problem to the government by saying 'We must have these posts'...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 ... From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism. These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked, and in fact the government ... commands them to go, thus giving their nationals satisfaction (1989: 125).*

We have here an account of a clear transition between the two forms of citizenship I have referred to: the popular inclusive conception founded on active citizenship and the state conception founded on indigeneity. It is also important to note the similarity with work on the South African struggle of the 1980s which makes similar points regarding the character of popular struggle in this period (Neocosmos 1998, Van Kessel 2000). The point is not to idealise popular struggle but to note that, despite all its contradictions, it enables the development of a different conception of citizenship. Van Kessel in fact notes explicitly in one of her case studies the centrality of a notion of moral community equated with political community of active citizens, an observation which pervades Fanon's account.

Incidentally such notions are also prevalent in accounts of popular movements and community democratic political practices, they are present in Wamba-dia-Wamba's (1985) account of the Mbongi, in Ifi Amadiume's study of women's struggles over citizenship in Nigeria (1997) and in Sibanda's (2002) account of a peasant organisation in Zimbabwe *inter alia*. The point then is that in popular-democratic struggles, this alternative conception of citizenship and hence the

possibility of emancipatory politics also exists (although this is not all that exists) as a counter to the statist equating of citizenship with indigeneity. There is then conceivably, a politics beyond Human Rights Discourse, a politics of prescriptions on the state. Such a prescriptions include, in the manner of the *Freedom Charter:* 'South Africa Belongs to All Who Live in it', 'The People Shall Govern' and so on. These prescriptions are assertions of rights to be fought for, not pleas for human rights to be conferred by the state.

Active citizenship arguably enables the second most important right after the right to life, namely the right to think, by suggesting the possibility of something different to one way thought (la pensée unique). As a community activist recently stated in South Africa:

> *The leaders [of the country] are saying that it is them who know everything and that the majority of the people can't think. We are saying that everyone can think (Activist, Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign, 2003, cited in Desai and Pithouse 2003: 17).*

One of the important dimensions of struggles for national liberation, had always been that, although they did contain for many an economic dimension, this demand for access to economic resources (e.g. land) was intertwined with its symbolic political value (of land, e.g. 'our land must be re-taken from the colonialists') which included an emancipatory component. Economics was always subordinated to politics in the struggle for freedom. In the process of struggle for political emancipation, citizenship as agency was paramount, so that political agency was the manner in which economic power was to be acquired.

After independence, it was access to economic resources which became central as Fanon (1990) notes, with access to state power (not agency as such) becoming the instrument through which such resources were to be secured at the expense of the most vulnerable (generally the excluded such as the poor or 'foreigners'). In other words the grabbing of resources from foreigners was founded on claims of indigeneity - rights secured by the state - after independence, and it illustrates an instance of state politics and passive citizenship replacing active citizenship; of economics replacing politics. It was therefore a direct result of a process of de-politicization whereby the state took over for itself the political agency of people. This process could thereby easily lead to xenophobia among state institutions and society as a whole (Neocosmos 2006a). In sum we can note that this example illustrates a transition common to the continent in which citizenship was transformed from an active and inclusive conception (in which citizens were those who fought colonialism, hence the dominance of pan-Africanist discourse in the struggle) to a passive and exclusive one; from a conception of citizenship founded on popular politics to one founded on indigeneity and national essentialism underpinned by state power.

Contrary to an understanding of citizenship as a bounded yes or no affair, anthropologists have stressed the importance of adhering to a concept of

'flexible citizenship' (Nyamnjoh 2006). Although valid, this idea assumes that these two conceptions are mutually exclusive. Of course, both occur simultaneously at least in popular discourses as well as in experience. The more flexible variety is more readily experienced in practice as different categories of people experience different ranges of rights depending on their power or lack thereof in society. The poor of course would not be able to claim as many rights or entitlements as the rich, women as men, children as adults, etc, while foreigners would be close to being able to claim only few, precisely because of their lack of possession of the state papers which express the bonded variety of citizenship. The two versions are then connected, and while it is important to note the existence of flexible citizenship, the reality is one which combines both. Given the various types as well as degrees of exclusion which are produced both by the neo-liberal economic world and by its political counterpart in an imported democracy, citizenship is bound to be a complex and indeed contradictory relationship

What both the 'bounded' and 'flexible' conceptions tend to forget however, is the notion of citizenship as agency, the idea that citizenship does not simply refer to a relationship which is given (bounded or fluid), but to one which can also be passive, active or any shade in between, depending on circumstances. In fact the idea of active citizenship (or its possibility) is usually occluded when this is the case, as it is assumed that the state or society are structured in such a way as to automatically (so to speak) allow for the access to (a range of) particular entitlements or rights. In fact without some form of agency, these rights are rarely forthcoming to the poor, and even then there is no guarantee that they will be. This is why I have insisted elsewhere (Neocosmos 2006b) that this distinction is a necessary one to make, and that (neo-) liberal politics tend to produce a passive citizenship (which thus restricts access to rights to a few only), while an active citizenship is usually produced beyond the hegemonic state of affairs[6].

In contrast to state politics, popularly founded conceptions of citizenship, although they may also show similar characteristics to state conceptions (e.g. as in essentialist 'ethnic politics'), also often exhibit different understandings. This is of course particularly the case in periods of popular political upsurge and regularly includes the important dimension of the formation of *a moral community of active citizens* in opposition to crude conceptions of arbitrary and violent state oppression. Such alternative perspectives may exhibit:

1. an inclusive (as opposed to exclusive) understanding of citizenship and the nation, i.e. the nation is the people and the people are those who work and struggle here, and

2. an active conception of citizenship, i.e. citizenship is seen as concerning political agency, it is bounded by the exercise of political agency not by

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[6] This is the case even though for example these rights may be perfectly legitimate in law, such as the right to housing or the right to work, or the right to land, or the right to safety, or even the right to life, etc.

physical borders. In Africa this active citizenship has taken the form of popular-democratic pan-Africanism (Fanon) and I have argued elsewhere that it must still take this form today although adapted to current post-colonial conditions (Neocosmos 2003).

3. the creation of a moral community of active citizens where one's duty to the community is connected directly to actively engaging in political activity for the common good (i.e. a universalistic conception and not just a reflection of interests economic or otherwise).

This active citizenship can in no way guarantee the development of an emancipatory politics, yet it can be seen as enabling a number of 'possibles', of alternatives to the existing situation. This alternative conception of citizenship can be traced throughout all popular emancipatory projects of the modern period from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune, to the various Socialist Revolutions, to the National Liberation Struggles against colonialism with the case of South Africa being one of the most recent; it arguably constitutes one of the possible conditions for an emancipatory politics. Popular-democratic political trends have thus regularly stressed alternative conceptions of citizenship which have laid emphasis on inclusiveness and agency. The political sequences of socialist revolutions and of national liberation struggles are historically over.

A new alternative emancipatory political sequence may be one which, in the words of Holloway (2002), is not about achieving state power but about transforming power, it is arguably about democratising power, not about replacing some politicians by others. In the formulation of Lazarus (1996), its concern is with prescriptions on the state. Does this amount to a new political sequence at world level? What are its manifestations on the continent? How can popular Pan-Africanism be rethought under these new conditions? To what extent are new and not so new popular movements able to move beyond arguing for their incorporation into the world of capital and that of the liberal state, and to what extent are they expressing prescriptive demands for freedom, justice and equality in new ways? In other words, in what sites can a new mode of democratic politics be found in contemporary Africa? In order to begin to answer such questions, we need to contribute to a rethinking of citizenship along the lines I have suggested above, but we also need to rethink the basis of political agency itself.

4. Theorizing emancipatory politics: an outline

Here the most important writers today are definitely Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus[7]. Badiou is currently being translated into English as he has been discovered by American audiences; the work of Lazarus on the other hand still remains largely untranslated into English. These authors have also had an

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[7] The most important references here are Badiou, 2001, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, Lazarus, 1996, 2001, Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1994.

important influence on the thought of Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba. While Badiou's work remains at the highest level of abstraction as it concerns ontology, Lazarus' work is more approachable by social scientists.

4.1 Alain Badiou: "event", "fidelity", "truth"

Perhaps the best place to start is the idea of agency which is so central to philosophical and social science discourse today. Feltham and Clemens (2003: 6) explain that for Badiou, the question of agency 'is not so much a question of how a subject can *initiate* an action in an autonomous manner, but rather how a subject *emerges* through an autonomous chain of actions within a changing situation'. Thus it is not everyday actions and decisions that provide evidence of agency for Badiou, these are simply part of being and existence, they are unavoidable as are social interests, opinions and conversations. Rather, it is 'those extraordinary decisions and actions which *isolate* an actor from their context, those actions which show that a human can actually be a free agent that supports *new* chains of actions and reactions.' As a result: 'not every human being is always a subject, yet some human beings *become* subjects; those who act in *fidelity* to a chance encounter with an *event* which disrupts the *situation* they find themselves in'.

Gone here is any notion of a universal human subject; Man is dead as God was proclaimed dead by the Enlightenment. As a result for Badiou there can be no Ethics founded on a universal human subject, and the whole idea of 'human rights' is undercut. In this sense Badiou follows very much in the different steps of Althusser, Foucault and Lacan who in their different ways, had proclaimed the death of Man. Of course such a conception has radical implications for conceiving ethics and (so-called human) rights not to mention democracy and the state. It is these dimensions that interest me here rather than the many aspects of Badiou's ontology. This is simply because the conception of politics and democracy which constitutes '*la pensée unique'* and which is hegemonic today, is one which is founded on precisely a universalistic conception of Man linked within political liberalism with a reduction of politics to the state and to state practices. I have argued elsewhere at length (within the context of South Africa in particular) how human rights discourse and political liberalism more generally, have as a necessary effect the 'technicisation' (hence the 'de-politicisation') of popular politics, and how as a result, human emancipation is thought to be realisable only by the state (Neocosmos 2006b). This conception is now becoming clearly apparent as a major contradiction, after the failure of the emancipatory projects of the twentieth century which were all, at their core, state projects.

It is mainly for this reason, because of the importance of thinking about politics as subjectivities beyond the realm of state subjectivity, of detaching politics from the state, that Badiou's philosophy of 'subjective militancy' is of interest to Africa. On the continent, our manner of thinking about politics has been overwhelmingly dominated by a liberalism for which the state is the sole

legitimate domain of politics[8]. Central to liberal discourse, has been a conception revolving around the idea that politics is reducible to the state or that the state is the sole legitimate domain of politics. For liberalism, 'political society' simply *is* the state[9]. This idea has permeated so much into African political thinking for example, that it has become difficult to conceive of an opposition political practice that is not reduced to capturing state posts or the state itself. In South Africa in particular, state fetishism is so pervasive within the hegemonic political discourse that debate is structured by the apparently evident 'common sense' notion that the post-apartheid state can 'deliver' everything from jobs to empowerment, from development to human rights, from peace in Africa to a cure for HIV-AIDS. As a result not only is the state deified, but social debate is foreclosed *ab initio;* the idea simply becomes one of assessing policy or capacity, in other words the focus is on management not on politics. Badiou, I suggest, enables us to begin to think a way around this problem. His categories of 'Event', 'Fidelity' and 'Truth' are the three important categories here, all are dimensions of what he calls a 'truth-process' or 'truth-procedure'.

Event

This is what 'brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges; the event is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears' (Badiou 2001: 67).

> *The event is both situated - it is the event of this or that situation - and supplementary; thus absolutely detached from , or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation ... You may then ask what it is that makes the connection between the event and that 'for which' it is an event. This connection is the void of the earlier situation. What does this mean? It means that at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organised the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question ... We may say that since a situation is composed of the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation. To take a well-known example: Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name 'proletariat', the central void of*

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[8] See Mamdani 1990. The entrance of names such as 'governance', 'civil society' and 'human rights' unquestioningly into our daily discourse is only a small example of such ideological dominance today.

[9] Wallerstein (1995) for example, shows that both conservative and socialist strategies in nineteenth century Europe gradually came close, from different starting points, 'to the liberal notion of ongoing, [state-] managed, rational normal change' (1995: 96). He also notes that between 1848 and 1914, 'the practitioners of all three ideologies turned from a theoretical anti-state position to one of seeking to strengthen and reinforce in practice the state structures in multiple ways'. Later, conservatives were transformed into liberal-conservatives, while Leninists were transformed into liberal-socialists; he argues that the first break in the liberal consensus at the global level occurred in 1968 (pp 97, 103).

early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat - being entirely dispossessed, and absent from the political stage - is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. To sum up: the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event. (2001: 69).

An event then names the void, the absence, what is considered simply 'impossible', that which is not conceivable from within the knowledges of the situation. An emancipatory politics or a truly popular-democratic politics is difficult if not impossible to conceive from within the parameters of liberalism, a politics of saving and helping the ethnically oppressed is inconceivable within a politics of ethnic genocide and so on. The event is something which points to alternatives to what is, to the possibility of something different. In politics today, and in Africa in particular, which is what concerns me here, an event would be expected to point us towards a different way of engaging in and thinking about politics, beyond the one-way thinking of liberalism and its liberal 'democracy', 'the best possible shell for capitalism' as Lenin used to say. For outside of hegemonic political liberalism today all there is, is a void.

When events happen, they force us, for a while at least, to think of the situation differently. Popular upsurges, however brief, if they are powerful enough, force new issues on the agenda for example, they enable changes in thinking in the public sphere. In France for example, commentators and policy suddenly re-discovered their '*banlieues*' after the events of November 2005; the extent to which this was a real event for politics in that country is however a moot point. The popular struggles in different parts of Africa in the 1980s and 90s, what was optimistically referred to as the 'second liberation' of the continent, forced new issues on the agenda for a while, before these were again pushed into the background as state politics re-established itself (Ake 1996).

Fidelity

This 'is the name of the process: it amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself; it is an immanent and continuing break' (Badiou 2001: 67). Fidelity to the event is an attempt to sustain the consequences of the event in thought. It is a refusal to return to the 'status quo ante', to return to the idea that what happened was impossible. Fidelity can be sustained by an individual, groups, organisations etc. There is no guarantee that this fidelity will be sustained, this requires a 'disinterested-interest' on behalf of the participants. It follows that the perseverance of the 'being-subject' remains uncertain. For, in order to be transformed into a subject, a being has to remain true to disinterest. It is on the basis of this uncertainty that Badiou is able to construct an 'ethic of truths' (2001: ch. 4).

Truth

For Badiou a truth is 'constructed' as a result of this process of fidelity to the event, not 'discovered'. It is 'the multiple, internal to the situation, that the fidelity constructs, bit by bit; it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces'. (2001: 68). 'Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*. This is something we have always known, even if sophists of every age have always attempted to obscure its certainty: a truth is *the same for all*.' (2001: 27). 'A truth punches a 'hole' in knowledges, it is heterogeneous to them, but it is also the sole known source of new knowledges. We shall say that the truth *forces* knowledges. The verb *to force* indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks the sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning' (2001: 70).

The 'indifference to differences' simply means that an emancipatory politics is universal and not linked to any specific interest, it is 'for all' never 'for some'. It follows that we can say that for Badiou emancipatory politics does not 'represent' anyone:

> *Politics begins when one decides not to represent victims ... but to be faithful to those events during which victims politically assert themselves ... Politics in no way represents the proletariat, class or nation ... it is not a question of whether something which exists may be represented. Rather it concerns that through which something comes to exist which nothing represents, and which purely and simply presents its own existence (Badiou 1985: 75, 87).*

An emancipatory politics therefore cannot be deduced from a social category (class, nation, state) it can only be understood in terms of itself. Moreover, the state itself is 'indifferent to' truths and thus also to (emancipatory) politics; the democratic state in particular is merely concerned with knowledges and opinions which it organises into a consensus.

> *Historically speaking, there have been some political orientations that have had or will have a connection with a truth, a truth of the collective as such. They are rare attempts and they are often brief ... These political sequences are* singularities: *they do not trace a destiny, nor do they construct a monumental history ... from the people they engage these orientations require nothing but their strict generic humanity (Badiou 2003: 70).*

Therefore, (emancipatory) politics may or may not exist at any time and must be understood as pertaining to the realm of thought: 'any politics of emancipation, or any politics which imposes an egalitarian maxim, is a thought in act' (2003: 71). In order to develop these points in some detail, we must now shift to the work of Lazarus.

4.2 Politics as subjectivity, modes of politics, political prescriptions, the extant and the possible in the work of Sylvain Lazarus.

I cannot at this juncture outline in detail what is an incredibly original and complex theory; this will have to wait for another time. For the present, it must suffice to provide a sketch of some of the main ideas put forward in Lazarus' work.   In order to make sense of his work, we need to begin with an understanding of the fact that Lazarus is interested in making intelligible, not just the existing configuration or structure of social situations of various types, but the existence of possible alternatives to the manner in which these situations are configured. In other words he is interested in theorising the subjective and the objective, not only as distinct, but as at a distance from each other. Not only is there no 'correspondence' between the two, but there is in many cases a distinct distance between them. In such cases the possibility exists that people's subjectivities - thought - can assert something different from what is, an alternative to the existing. In fact he argues that the 'extant' is identified via the possible:

> *In people's thought, the real is identified via the possible. The investigation of what exists takes place but is subordinated to the investigation of what could be. The methods of investigation differ according to whether they are linked to the category of the 'possible' or to that of the 'extant'. (Lazarus 2001: 8; unless otherwise indicated all translations from the French are mine - MN).*

Politics is of the order of thought

If politics as doing, (he rejects the term 'practice'), politics as 'prescription' as he puts it, is what denotes the distance between what is and what could be, then what this means is that what is required is an understanding of politics as concerning thought exclusively, as remaining purely within the domain of the subjective. Like Badiou, who relies on him heavily (see Badiou 2005, ch. 2), Lazarus is interested in theorising politics as a militant 'practice' while remaining consistent with rationalism, i.e. materialism. What he attempts is no less than a materialist theory of the subjective. This theory he calls an anthropology (after all anthropology has generally been precisely the study of the subjective, culture, belief etc), more specifically an 'Anthropology of the Name'. It is this anthropology he argues, which makes politics thinkable as thought. But in order to think thought purely within thought, all scientistic assumptions must be dropped as these assume some correspondence between thought and object, between subjective and objective; the 'concept' then becoming a more or less accurate expression/representation of the real. This axiom is then pursued to its logical conclusion building a system of names and categories which help to identify the real. If the relation between the real and the subjective is not the issue, how are we sure that we are indeed investigating the real? This requires a rigorous consistency to two foundational

statements/axioms which Lazarus sees as the core of his theoretical system, these are: 1. People think (*les gens pensent*); and 2. Thought is a relation of the real *(la pensée est rapport du réel)*.

To maintain that politics is subjective, is simply to say that it is of 'of the order of thought' as Lazarus (op.cit.) puts it. 'To say 'people think' is to say that they are capable [...] of prescribing a possible that is irreducible to the repetition or the continuation of what exists' (Badiou 2005: 32). Anyone is able to think politically, and such thought is not the preserve of experts. At the same time, such thought is itself a real relation because that prescriptive thought is indeed material as we shall see below. In this manner politics can be comprehended in terms of itself and not in terms of some other entity (or 'invariant') external to it (Badiou 1985). Politics is thus irreducible to the economy, to the state, to ethnicity, to society, to history or to any entity outside itself:

> *As soon as the conceptual categories in operation are those of consciousness ... there can no longer be an expressive dialectic between relations of production and forms of consciousness, otherwise this dialectic remains that of history, that of the state or of the economy and no longer possesses a prescriptive character (Lazarus 1996: 57).*

In actual fact, for Lazarus, it is not all politics which is capable of fulfilling the criterion of irreducibility, only (various modes of) emancipatory politics do so. As a result such politics do not always exist. Lazarus (1996: 53) refers to the example of Lenin's thought for which the existence of a working class as a social class is distinguished from its existence as a political class. The existence of the latter cannot be deduced from the former in Lenin's thought.

In fact in Lenin, 'class' is no longer a historico-political category as in Marx - after the failure of the Paris Commune, the historical certainty of the Communist Manifesto is no longer sustainable - but is rather replaced by a category of 'organised political consciousness' (Lazarus 1993: 25). With Lenin, 'politics must possess its own specific terms ... as it passes from the certain to the possible' (1993:26). Thus, in Lenin's terms, the proletariat must 'demarcate itself' politically from other classes by its party acquiring a unique set of ideological positions on the issues of the day. This means that politics is not an 'expression' of social conditions or of history, but that the relations between politics and history are much more complex and mediated by a party (Neocosmos 1993 part 1, Lazarus 2007). This perspective is clearly apparent, for example, in Lenin's analyses of the 'national question', where he argues, against Luxemburg in particular, and 'imperialist economism' in general, that the national question is not reducible to class (the right of nations to self-determination is not a bourgeois demand) but is a 'democratic' issue – i.e. a political issue - of concern to the people as a whole (see eg. Lenin 1986).

In Marx's thought, the issue is treated differently. For him, 'scientific notions are also notions of political consciousness, they are realisable [...] from this perspective, human emancipation is not a utopia but a real possibility'. For Marx the science of history and the politically prescriptive are fused into one

unique conception (ibid.: 55). It should be noted in passing that when we study politics as 'practice', there is no such thing as a unified 'Marxism'; the politics expressed and practised by Marx, Lenin, Mao, Stalin, Gramsci, Lukaçs, Cabral, Che Guevara, etc are crucially all distinct, they (may) formulate different modes of politics.

Modes of Politics and their Sites

For Lazarus, 'there is no politics in general, only specific political sequences. Politics is not a permanent instance of society' (1993: 89). Different kinds of politics are distinguished by their historicity, in other words they have a history, they arise and then they wane. Lazarus refers to these as historical modes of politics or 'the relation of a politics to its thought' (loc. cit.). They are identified by different sites (*lieux*) and have their own activists (*militants*). The former refer to the sites in the concrete situation where that particular mode exists, the latter to those who most clearly embody, express and represent that mode in thought. Politics does not always exist, it is rare and is always sequential. Lazarus outlines different historical modes of politics with their own sequences, some of which have been emancipatory due to the fact that they conceive of politics 'internally' and others which reduce politics to an 'external invariant'. Clearly, these are not the only modes of politics which have developed historically, and others remain to be elucidated and analysed; however a brief recapitulation of these different modes serves to illuminate his form of reasoning[10].

Lazarus includes four examples of emancipatory modes of politics which he has identified. The first of these is what he calls the 'revolutionary mode of politics' associated with the experience of the French revolution between the Summer of 1792 and July 1794. Its main site was the Jacobin Convention and its main militants and theoreticians were Robespierre and Saint-Just, the co-authors of the 1793 constitution. Its conception of politics was one which proclaimed that 'a people has only one dangerous enemy: its government' (Saint-Just 2004: 630) and which understood politics as a form of moral consciousness or 'virtue,' to be combined with 'terror' against the revolution's enemies (Zizek 2007). For Saint-Just, 'it is leaders who must be disciplined because all evil results from the abuse of power' (2004: 758). Thus, 'Saint-Just regularly proposes analyses and policies which, although they concern the state and the government, are thought outside of and are explicitly directed against a statist logic' (Lazarus 1993: 225ff).

The second he terms the 'classist mode of politics' whose sequence is opened up in 1848 by working-class revolutionary movements throughout Europe, and which closes with the failure of the Paris Commune of 1871. Clearly the main figures here were Marx and Engels and its sites were the working class

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[10] As far as I am aware, these different modes of politics were first briefly outlined in English in an appendix to Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993. They can also be found in chapter 2 of Badiou 2005.

movements of the nineteenth century. It is not here a question of politics within a party, but of politics within a mass movement, as modern parties only develop in the period following 1871. For Marx as noted above, history and politics are fused into one unique conception mediated by class.

The third is termed the 'Bolshevik mode'. Its sites were the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party) and the Soviets (People's Councils), and Lenin was its militant figure and theoretician. 'Proletarian political capacity is seen here not as spontaneous, neither is it historically or socially determined but it is obliged to specify its own conditions of existence' (1993: 90). The party mediates between consciousness and history. This political sequence opens up in 1902 (year of the publication of Lenin's *What is to be Done?*), reaches a peak in 1905 and closes in 1917. After that date the party becomes 'statised' as no solution is found to Lenin's contradictory conception that the party must be both the state as well as the defender of the masses against the state; and the soviets which disappear, cease to be the sites of an emancipatory politics (1993: 91).

The fourth mode Lazarus terms the 'dialectical mode of politics'. Its main theoretician is Mao Zedong and history is here subordinated to the masses, as the influence of the former disappears behind subjective notions such as an 'enthusiasm for socialism'. Political consciousness develops in leaps and bounds and 'there exists an exclusively political knowledge because such knowledge is dialectical without being historical. Even if the party exists it does not identify the mode of politics.' The sites of this mode are those of the revolutionary war: the party, the army, the United Front; its limits extend from 1928 to 1958 (1993: 91).

The above modes of politics conceive of politics internally, in terms of its own specificity, without reference to what Lazarus calls 'external invariants'. In fact it was only in the Bolshevik mode that the party had a central role.   In all cases there was a multiplicity of sites, and there is maintained a political distance from the state. In Wamba-dia-Wamba's (1993: 98) terms: 'it is the existence of an independent (emancipative) politics which makes the destructive transformation of the state possible'. This emancipative consciousness is purely political and exists under conditions of a subjective break with spontaneous forms of consciousness.

In addition, two modes of politics are identified by Lazarus which each make reference to an 'external invariant'. These are the Parliamentary mode of politics and the Stalinist mode of politics; both of these have been dominant in twentieth century world history. For both these modes, political consciousness is subordinated to a consciousness of the state. The principle of parliamentary politics is not that 'people think' but rather that people have opinions regarding government (Lazarus 1993: 93). 'The so-called 'political' parties of the parliamentary mode, far from representing the diversity of opinions, are the subjective organisers of the fact that the only thought deemed possible is an opinion regarding the government'.

It follows that parties are not so much political organisations, but rather state organisations which distribute state positions. Thus for the parliamentary mode there is only one recognised site of politics and that is the state (loc. cit.). Similar functions are fulfilled in this mode by trade unions, which are also very much state organisations. Voting, as the institutional articulation between the subjective side of opinion and the objective character of government, is the essential political act of parliamentarianism. Voting does not so much serve to represent opinions but to produce a majority of professional politicians who are provided by parties; 'it transforms the plural subjectivity of opinions on government into a functioning unity' founded on consensus. The act of 'voting transforms vague 'programmes' or promises of parties into the authority of a consensus' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993: 117; 1994: 249). In other words, voting amounts to a legitimising principle of the state consensus, and 'politics' is ultimately reduced to a question of numbers.

The Stalinist mode of politics refers to a political subjectivity which existed not just in the Soviet Union, but also throughout parties linked to the 'Third International'. 'The party is viewed as the condition of revolutionary political consciousness. Politics, in this mode, is thus referred to the party; the party is finally revolutionary politics and revolutionary politics is the party' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 250). Politics is confined to the party and the party is understood to be the very embodiment of that consciousness. 'As the party is presented as the source of all political truth', the Stalinist mode 'requires the credibility of the party' (ibid.). The party-state is the only political datum provided to subjectivity and the only practical domain of that subjectivity. The only site of politics is the state-party. The sequence of this mode begins during the early 1930s and ends with Gorbachov's accession to power (Lazarus 1993: 94).

Where does all this leave the conceptualisation of contemporary politics on the African continent? The answer provided by Wamba-dia-Wamba is that one must identify modes of politics historically present in Africa which he attempts in the case of Zaire/DR Congo (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993), and also, more importantly, specify the basic characteristics of an emancipatory mode of politics on the continent (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994). The latter project is, in his writings, highly informed by the analysis of Lazarus so I shall continue to briefly outline them together.

> *Politics (political capacity, political consciousness), the active prescriptive relationship to reality, exists under the condition of people who believe that politics must exist ... Generally in Africa, the tendency has been to assign it [this political capacity] to the state (including the party and liberation movements functioning really as state structures) per se. Unfortunately, the state cannot transform or redress itself: it kills this prescriptive relationship to reality by imposing consensual unanimity ... the thrust of progressive politics is to be separated from the state. It is not possible to achieve a democratic state, ie. a state that is transparent to, rather than destructive of, people's viewpoints, if people only 'think'*

> *state, internalize state and thus self-censor themselves (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 258).*

In post-colonial Africa therefore, it is noted that one form or other of state-fetishism has been the dominant way of conceiving the political capacity to transform reality, however I do attempt to specify below some of the features of a 'national liberation struggle' mode which can be said to have existed prior to independence to various extents. If the problem in Africa has been the state, then a new way of conceiving politics must be developed. For Lazarus, three fundamental conceptions have to be put forward here: first it has to be understood that there are or can be multiple sites of politics including especially sites outside and beyond the state, and second that emancipatory politics concerns democratic prescriptions on the state; finally, of course an organisation of activists is required, but this cannot be a state organisation as the state is not concerned with (popular) politics, and rather suffocates all political prescriptions. Rather, this must be an emancipatory political organisation, which is consistently democratic in its practices and which thereby enables the development of democratic political prescriptions on the state.

Sites of emancipatory politics in Africa are varied and they *may* include the factory (which is not just a place for producing commodities), 'traditional' and popular institutions such the palaver, village assemblies, the sovereign national conferences in several Francophone African countries in the early nineties (all mentioned in Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994) as well as social institutions such as educational institutions, neighbourhood groups, social movements and so on, in sum all organisations in which the possibility of democratic politics exists. Clearly, such sites do not always exist, as emancipatory politics is not always present in them. For example, street committees, area committees and trade union 'locals' were all sites of emancipatory politics in the townships of South Africa of the 1980s, but this is no longer the case. They have either disappeared as political structures completely or have been incorporated into the state domain of politics (Neocosmos 1998). Parties on the other hand incarnate a state project of one form or another as they propose the state as the exclusive reference of political consciousness. Currently these are not sites of emancipatory politics in Africa, which means that extending the number of parties in existence (from single to multi-partyism) will not, of itself, enable the development of democratic-emancipatory politics on the continent (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 258-9).

While possible sites of politics can be found anywhere where state and society relate, emancipatory politics only exists when democratic prescriptions on the state emanate from such sites. Democratic political prescriptions are possible only when distancing oneself politically from the state. This idea corresponds, in essence, to the possibility of a domain of politics beyond the state and civil society, which I have detailed above; but this domain must now not be understood spatially or institutionally as defined by the form of state rule as in Chatterjee (2004), but fundamentally as distinctly political-subjective. It must be stressed that: 'one can prescribe to the state only on condition of being

independent of it, by placing oneself precisely in a political position clearly distinct and separate from it' (*LDP*, no 14, July 1995, p. 9). Thus 'distance' here refers to political distance rather than to structural occupational distance for example, although clearly these are by no means unconnected. This signifies in particular that a democratic political practice must be clearly distinct from a state practice. Democracy here no longer refers to a set of state institutions.

Political Prescriptions

What does prescribing to the state actually mean for Lazarus? It is easiest to outline this with reference to one specific example. To argue publicly and consistently that everyone must be treated equally by state laws and practices under conditions where this is evidently not the case, is to make a democratic prescription on the state, according to this perspective. This is particularly of relevance to the modern state in both Europe and Africa, because this state systematically practices various forms of discrimination against a number of people living within its boundaries on the basis of gender, ethnicity and nationality as well as social class. 'Any state which is founded on ethnic or communitarian distinctions, is a state producing civil tensions and war' (*LDP*, 14: 9). It is thus imperative to uphold the view politically that the country is made up of 'people from all walks of life' ('*les gens de partout*'), and that no single individual or group should count for any more or less than any other. This would be in Badiou's terms an indication of fidelity to the axiom of equality. New categories and terms should be thought up to transcend such differences[11]. If this view is not consistently upheld, then the door is left open to various forms of state discrimination with disastrous results (*LDP* 14: 9-10)[12]. To make democratic prescriptions on the state is precisely to assert such a position for example, from a multitude of sites where it is of relevance; in addition 'to make democratic prescriptions on the state ... is to view the latter not only as a juridical and formal structure but also as being the object of prescriptions' (ibid.). In other words that the state can be prescribed to with important results for politics:

> *[In politics] there always exists an ensemble of possibles more or less open depending on the issues, but rarely completely closed. It is here that what we call "prescriptions on the state" can take root. To prescribe to* the state is to assert as possible a different thing from what is said and done by the state ... our idea of democracy is to sustain point by point democratic prescriptions in relation to the state *(LDP 14: 10-11, emphasis in original).*

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[11] In the past, such categories have, in different contexts, included 'citizen', 'comrade', 'ndugu'. These terms no longer have the equalising quality in today's context which they once had. See *LDP* (op.cit.), Wamba-dia-Wamba (1994).

[12] I have argued this point at length in Neocosmos (2006a) with respect to xenophobia in South Africa.

Clearly the argument here is that alternatives and choices are always possible and that it is imperative to force the state, from sites within society, to treat all people living within its boundaries equally and not to discriminate against some for whatever reason. Today in Africa, the main bases for such discrimination are gender, nationality and ethnicity, although other social divisions based on class, age, rural-urban differences and so on are also transformed into discriminatory distinctions by state practices and ideologies.

For Hallward (2005: 770) following Badiou, prescription is 'first and foremost an anticipation of its subsequent power, a commitment to its consequences, a wager on its eventual strength'. It is fundamentally the divisive application of a universal axiom or principle which serves to demarcate a partisan position with the result that 'politics is the aspect of public life that falls under the consequences of a prescription' (2005: 773). Politics is thus not reducible to 'the art of the possible' in the usual sense. It is indifferent to interests and to their compromises, as a prescription is of a universal character. Prescription implies freedom to make political choices, 'without such freedom we cannot say that people make their own history; we can merely contemplate the forms of their constraint' (2005: 781), which has been precisely what a politics deduced from political economy has done in the second half of the twentieth century in Africa. However, we still remain here at a relatively high level of abstraction. It is important to descend to what this means in more concrete terms.

The Extant and the Possible

In his most recent work, Lazarus (2001) uses the notion of prescription to distinguish the understanding resulting from the thought of people, from that developed by a scientistic approach. All social science comes down in one way or another to a matter of definition in order to resolve the 'polysemic' contradictions between meanings attributed to words in life. Contrary to this, Lazarus insists that this discursive polysemy is a reflection of different prescriptions attached to the word in question, some of which may contest what exists (the extant) in terms of possible alternatives. 'It is through prescriptions - for there is not only one - that the word is submitted to something other than a definition' (Lazarus 2001: 7).

> *An approach via the objective evaluation of things can end up with predictions, scenarios, tendencies or determinations. It is not in this way that the possible must be understood. For the first approach, the objective of thought is to isolate the logic of the real. For the second, the objective is not to articulate theses on what exists. The field of intellectuality presents itself differently: the question regarding what exists is only given in relation to what could be (Lazarus 2001).*

A definition is scientistic and only proposes a unique conception of the real. On the other hand, because a number of prescriptions may exist on the meaning of words, the possibility exists of conflicts between prescriptions, each one sustaining a distinct order of the real. Because of this confrontation between

prescriptions amounting to conflicts between different theses on the real, 'knowledge is confronted by a choice which is not that between the true and the false, the imaginary and the rational, but that between different orders of the real' (2001). For example if an interlocutor says: 'at the factory they call me a worker, outside they call me an immigrant because they have forgotten that I am a worker', the figure of the worker is maintained in the context of the factory and denied in society. There are here two orders of the real founded on two prescriptions, one for which the figure of the worker is asserted and another for which it has disappeared. It can thus be seen how prescriptions resolve the polysemic multiplicity in a manner which is in no way definitional (2001). As a result a number of possibles are apparent. It is thus the question of the possible which specifies people's thought.

> *That a situation can be apprehended by "possibles" is an overturning of historicist and scientific thought, for which it is a precise investigation of what exists, in terms of determinations, causes and laws, which may then permit an answer to the question of what may come. The possible here is totally subordinated to the extant. In people's thought [on the other hand], the real is identified through the possible. The investigation of what exists is also involved, but is subordinated to the investigation of what could be. The investigation differs according to whether it relates to the category of the 'possible' or to that of the "extant" … We are confronted with two different modes of thought: the first is analytical and descriptive, it asks questions regarding what exists; irrespective of the eventual complexity of its research protocols and discoveries, it proposes the scientific character of sites (lieux). The second is prescriptive and has as its principal point of entry the question of the possible (2001: 8).*

While the former perspective proposes to apprehend reality as extant, the latter maintains that in order to access what exists now, the 'now' can only be grasped as a conjunction of different 'possibles'. 'Knowledge of a situation is grasped by people in terms of the identification of its possibles. The possible is not of the order of what is to come but of the order of the now'. (2001: 9). The investigation utilising categories such as 'present' and 'possible' 'works through words … on the thought of people which is outlined in singular intellectualities, to which one can accede from the words used and the singular theses which they constitute' (2001: 11).

Lazarus develops a new theory and detailed methodology for understanding the possible in the extant, the 'what could be' in the 'what is'. There is no space to develop all the details here, but enough has been said to suggest the originality and inventiveness of the whole perspective, which opens up a whole new manner of investigating politics precisely because this is about conceiving a situation other than what exists. It has the advantage, vis-à-vis Badiou's work, of moving beyond the extremely abstract ontological statements which characterise that discourse, to enable the thinking of precise concrete investigations of the possible in the extant, in other words of people's political thought. I want now to attempt to utilise some of the ideas and categories

outlined above to sketch the character of what may be termed a 'National Liberation Struggle Mode' (NLS) of politics at least in Africa and to ask the question of the extent to which the resistance struggle in South Africa of the 1980s broke with this mode. I will suggest that it did indeed do so in significant respects.

5. The "National Liberation Struggle mode of politics" and the popular struggle against apartheid

The standard reading of the liberation struggle in South Africa, is that this struggle - seen as a continuous process from the formation of the ANC in 1912 to the achievement of liberation marked by the first elections by universal suffrage in 1994 - operated very much within the theoretical confines of the NLS mode. Even when the importance of the popular struggle of the 1980s is acknowledged as a specific process independent of the organisational requisites of the ANC in exile, this popular struggle tends to be seen as a 'radicalised' variant of the NLS mode. One of the better arguments developed along these lines is made by Yunis (2000) who suggests that the national liberation struggle in South Africa in the 1980s was radicalised as its class composition became more democratic and popular. For Yunis (2000: 33-5), the struggle for national liberation in South Africa (as that in Palestine) was 'radicalised' along with the historically gradual dominance of more popular classes: 1910s - 1940s dominance of elites, 1940s -1970s dominance of a middle-class leadership, mid-1970s -1980s dominance of popular classes. In this conception, the 1980s simply mark the 'radicalisation' of an ongoing NLS, unfolding on the basis of the class composition of the movement. For me, this kind of perspective disables an understanding of the truly inventive nature of the popular politics of the 1980s, which I believe constituted an event, in Badiou's sense, probably for the African continent as a whole. It does so, not only because of its historicism (incidentally a curtailed and thus unrealised historical trajectory as the popular classes did not achieve their imputed radical aims), but also because of its insistence on articulating politics to an external social invariant, namely class. In this manner, it does away with the singularity and specificity of these politics and makes them unthinkable outside a pre-given NLS mode.

Contrary to this view, I would suggest that there was a clear distinction, as well as a struggle, between different conceptions of politics within the anti-apartheid movements of the 1980s - politics that cannot be understood simply in class terms - particularly between the democratic politics made possible by the popular movement inside the country and the party-bureaucratic politics of the NLS mode attached to the proto-state institutions outside the country, despite their similarities in discourse. However this contrast should not suggest uncontradictory politics in either of these sites. Rather the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its affiliates, as well as the trade unions in particular, constituted sites which enabled the development of a political subjectivity which was centrally located in popular control of conditions of life, something which

could not be prevalent in sites such as military camps and exile, simply because the latter were evidently cut off from popular concerns. In neither of these cases was politics reducible to sociological class categories. After all the politics of exile were conducted within a Marxist discourse which, as numerous official documents of the ANC/SACP attest to, privileged (the working-) class in the construction of the nation, as did the politics inside the country. Reference to class was then not what distinguished them. Rather, it can be argued that, during the years 1984 -1986 at least, a quite new political sequence develops in South Africa itself which identifies elements of a distinctly new (although incompletely developed) mode of politics which breaks in *some* crucially important respects with the fundamental tenets of the NLS mode, while reproducing it in some other respects.

5.1 The National Liberation Struggle Mode of Politics in Africa

To think purely subjectively about a National Liberation Struggle mode at Third World and even at an African level in the twentieth century is extremely difficult without collapsing into model building, i.e. into objectivism. Moreover, there is no one major single individual who expressed such a politics intellectually. A situated analysis of say the work of Cabral, for example, as one of the major thinkers in this regard, is well beyond the scope of this work. Yet there is an important sense in which such a mode provided the parameters of political thought in the colonial and neo-colonial social formations of the immediate post-World War II period up to the 1970s. Its main figures included such disparate thinkers as Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Mohandas Gandhi as well as Fanon, Cabral and Nyerere closer to home, each of whom expressed a (more or less) different variant of the NLS mode. During this period, it was impossible to think politics in Africa in the absence of some form or other of anti-imperialism, even if only in rhetorical form. This contrasts with the position today when all states (if not all peoples) clamour to be part of the new empire. As Chatterjee (2004:100) has so accurately observed, today the new 'empire expands because more and more people, and even governments, looking for peace and the lure of economic prosperity, want to come under its sheltering umbrella'. In other words the underlying conception of state politics today, in what is commonly referred to as 'the South', is to be part and parcel of the new 'democratic empire'.

We should start first by stressing the irreducibility of the politics of national liberation from colonialism. Not many European thinkers understood this point. One exception was Jean-Paul Sartre who was able to show that as colonisation was centrally a political endeavour, so was the struggle for freedom (Sartre 2006: 36ff). The solution to the problem of colonial oppression was thus not fundamentally economic (reducing poverty), social (providing health or educational systems) or indeed cultural or psychological, however much these factors may have played a role in oppression and resistance. Poverty, for the majority, was clearly insoluble under colonialism, as it was a necessary outcome of the colonial system. The demand for freedom is thus purely and irreducibly

political and was to be found at the core of nationalist politics, especially of the mass politics which were in most cases necessarily unleashed in the struggles against colonialism. As Issa Shivji never tires of repeating, it should be stressed that nationalism grew out of pan-Africanism and not the other way around. Pan-Africanism was founded on the demand for universal freedom, justice and equality for all African peoples and was perforce irreducible to narrow national interest. It was only a state nationalism which could eventually abandon pan-Africanism for a state interest.

Politics was therefore the core issue of the struggle for independence, and politics gradually 'withered away' as the state took over nationalist concerns with independence, as popular nationalism was transformed into state nationalism and democracy was overcome by the need to solve the 'social question' (Arendt 1963) known in the post-colonial period as 'development'. The absence of politics in the post-colonial period has been accurately expressed by Shivji (1985) *inter alia* on the continent. Yet he was arguably not able to expand this observation to fully think the disappearance of politics as being occasioned by the rise of the state and its replacing of popular self-activity, thus arrogating all politics to itself. The difficulty faced by the national liberation struggle mode was its inability to sustain an irreducibly political conception of politics. Through the medium of the state party, an irreducible conception of politics with a universal emancipatory content, was gradually replaced by a politics founded on interests (economic, power, cultural, rights and entitlements) to be managed by the state. *Inter alia*, this became more and more an obvious intellectual problem after independence as it was clearly a particular (state) politics which created the social in the form of (a 'bureaucratic bourgeois') class rather than the expected opposite of politics 'reflecting' the social category of class (Shivji 1976).

Thus the reasons for the difficulty in thinking the emancipatory character of mid-twentieth century anti-imperialist politics are arguably related to the fact that, while ostensibly concerned with emancipating colonial populations, the national liberation struggle mode equated such emancipation with the construction of a nation, thus unavoidably referring politics to an external (social) invariant such as nation, state and/or class. Only in a small number of cases was a politics inspired by this mode not thought exclusively via external referents. These rare instances - the writings of Fanon and Cabral come particularly to mind here (although there may also be others) - were brief and would have to be analysed as thinking the political singularities of Algeria and Guinea Bissau during short historical periods, a fact which lies well beyond the scope of this work. What is however interesting to note, is that both these figures were spared the dubious status of becoming 'state revolutionaries'. Fanon in particular, was excluded by his foreignness from holding high office in Algeria and died at a young age, while Cabral was assassinated before assuming state power.

In general then, the NLS mode was a mode 'in exteriority' in Africa, lasting probably between 1958 (the date of the All-African People's Conference in Accra

5-13 December 1958) and 1973 the assassination of Cabral (Hallward, 2005)[13]. The NLS mode is a truly twentieth century mode[14] and its language was often borrowed from Marxism, particularly from the Stalinist mode. However the term 'class' as the referent of the latter's politics was usually displaced by that of 'nation', with Cabral, for instance even speaking in terms of a 'nation-class' to reconcile Marxist and nationalist conceptions (de Bragança and Wallerstein vol. 1 1982: 69). Its two main external invariants were 'state' and 'nation' although 'class' clearly also featured in this capacity. By 1975, the last vestiges of popular-democratic struggles had ended with the independence of the Portuguese colonies of Africa (and Vietnam at a world level), followed in 1980 by that of Zimbabwe which was, in most instances, only a pale reflection of the experience of its predecessors. Even though the language of this mode was dominant within the South African ANC (African National Congress) in exile, whose perspective on the liberation struggle was largely congruent with that mode, I shall suggest that during the 1980s in South Africa, a new sequence of politics was inaugurated, and during the period 1984-1986 in particular, evidence exists for the beginnings of a new singular (internal) mode of politics for the continent, although such a mode was never fully developed as evidenced *inter alia* by the absence of any figure to systematise it theoretically.

In general, it can be suggested that in the same way that a demarcation of a 'proletarian politics' was central to the Bolshevik mode, the demarcation of a 'national politics', of the nation itself constituted by such politics, was central to the NLS mode. The questions of this politics were thus: who is the nation? (and *not* what is the nation?) and what are its politics? The answer provided - at last by the most emancipatory versions of that mode - was that the nation is those who fight consistently against colonialism/neo-colonialism. To the extent that this was adhered to then, this politics could be said to be partly structured 'in interiority'. The nation is not race, it is not colour, it is not class, it is not gender (see Fanon on the struggle of Algerian women), it is not tradition, it is not even state, but it is open to all Africans, irrespective of ethnic, racial or national origins; it is a purely political subjectivity (Neocosmos 2003). Hence the question of who was a member of the nation acquired a purely political answer. For Fanon the nation during the liberation struggle is a purely political construct undetermined by any social category other than those who simply live there (e.g. Fanon 1989: 152). As a result this politics was coloured by pan-Africanism, which only gave rise to a contradiction once nation was equated with state. In the meantime, national consciousness was mediated by the popular movement. In Cabral's words:

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[13] The dates of this sequence can be obviously debated. At the level of the Third World as a whole, the mode probably began as early as 1910 with the publication of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* which was a systematic critique of colonial values accepted uncritically by the Indian middle class. See Hardiman 2003: 66-93. The following very important remark which illustrates the emancipatory character of Gandhi's thought is taken from this text (p.40): 'to believe that what has not occurred in history will not occur at all is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man'.

[14] Although again, its origins can be stretched as far back as the Haitian revolution of 1791 -1804; see the very important work by Fick, 1992.

> *if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of* culture ... *The liberation movement must ... embody the mass character, the popular character of the culture - which is not and never could be the privilege of one or of some sectors of the society (Cabral 1973:43-4).*

Thus, insofar as the nation has a social base, it is the poorest, the most excluded (the 'wretched of the earth') and particularly the rural peasantry who form it. The nation has a bias towards the rural; not only are rural people a numerical majority, but they are the most excluded; they have nothing to gain from the continuation of colonialism; only they can be truly universal and consistent in their demand for national freedom and democracy. The (petty-) bourgeoisie and workers as well as the inhabitants of the towns more generally, acquire some benefits from colonialism, they vacillate and are not consistently anti-colonial; their political and cultural references are to the metropole. There is, among the bourgeoisie in particular, a tendency to 'compradorisation' evidently realised during the post-colonial period (Shivji 1985). However, in the final analysis, the nation is composed of those who fight consistently for national freedom irrespective of social origins. This is what national politics amounted to for this mode, at least in its popular-emancipatory version, insofar as the latter existed.

It is the national movement (made up of a 'Front' or 'Congress' of a number of organisations) which usually (but not always) embodies the organisational subjectivity of the nation, not usually a party as such. Although there are differences here, parties are for some (eg Fanon) Western imports with few roots among the people. The dominant tendency, however, was for political movements to become state parties more or less rapidly (arguably a necessary outcome of seeing politics as representing the social in the form of the nation), evidently so at independence, and in many instances long before that, in which case the emancipatory character of politics collapsed. In all cases, the first step to freedom was said to be the attainment of state power for the emancipation of the nation. The aphorism attributed to Kwame N'krumah - 'seek ye first the political kingdom and all shall be given unto thee' - accurately expresses this collapse into a disastrous politics - often a simulacrum of national emancipation and culture as in Mobutu's '*authenticité*' - as the instrumentalist notion of the state which it implied, meant that the latter was left largely untransformed from its colonial origins.

It was this dominant tendency which assured the ephemeral nature of any genuinely emancipatory content to the national liberation mode, and the continuation of a colonial set of institutions and practices from which the continent has been suffering ever since. The neo-colonialism which ensued was thus *primarily* a political phenomenon; the submission to economic dependency on the West was a result of such politics and not its cause. In addition, the deployment of this mode during the international geo-political context of the 'cold war' and its fetishism of state power meant its frequent ideological dependence on either the Stalinist or the parliamentary modes, a

fact which ensured its final disintegration and collapse into statism. One can see therefore how easily a politics with an emancipatory content could tip over into relying on external invariants, when consciousness became derived from the state itself, as the movement became nation, became party, became state[15]. This movement from internal to external mode was most evident at independence, but for many national liberation movements, the transition to proto-states or 'states in waiting' was effected long before independence (e.g. PAIGC, SWAPO, ANC etc, see de Bragança and Wallerstein, vols 2&3) many being recognised by the United Nations as 'the sole and authentic representatives' of their nations long before taking power.

The nationalist form of struggle had violence at its core. For Fanon, violence 'purifies' (i.e. distinguishes) the nation from colonial violence. The combination of the exercise of violence as a counter to colonial violence, with the democratic aspirations of the people is to be found in the people's army, people's war and the practice of guerrilla warfare. The guerrillas were supposed to be the people in arms, the armed militants; the guerrilla army was the people at war. 'We are armed militants, not militarists' (Cabral, cit. Davidson 1981: *v*). The various sites of a genuinely emancipatory mode of politics when that existed varied, but were likely to include the mass movement and its constituent organisations, the guerrilla army, peasant communities. Militarism was a statist deviation from this conception (easily fallen into given the centrality of 'armed struggle'), when military solutions became dominant over political ones. In sum, the general trend was for national liberation movements to end up providing a mere mirror image of colonial politics in their practice. The sequence of this mode in Africa, with all its contradictory attempts to resist colonialism is today clearly over, and has been so for about thirty years. Yet as Hallward (2005) asks, can we begin to speak today of the end of this end? I shall suggest that there is evidence from South Africa to suggest that we can.

5.2 The popular struggle against apartheid: a new political sequence and mode?

Today we are in a situation when an emancipatory politics must be thought as fundamentally distinct from state politics, as the state is incapable of emancipating anybody (Neocosmos 2009a). In this context, it could be suggested that the national-liberation movement in the urban areas of South Africa during the period 1984-86 constitutes an event for politics on the continent. This is fundamentally because the urban popular masses of the oppressed black population took an independent role in the politics of transformation and managed, for a time, to provide an inventively different

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[15] Wamba-dia-Wamba has recently suggested that while it is the popular masses which enable 'events', the masses possess a blind faith in the state or in those individuals whom they associate with change. It is the breaking of this blind faith which constitutes fidelity to the event and it is those activists who militate for such a break who today engage in emancipatory politics on the continent (personal communication, 22/01/2007).

content to the slogans of the NLS mode. Moreover, the organisational expression of this movement, the United Democratic Front in the South Africa of the 1980s, was not a party organisation but a loose confederation of local political affiliates, which all adhered to some common principles. These retained their organisational autonomy meaning that organisationally, the UDF constitutes a useful recent non-party form of political organisation from which it is important to learn, although serious detailed research on this question has yet to be undertaken (but see Neocosmos 1998; Van Kessel 2000). Moreover, beyond this organisational form, the fact that the authority of the party in exile (the ANC) was recognised by most of these internal anti-apartheid formations had a number of crucially important effects including the need to engage in a 'revolutionary' politics the object of which was not the attainment of state power, but deferring to its ultimate authority. I will outline some of the features of this new politics as I understand them, below.

The struggles for liberation in South Africa during the 1980s were part of a new worldwide wave of resistance which in Africa has been referred to optimistically as 'the second struggle for independence'. In South Africa however this struggle emerged as the first. Particularly in the period 1984-1986, it can be described as an 'event' in Badiou's sense of the word, meaning a process after which the political reality of the situation could no longer simply be understood in the old way it had been visualised before (see Badiou 1988). In his own inimitable style: '... there exists no stronger a transcendental consequence [of an event - MN] than that of making something appear in a world which had not existed in it previously' (Badiou 2006b: 285)[16].

These struggles denoted a fundamental break with liberalism for which the nation is to be identified with the state and democracy with a form of state. For the state, the mass movement in the 1980s substituted for a while a notion of 'people's power'. One of the main characteristics of this event which constituted a break from previous modes of resistance politics is that arguably, for the first time, nationalist/nationwide resistance did not take the form of a mirror image of colonial/apartheid oppression; that mirror image already existed in the politics of the exiled ANC. Rather, that resistance and the culture which emanated from it, acquired its inspiration directly from the struggles of people in their daily lives for political control over their social-economic environment, thus providing the 'enabling environment' for the unleashing of popular political initiatives and inventiveness. In this sense this experience was a truly democratic event, and a fidelity to its lessons forces us to think about politics differently. In particular I have argued elsewhere (Neocosmos 1999) that rather than thinking 'vertical' distinctions as central, (e.g. the distinctions around which leaders would mobilise followers such as the ideologies of nationalism or socialism), this mass movement put the 'horizontal' opposition between

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[16] In his latest work, Badiou outlines at length the ontological conditions of an event in terms of a detailed typology of change (2006a: 383-401). Here an event is understood as a 'singularity with maximal consequences'. An example of his discussion can be found in English in his discussion of the Paris Commune of 1871 in Badiou, 2006b: 257-90.

democracy and authoritarianism firmly on the agenda, in terms of political practices in particular. In broad outline, the most important features of the nationalist politics of the period can be sketched as follows.

The most important and truly original organisational expression of popular resistance in the 1980s, was the United Democratic Front (UDF) which was formed in 1983 initially ostensibly to mobilise opposition to the state's constitutional proposals and other legislation (known collectively as the Koornhof Bills) including the Black Local Authorities Act which increased the powers of reviled township councillors. The UDF brought together under its umbrella a coalition of civic associations, student organisations and youth congresses, women's groups, trade unions, church societies, sports clubs and a multitude of organisations who retained and often increased as a result of their affiliation to the UDF, their ability to organise independently. At its peak it claimed it had around seven hundred affiliates grouped in ten regional areas and amounting to a total of over two million people (Lodge et al. 1991: 34). With the upsurge of township unrest beginning in earnest in 1984, it was the young people of the townships who provided the main impetus behind the struggle, while this leadership passed over to the Trade Unions in 1988. In one important respect at least, the UDF managed to build on the experience of township based organisations such as civic associations, in that it successfully combined local and national grievances.

Nevertheless, the history of the mass upsurge, even though enabled as well as expressed by the UDF, cannot be reduced to the organisation[17]. Frequently contradictions existed between popular initiatives and the national organisation and the latter often 'trailed behind the masses' (Seekings 1992). The important point to understand is that while the organisational existence of the UDF spans the years 1983-1991, the political sequence of the event along with the beginnings of a new mode of politics, can be said to have lasted between August/September 1984 and mid-1986. While the early political intervention under the banner of the UDF adhered to standard protest politics and the gathering of signatures against the apartheid state's introduction of a 'tricameral parliament', a mass upsurge started in earnest in September 1984 and took the form of bus and rent boycotts, housing movements, squatter revolts, labour strikes, school protests and community 'stay-aways'. This change in the mode of politics was not the result of any strategy by the leadership of the UDF or of a change in policy. It was forced on the leadership from below (Swilling 1988: 101). Indeed, by mid-1985 it was becoming clear that the UDF leadership was unable to exert effective control over developments despite its popularity:

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[17] The literature on this period tends to provide a history of the popular struggle through that of the organisation, conflating the former with the latter. The UDF as an organisation made possible an emancipatory politics but it cannot be conflated with such politics. See for example, Marx 1992, Houston 1999, Seekings 2000, Lodge et al 1991; others attempt to focus more on the popular movement itself e.g. Swilling 1988, Sitas 1992, Van Kessel 2004. See also Murray 1987, 1998, Neocosmos 1998, 1999 and Bozzoli 2004 for contrasting analyses of the period and also the review of much of this literature in Suttner 2004.

> *The momentum for action came from the bottom levels of the organisation and from its youngest members. It was children who built the roadblocks, children who led the crowds to the administrative buildings, children who delegated spokespersons, and children who in 1984 told the older folk that things would be different, that people would not run away as they had in 1960 (Lodge et al 1991: 76).*

In 1986 the apartheid state instituted a massively repressive state of emergency which covered the whole country with the result that from late 1986 onwards UDF campaigns were more and more initiated 'from above', by the 'national leadership' operating exclusively at the national level. At the same time, more and more coercive measures were being applied to township residents to adhere to various boycotts, a fact which showed the weakening of popular control, 'the struggle' was acquiring more of a militaristic character, and vigilante activities acquired more and more support from businessmen affected by youth directed boycotts. All in all, after that date, the politics of coercion were gradually taking over from the politics of popular democracy.

What characterised this political event during this two year period was not simply a dominance of popular power 'from below' to be replaced by an imposition of a change in politics 'from above'; after all this is a regular occurrence throughout history, including in contemporary Africa. Rather, the reason for considering this period a new political sequence or an event for politics is fundamentally rooted in the bringing to the fore of new political questions and new political solutions. Broadly speaking this new political conception can be sketched under five headings. All these enable a brief elucidation of a new form of popular democracy.

Politics without a party

What was fundamental was that, in its essence, the politics of the political movement led by the UDF was a politics without a party. The whole idea of 'capturing' or 'seizing' state power whether through elections or the force of arms was absent from its politics (Suttner 2004: 695-6). In this way it differed significantly from the perspective of the NLS mode including that of the ANC. This was the case primarily because the UDF viewed the exiled ANC as the rightful leader of the national movement and deferred to it in terms of overall political dominance. Yet given the virtual absence of an organised presence within the country, the ANC could never exercise party control, and the open structure of the UDF meant that its affiliates, themselves largely controlled by their rank and file, were primarily the ones to set out the forms of struggle. Leadership was however not only reacting to pressure from below, but was forced to be accountable to activists as we shall see. Systems of accountability were instituted largely as a result of trade union influence, which had itself developed from popular resistance through the wave of strikes in the Durban area in 1973.

The main demands of the UDF concerned what one of its leaders called removing the 'barriers to democracy', by which was meant creating 'the necessary conditions for the democratic process to expand' (Morobe 1987: 86). These included: 'the lifting of the state of emergency, the withdrawal of troops and vigilantes from townships, and the release of detainees' as well as the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and other banned organisations, the safe return of exiles and the repeal of racist legislation. These were of course very limited demands and implied a deference to another leadership, yet the taking over and putting into practice the demands of the *Freedom Charter* in particular - the political flag of the Congress alliance - meant that, pushed from below, the mass movement thus constituted, engaged in a politics which focussed on transforming the living conditions of the masses of the people, especially in urban townships. What was meant by democracy and the content given to the first demand of the *Freedom Charter* 'The People Shall Govern' went far beyond anything which had been dreamt of before or established since. This will appear clearly in what follows. Yet the advantage faced by the popular movement in the 1980s - i.e. the absence of a controlling 'party line' - turned out to be one of the reasons for its eventual demise, as it gave way, after being seriously weakened by state coercion, to the returning exiled party of the ANC (Neocosmos 1998).

Community-based organisation and active citizenship

The mass actions from 1984 onwards succeeded in mobilising:

> *all sectors of the township population including both youth and older residents; they involved coordinated action between trade unions and political organisations; they were called in support of demands that challenged the coercive urban and education policies of the apartheid state; and they gave rise to ungovernable areas as state authority collapsed in many townships in the wake of the resignation of mayors and councillors who had been 'elected' onto the new Black Local Authorities (Swilling 1988: 102).*

The state declared a first state of emergency in 1985 as it attempted to control this mass upsurge and to reassert its control over 'ungovernable areas'. Interestingly, both popular rebellion and political organisation grew during this period which saw the setting up of 'street committees' in particular. These took over the functions of local government especially in ungovernable areas. One local activist in the Port Elizabeth area stated:

> *We said [to our people]: In the streets where you live you must decide what issues affect your lives and bring up issues you want your organisation to take up. We are not in a position to remove debris, remove buckets, clean the streets and so on. But the organisation must deal with these matters through street committees (cit. Lodge et al. 1991: 82).*

The ANC view as expressed by their spokesman Tom Sebina was that street committees 'grow out of the need of the people to defend themselves against State repression...and in response to ANC calls to make the country ungovernable and apartheid unworkable [so as to forge them into] contingents that will be part of the process towards a total people's war'. Contrary to this view which saw street committees as tactical adjuncts to the development of a militaristic process and as simply oppositional to the apartheid state, local activists spelt out a different assessment:

> *The people in Lusaka can say what they like...we know that the purpose is to enable people to take their lives in hand. Local government has collapsed. The state's version of local government was corrupt and inefficient in any case, but local government is necessary for people to channel their grievances. The street committees fill the vacuum. They give people an avenue to express views and come up with solutions (*Frontline*, Xmas 1986, Vol 6, no. 7: 13).*

One activist expressed the new situation as follows:

> *Generally ... I can say that the community is the main source of power, because the state has really lost the control over the people. He (sic) has no power over the people in terms of controlling them. This is why the people have formed these area committees, so that they can try to control themselves. What has been preached in the past about the* Freedom Charter, *even now we are trying to do that practically (An activist from the Eastern Cape,* Isizwe, *Vol 1, no 2, March 1986).*

These popular state structures were proliferating in urban townships. Marx (1992: 167) notes that by 1987, 43 percent of the inhabitants of Soweto for example, were reporting the existence of street and area committees in their neighbourhoods. In many townships, rudimentary services began to be provided by civics and youth congresses, while crime also began to be regulated through 'people's courts'. These developed in some areas originally to regulate dispute between neighbours (as in Atteridgeville in Pretoria) and also as attempts to control the proliferation of brutal Kangaroo courts (e.g. in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth). In Alexandra outside Johannesburg, five members of the Alexandra Action Committee were nominated in Feb 1986 to sit in judgement over cases of assault and theft, while street committees were empowered to settle quarrels. In Mamelodi one of Pretoria's townships, a number of informal systems of justice operated in the 1970s and 1980s and there were long term struggles over the setting up of popularly accountable courts, which were also highly influenced by traditional African custom (e.g. the importance of elders etc)[18]. Lodge concludes that:

> *Of all the manifestations of people's power...the efforts of local groups to administer civil and criminal justice were the most challenging to the*

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[18] For greater detail see Lodge et al. 1991: 135-139; Seekings 1989; and also *Isizwe*,vol 1 no 2 March 1986: 35-41.

> *state's moral authority. More than any other feature of the
> insurrectionary movement, people's justice testified to the movement's
> ideological complexity and to the extent to which it was shaped from
> below by popular culture (Lodge et al. 1991: 135).*

In addition to popular control of townships and popular justice, there was a
complementary development of institutions geared towards the provision of
'people's education'. These included in particular attempts to bring local schools
under community control through the establishment of Parent Teacher Student
Associations (PTSAs) and even attempts to develop a new curriculum in
response to 'Bantu Education' the central plank of the apartheid state in this
sphere. The struggle for people's education was seen as intimately linked to
establishing people's power. In the words of Zwelakhe Sisulu:

> *The struggle for People's Education is no longer a struggle of the students
> alone. It has become a struggle of the whole community with the
> involvement of all sections of the community. This is not something
> which has happened in the school sphere alone; it reflects a new level of
> development in the struggle as a whole...The struggle for people's
> education can only finally be won when we have won the struggle for
> people's power ... We are no longer demanding the same education as
> Whites, since this is education for domination. People's education means
> education at the service of the people as a whole, education that liberates,
> education that puts the people in command of their lives. We are not
> prepared to accept any 'alternative' to Bantu Education which is imposed
> on the people from above ... To be acceptable, every initiative must come
> from the people themselves, must be accountable to the people and must
> advance the broad mass of students, not just a select few (Sisulu, 1986:
> 106, 110).*

Or again:

> *I want to emphasise here that these advances were only possible because
> of the development of democratic organs, or committees, of people's
> power. Our people set up bodies which were controlled by, and
> accountable to, the masses of the people in each area. In such areas, the
> distinction between the people and their organisations disappeared. All
> the people young and old participated in committees from street level
> upwards' (ibid.: 104)*

However, at the same time as street committees were taking up local grassroots
issues, they also functioned as vehicles for the direct challenge to apartheid state
power by the people. A detailed assessment from 1986 makes this point
forcefully.

> *The street/area committees - the structures of an embryonic People's
> Power - are not only restricted to playing this kind of [local] role, but
> also have a far more directly or narrowly political dimension to them. At
> the same time as they are taking up ... grassroots issues ... they also form
> the units in and through which major political issues and strategies (e.g.*

the consumer boycott) are discussed and organised. Thus the street committee system is beginning to form not only the avenue through which people can begin to take greater and more democratic control of the immediate conditions of their existence, but they are also emerging as the form through which direct political action against the state and the ruling bloc can be decided on and implemented (White 1986: 92).

Thus South Africa, particularly urban South Africa, did experience however briefly, a period where the oppressed people did succeed in controlling their own lives as well as in providing an alternative to state structures in the movement for 'people's power'. In practice, this social movement was giving rise to a form of mass democracy and a form of state unique in South Africa (and probably also in Africa as a whole). While these forms of popular democracy were never able to establish their dominance especially beyond 1986, they were a central feature of popular or 'subaltern' politics at the time. These forms of democracy and state have gone largely unrecognised by most intellectuals, by the party of state nationalism, the ANC, and even by many of the popular movement's own leaders. What especially stood out, was an attempt to develop genuinely popular forms of democracy in both ideology and practice.

Direct accountability of leadership

The general characterisation of the mass struggle as national and democratic, brought together both nationwide as well as popular-democratic locally-focussed aspects of the process. In fact, the two were regularly combined in attempts by leading activists to theorise the process of struggle. Thus Murphy Morobe, the Acting Publicity Secretary of the UDF in 1987:

We in the United Democratic Front are engaged in a national democratic struggle. We say we are engaged in a national *struggle for two reasons. Firstly, we are involved in political struggle on a national, as opposed to a regional or local level. The national struggle involves all sectors of our people - workers (whether in the factories, unemployed, migrants or rural poor), youth, students, women and democratic-minded professionals. We also refer to our struggle as national in the sense of seeking to create a new nation out of the historical divisions of apartheid. We also explain the* democratic *aspect of our struggle in two ways ... Firstly, we say that a democratic South Africa is one of the aims or goals of our struggle. This can be summed up in the principal slogan of the* Freedom Charter*: 'The People Shall Govern'. In the second place, democracy is the means by which we conduct our struggle ... The creation of democratic* means *is for us as important as having democratic goals as our objective ... When we say that the people shall govern, we mean at all levels and in all spheres, and we demand that there be a real, effective control on a daily basis ... The rudimentary organs of* people's power *that have begun to emerge in South Africa (street committees, defence*

committees, shop-steward structures, student representative councils, parent/teacher/ student associations) represent in many ways the beginnings of the kind of democracy that we are striving for ... Without the fullest organisational democracy, we will never be able to achieve conscious, active and unified participation of the majority of the people, and in particular the working class, in our struggle (Morobe, 1987:81-3).

Two features of this democracy worth noting, were a detailed system of controlling leaders to be accountable to the rank and file membership, and a different way of demarcating 'the people' from 'the oppressors'. Attempts at instituting internal democracy within organisations were strongly followed, although they obviously had various degrees of success. The important point however was that such a struggle for democracy existed within organisations. The various dimensions of this democracy were according to Morobe:

1) Elected Leadership. *Leadership of our organisations must be elected (at all levels), and elections must be held at periodic intervals...Elected leadership must also be re-callable before the end of their term of office if there is indiscipline or misconduct.*

2) Collective Leadership. *We try and practice collective leadership at all levels. There must be continuous, ongoing consultation ...*

3) Mandates and Accountability. *Our leaders and delegates are not free-floating individuals. They always have to operate within the delegated mandates of their positions and delegated duties ...*

4) Reporting. *Reporting back to organisations, areas, units, etc. is an important dimension of democracy [...] We feel very strongly that information is a form of power, and that if it is not shared, it undermines the democratic process. We therefore take care to ensure that language translations occur if necessary ...*

5) Criticism and Self-criticism. *We do not believe that any of our members are beyond criticism; neither are organisations and strategies beyond reproach ... (Morobe, op.cit.: 84-85).*

Similar observations regarding the popular content of struggles for democratic transformation during this period have also been made with regard to the trade unions:

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).

Not surprisingly under this challenge, the apartheid state did not hesitate to intensify its repression. In the first six months of the 1986 emergency around 25 000 people were arrested and isolated, the ability of the press (especially the vibrant 'alternative press') to report objectively was systematically curtailed and the townships were placed under direct military rule while the state introduced

a militarised bureaucracy (The National Security Management System) to run local government and to 'win hearts and minds' (known as WHAM) following the classic counterinsurgency pattern which the Americans had perfected in Vietnam. In brief this state offensive succeeded in undermining popular organisations considerably, and probably eliminating popular leadership altogether. This was not because the UDF ceased its activities, on the contrary, rent, bus and consumer boycotts continued unabated at least until 1987 (Lodge, op.cit: 87-100). Rather it was the popular aspect of the struggle which was fatally wounded as it depended for its democratic operation on consultative processes, relative freedom of movement etc, and there was no popular army capable of defending popular gains and structures against military onslaught[19].

New conceptions of nation and leadership

The manner in which the popular movement demarcated its members ('the people' or 'the nation') from the oppressive state, is also worthy of note. This largely surrounded the notion of 'non-racialism' as a way of characterising the ideology of the movement as well as the nature of the state which was being fought for. Originally inherited from Black Consciousness discourse which used the term to refer to all oppressed racial groups in South Africa under the characterisation 'Black', 'non-racialism' was adapted by the UDF to include Whites who supported the struggle. This struggle was visualised as uniting into a national opposition the disparate groups which the apartheid state divided, hence the main slogan of the UDF: 'UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides!'. One important aspect of non-racialism was the fact that rather than distinguishing 'the people' or 'the oppressors' on racial grounds, it did so by demarcating on political grounds: popular-democrats from anti-democrats. The former were those who supported change 'from below', the latter those who proposed some form of 'tinkering from above' and who had by this period, lost the confidence of the majority. Democrats were all those who opposed 'minority rule' and supported 'majority rule' through popular democracy. In the words of a UDF discussion document from 1986:

> *The essential* dividing line *that we should promote is between supporters of* minority rule and majority rule. *The common ground between the Botha (sic), the PFP [Popular Federal Party, the main White, big business-backed liberal opposition at the time - MN] leadership and big business is that they all seek solutions within the framework of adapting minority rule. Although they differ fundamentally on who to involve in negotiation and how much adaptation is necessary, these elements all agree that the system must be changed from the top down, with the solutions being decided over the heads of the people. All those who accept the right of the people to*

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[19] The ANC's MK's activities were never successfully integrated into the popular struggle, denoting a failure by the exile movement to adapt organisationally to the changed internal conditions; see Barrell 1991.

> *determine the process of change are allies of the people and part of the*
> *NDS [National Democratic Struggle] (UDF Cape Town Area Committee*
> *1986: 10, emphasis in original).*

This meant that the conducting of the popular struggle should also be 'non-racial'. Such a position was possible precisely because the social movement was not an elite movement and because White 'progressives' provided invaluable work both in the trade unions as well as the UDF, thus becoming known and appreciated by the people of the townships. It served to divide a minority of White democrats from White racists while forcing the uncommitted to commit themselves, in the same way as affiliation to popular organisations divided Blacks between collaborators with the state (so-called 'sell-outs') and the majority of the oppressed. Similar democratic practices also characterised the 'Call for National Unity against Apartheid and the Emergency' by the UDF in August 1986 for example. The discussion documents surrounding this call stress emphatically: 'it is essential that the call is not simply for unity at the top. We must ensure a way to ensure contact and planning on the ground, so that membership of different organisations may grow closer together'. At the same time they noted that the timing of the call was 'delayed to give COSATU affiliates time for thorough discussion - this is crucial, as the leadership of the call must reflect the people's unity right from the start'[20].

In fact, the danger posed to popular democracy by the lack of control of the popular movement over a number of charismatic leaders who felt they had the authority to speak and act without being mandated, was one of which many were aware. Thus, *Isizwe*, the main journal of the UDF made a rather prophetic statement in 1985:

> *One thing that we must be careful about [...] is that our organisations do*
> *not become too closely associated with individuals, that we do not allow*
> *the development of personality cults. We need to understand why we*
> *regard people as leaders and to articulate these reasons. Where people*
> *do not measure up to these standards they must be brought to heel -no*
> *matter how 'charismatic' they may be. No person is a leader in a*
> *democratic struggle such as ours simply because he or she makes good*
> *speeches [...]* No individual may make proposals on the people's behalf -
> unless mandated by them *[...] We need to say these things because there*
> *are some people and interests who are trying to project individuals as*
> *substitutes for political movements (United Democratic Front 1985: 17,*
> *emphasis added)*

The practices of 'mandates and report-backs' which had been adopted largely as a result of trade union influence were taken particularly seriously in the mid-eighties, had begun to decline at the end of the decade. Under such circumstances it would be relatively easy for leaders to disband the UDF in the

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[20] See Cape Town UDF Area Committee 'Call for National Unity -Discussion Paper' (85186) p.1.; UDF National Office (1986) 'Proposed Joint statement on 'Call for National Unity against apartheid and the Emergency'.

wake of the unbanning of the ANC, as it was felt that the latter could now take over the organisation of popular political protest. The early 1990s witnessed the gradual de-politicisation of civics and the renegotiation of their role vis-à-vis the state. I have shown elsewhere how the popular politics embodied in the organisations mentioned above was gradually replaced by state politics (Neocosmos 1998, 1999).

Another important innovation was the attempt to specify the content of the orthodox Marxist idea of 'working-class leadership' which was becoming more and more stressed as the link between 'the working class' and 'the national democratic revolution' during the period in question. The Stalinist mode of politics had hitherto basically equated such 'leadership' (hegemony) with that of a party, as the dominance of the communist party in inter-party alliances was substituted in the Stalinist mode in particular, for the 'class leadership' of the proletariat in class alliances which for the Bolshevik mode had referred to a specific politics. As the SACP was banned and did not constitute an independent organised force in South Africa at the time, it was not so much *party* alliances which were the issue (as they were in exile of course) but *class* alliances which were understood *in purely political terms*. In brief, in such circumstances, in any discussion of this issue, a greater emphasis had to be placed on ideology and practice rather than on crude organisational control. For example, *Isizwe*, the theoretical journal of the UDF stated in 1987:

> *For the working-class to play their full role, their leadership must be fundamentally* political *leadership. It must be working class leadership of and within the national liberation front … of the UDF itself … The dynamic active participation, from grassroots level up, of ever increasing numbers of workers in our structures will pose fresh challenges. That is how it must be. We must be prepared for this and work to assist this process (Isizwe, vol. 2, no1: 7-8).*

At the same time both the UDF and the general secretary of COSATU added:

> *The working class must ensure that its interests are paramount in the liberation struggle. That is why the mass democratic movement in our country has acknowledged the leading role of the working class. We believe that the only way to ensure this leadership is to build democratic organisations in the factories, shops, mines, in the townships, cities and villages where we live. Our structures are rooted in a constituency where leaders are not free-floating individuals but subject to recall at any time and are accountable to their constituencies and operating on the basis of mandates and report backs, can claim to be democratic (Naidoo 1987: 15).*

While the UDF therefore insisted on opening its cadreship to workers, both it and the COSATU leadership insisted more and more on the building of 'popular democratic structures' as the attributes of 'working class politics'. This idea of popular democracy being the essence of working class politics was given its most detailed explication by Karon and Ozinsky (1986). They argued that as:

> *It is the* process *by which the national democratic tasks are completed that will determine the character of the society which follows ... the task of* transforming *society cannot be separated from the process of* liberating *it ...The method of [the] eradication [of minority rule], and the depth of the democracy which replaces it, is the essential class question of the national democratic struggle ... Transformation is only possible if the liberation struggle ensures the development of direct democracy based on* organs of people's power*. These are the crucial source of the power of the working class in the national democratic state, and hence the foundation of an uninterrupted transition to socialism (1986: 33, 35, 34, 36, emphasis in original).*

Here society had to be transformed *prior* to - and hence independently from - the attainment of state power and the transformation of the state: 'transformation [of the state] is only possible if the liberation struggle ensures the development of direct democracy based on *organs of people's power*' (Karon and Ozinsky 1986: 36).   The idea of controlling the state in order to transform society was one which arose later, particularly with the return of ANC exiles in the 1990s. Thus for Joe Slovo, the priority was for the ANC to attain state power. Having done so would *then* 'immeasurably facilitate' the establishment of people's power (Slovo 1992: 36-37, see also Neocosmos 1999). For the popular movement then, the idea was to transform society prior to, and hence outside of a seizure of state power.

In sum it was the experience of the South African popular movement itself which was imposing itself on the understanding of 'working class politics' by those intellectuals closest to this social movement. Evidently, this understanding of popular democracy as 'working class politics' is not deducible from a social class category. The 'people' is clearly not a class category. It is not at all obvious that a popular conception of democracy should be in the interest of (or only of) a working class and not have a greater and even universal validity. So-called 'working class parties', of whatever hue, have not historically been paragons of democracy. This conception was in fact a purely politically subjective one, but it was never systematised into a theory, and a number of questions were clearly left unanswered such as: what is the difference if any between popular and working-class politics? What does the 'depth' of democracy actually mean? Is the reference to qualitatively or quantitatively different forms of democracy? How does such democracy differ from more liberal conceptions? How does this conception of democracy link up with notions of rights? And most importantly, how is a conception of 'class leadership' of the 'national democratic revolution' to be reconciled with the organisational 'leadership' of the ANC in 'the liberation movement'? The absence of clear answers to these questions was to contribute to the eventual collapse of popular forms of democracy and their replacement by an apolitical (because state-focussed) liberalism (Neocosmos 1998).

Prescriptive politics at a distance from the state

The argument which I have stressed throughout has been that during the period 1984-86, the popular struggle raised questions of politics which had never been raised before in South Africa, or even perhaps in Africa - in the post-colonial period - in such a clear fashion; the issue specifically concerns the thinking of a new form of emancipatory politics in a post-NLS period. The main question raised was what is democracy? How should a popular democracy be understood and consolidated? This differed fundamentally from what most intellectuals were debating such as the relative importance of capitalism vs. socialism, the state, the nature of the economy, race and class, and so on (Neocosmos 1999).

First, there is no doubt that South Africa witnessed a period of mass popular upsurge, especially in urban townships which eventually led to the collapse of the apartheid state. The mass politics of this period were founded on the daily issues of survival confronted by ordinary people. The UDF, its affiliates and activists were able, to various extents at different periods, to express organisationally, the mass involvement of the population in politics. Everything became political, from sport to transport, from art to schooling, from rubbish collecting to public parks. In other words, true active citizenship was created across the board, unevenly to be sure, but nevertheless sufficiently for all sectors of the majority of the population to be involved. In this way then a moral community of active citizens was developed (Van Kessel 2004). The UDF, in its politics, managed to link local concerns and politics with national issues. Everything was seen as connected to the (apartheid) state. What was not understood was how to sustain (or even *whether* to sustain) this active citizenship post-apartheid, and that the role of the state in controlling the issues listed above remained central, irrespective of the form the state would take. In the absence of thinking independent popular politics post-apartheid, the only categories available to thought became those of liberal 'civil society' (Neocosmos 1999).

Second, the politics of the event of 1984-86 were emancipatory and existed at a complete distance from those of the state, simply because the thinking of political activity and practice was not modelled on an attempt to enter the subjective domain of state politics. Indeed, these constituted an alternative to state politics and were not just oppositional, as the ANC leadership has regularly maintained (e.g. Mbeki 1996). The fact that organisations were able to construct their own political culture, their own embryonic state structures, their own (often highly democratic) modes of decision-making, shows that the organisation and mass movement went beyond instilling political agency among citizens, but also delved into thinking new forms of politics of a fundamentally popular-democratic character.

The fact that 'class leadership' was theorised as democratic practice, and not simply as party dominance, shows this, despite the frequent lapses into bureaucratic-statist conceptions and practices. The weakness, if not absence, of party forms of politics, and the absence of the idea of the seizure of power, constituted major influences on the formation of these politics, as did the necessity to construct majority popular support around issues. There was

clearly militarist imagery, but little in terms of militarist politics. The UDF as an umbrella of independent organisations/affiliates was organisationally novel. Moreover not only was the UDF excluded/excluded itself from formal recognition (in fact it operated so much beyond the limits of state politics that it was eventually banned) *the politics of the UDF were not the politics of civil society*, neither as I have noted were they the politics of parties, at least not fully so. Here was an organisation which did not see its purpose as achieving state power, yet which was totally political. Unlike the ANC, the UDF was not a state-party in the making and never saw itself as such.

Moreover, these were not the politics of human rights, requesting the state to 'deliver' rights or entitlements in order to include the majority within its political ambit, for the simple yet important reason that the 'Congress Tradition' as a whole had vehemently distanced itself from the notion of being or forming a 'civil rights movement'. Rather than demanding incorporation into an existing state, activists consciously rejected state modes of politics and rather made prescriptions on the state, most notably those of the *Freedom Charter* which stressed popular democracy: *South Africa belongs to all who live in it, The People Shall Govern, The Doors of Culture Shall be Opened* and so on, all of which had a universal character. Therefore what dominated here was a politics 'for all' and not only a politics 'for some'. These politics were thus not state politics, but operated at a political distance from the state. How to put the universal ideas expressed in the *Freedom Charter* into practice was a regular question posed by activists, and at times these ideas were imposed violently on those who disagreed, an illustration of episodic relapses into statist modes. At the same time such politics could not be characterised as either 'reformist' or 'revolutionary', the usual terms with which the Left has evaluated politics, because such politics were vehemently opposed to the existence of the apartheid state (hence not reformist), while concurrently not wishing to achieve state power (revolution implies the seizure of state power).

Third, the politics of the period in question differed fundamentally from the statist aspects of the NLS mode represented most clearly by the ANC which was a proto-state operating within the diplomatic international arena and primarily focussed on gaining power through military means (Barrell 1991). The ANC was centralist, hierarchical, pyramidal in its structure. The UDF had no branch structure, only loose affiliates which encouraged popular involvement. As noted, consultation had to take place regularly in order to ensure support. The ANC on the other hand was highly centralist, cut off from direct contact with the mass movement, and hampered by the Stalinist mode of politics which dominated, in conjunction with the NLS mode, within its structures[21]. On the

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[21] What had accompanied the ANC's orientation during the 1960s and 1970s had been a militaristic perspective whereby the assumption was maintained that: 'armed struggle was not simply the means by which ultimately to contend for state power but also the principal means by which to progress in each phase of escalation to that goal' (Barrell 1991: 69). Barrell shows that armed struggle was viewed in the 1960's as 'the *sine qua non* of any form of ANC political progress' (1991: 70) and that the ANC ignored the setting up of political structures within the country. At its Morogoro conference in 1969, political forms of struggle were still considered 'as

other hand, the sites of the new mode of politics were clearly the UDF itself along with various of its affiliates, the street committees and various other community organisations, the shop-steward 'locals', a number of churches and so on.

Fourth and finally, of course there were contradictions within the popular politics of the 1980s and these appear in the extensive literature. These contradictions arose and fell along with the vagaries of the struggle and included: authoritarian tendencies, sexism, urban-rural contradictions, and deference to well known nationalist figures and to the ANC in exile, and thus to the NLS mode *inter alia*. These contradictions, along with the restructuring of the state, contribute to explaining the ultimate inability of this mode to sustain itself. These problems illustrate the fact that these politics never fully broke from what Badiou (2005: 68ff) terms the 'bond' of mass politics, the bond of interests, in order that the 'long term durability of the event' may be sustained (2005: 72). The binding of the mass movement around the idea of the coming to power of the exiled leaders of the ANC was its undoing. The sites of embryonic people's power never fully matured and were rather still born, as the democratic politics of the mass movement more or less rapidly collapsed into authoritarianism (Cronin 1992; Neocosmos 1998).

Yet what seems apparent is 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 in any African emancipatory transformation. As Morobe (1987: 83) put it: 'the essence of democracy cannot be limited to debate alone. 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 [...]' 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. What it was for, 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

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auxiliary to military imperatives' (1991: 71), while its SACP ally during the same period resolved that: 'every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up towards a nationwide people's armed struggle leading to the conquest of power' (cit Barrell 1991: 71). The effect of the Soweto uprising of 1976 was to push the ANC and SACP into reviewing their strategy (there had been no ANC armed activity inside the country for 13 years anyway; Barrell 1991: 72). This review which took place in 1978-79, emphasised the possibilities of political struggle inside the country and the construction of a popular revolutionary political base. Yet despite what Barrell calls this 'turn to the masses', the overall perspective was one where 'power in South Africa would be won by revolutionary violence in a protracted armed struggle which must involve the whole people and in which partial and general mass uprisings would play a vital role' (cit. Barrell 1991: 89). In sum therefore, even as late as the 1980s'the strategic vision remained one in which political organisation was ultimately seen as subject to military imperatives - notwithstanding traces of ambiguity in some formulations' (1991: 89).

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. Thus, intellectually, a fidelity to this event must put this point at the centre of thinking about politics on the continent. Such fidelity would have to name the event and the political sequence or mode corresponding to it. To my mind, this event is most aptly named the sequence of 'People's Power' which is how it was named by those involved. It institutes the inception of a People's Power mode of politics. What should be stressed insofar as the lessons for developing a more general understanding of politics is concerned, is that the politics of this mode constituted itself subjectively outside state modes of thinking politics. This was its fundamentally innovative characteristic. Whether in fact such subjectivity resulted in an opposition to the state, as it in fact rightly did, is largely of secondary importance. This non-state subjectivity constituted its novelty simply because most revolutionary politics hitherto on the continent had been firmly situated within a state subjectivity, hence their insistence on seizing power. However, fidelity to this event is certainly not guaranteed today. Yet such fidelity must be present within the politics of post-apartheid/post-colonial political organisations or social movements if a critique of neo-liberal democracy is to be sustained in practice, i.e. if a political truth stands a chance of being asserted and established. It is to this issue that we must finally turn.

6. Understanding fidelity to the emancipatory event: the politics of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa.
A comparison of the TAC and AbM

We now no longer live within the cold war/Keynesian/social-democratic/ developmental-state period. Today, neo-liberal economics and politics have replaced state-led economic transformation by market-led growth along with massive unemployment and poverty levels while so-called de-regulation and privatisation have devastated state social provisioning infrastructure. At the same the current form of imperialism is one which is not only globalised, but has replaced its 'civilising mission' (and later 'development mission') by a liberalising and 'democratising mission' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 2007, Neocosmos 2009b). Neo-liberal market capitalism and its attendant political liberal-democratic norms are everywhere hegemonic in thought, although people throughout the world have been showing their disgust with the liberal political system by staying away from the polls.   In this context the neo-liberal state has been ruling - ensuring its legitimacy - less through the operation of parties but increasingly by institutionalising the operation of civil society organisations, in particular NGOs[22]. It is in such a context of the decline in legitimacy of parties,

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[22] Apparently USAID refers to the old South African 'struggle NGOs' as CSOs which it funds to 'function as effective policy advocacy groups' and 'to lobby' (Manji and O'Coill 2002: 14). Of course government funds its own NGOs too; see Swilling and Russell 2002.

that so-called civil society organisations have been seen as a form of popular incorporation into state politics. On the other hand, so-called 'new' social movements (which at least in Europe have now become directly embedded into the state[23]) are regularly visualised as holding the key to an emancipatory future. Too often though, such movements have shown highly contradictory features and the majority have simply been concerned to advocate their integration into either the state or the broader system.

Given the decline and loss of legitimacy of parties, how then are we to understand the relationship between popular movements and politics, between the social movements of what Hardt and Negri (2001) call the 'multitude', and politics? Hardt and Negri's idealisation of spontaneity imbues the 'multitude' with the same qualities of a historical subject with which Marx had endowed the proletariat. The 'multitude' is to be the saviours of humanity; a position seemingly adhered to also by Samir Amin (e.g. Amin and Sridhar 2002). While it is in popular social movements that the potential for an emancipatory politics exists, such a blanket uncritical argument is quite unconvincing, simply because the politics of many 'multitudes' are still imbued with insurrectionist assumptions for example, a form of politics inherited uncritically from our statist past, as insurrections were geared to taking over state power. The existence of social movements is not in itself sufficient evidence of an emancipatory alternative, and in any case it is in the character of such movements to rise and fall as their concerns become quite difficult to sustain over time. What is required, in addition to recognizing the importance of social movements, is the development, both in theory and in practice, of an emancipatory politics, something which is not simply given by capitalist society, but is, according to Badiou (1988) the outcome of a fidelity to specific 'events' as I have already noted.

It is probably in South Africa that the study of social movements is the most developed on the continent. However, this literature remains squarely within the perspective of the Western 'sociology of social movements' while ignoring the equivalent material from Asia, Latin America and Africa[24]. It is not my intention to review the South African literature here, merely to emphasise its operation within the neo-liberal framework of the human rights and civil society paradigms[25]. From within this perspective, as I have already noted, the

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[23] At least this is true of environmentalism and feminism, along with the 'old' trade union movement.

[24] The predominant character of Western sociology - including that of social movements - has been its systematic evacuation of political subjectivity from its accounts. This trend has not been equally predominant among the analyses emanating from the South, where social analyses have been more conditioned by popular politics. On Africa, see eg. Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1995), Romdhane and Moyo (2002); on India see Rao (2004) and various issues of *Subaltern Studies*.

[25] The main texts here are Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) and Jones and Stokke (2005) *inter alia* and the various publications emanating from the *Centre for Civil Society* at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

tendency is to evaluate the 'success' or otherwise of an organisation 'of' civil society in terms of its ability to influence or lobby government in favour of the group whose interests it is said to represent. Operating within civil society is said to enable this, and to help redress the obvious imbalance against the poor, which the growing inequality accompanying the spread of liberal democracy has entrenched on the continent since the 1980s at least. The existence of such organisations, NGOs in particular, is seen as politically 'empowering' the poor, to exercise citizenship rights, within an otherwise disempowering economic context. The liberal conscience can thus be assuaged without its power or dominance being in anyway contested, let alone threatened.

Within this overall perspective, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has a place of honour. Not only does it fight ostensibly for an impeccably moral issue - the provision of treatment for those dying of an incurable disease, HIV/AIDS - with which all can identify, but also it has succeeded in forcing the South African government to set out a plan for the 'rolling out' (i.e. 'delivery') of anti-retroviral drugs for AIDS sufferers, seen by most as considerably extending their life if not constituting a cure. Moreover, the TAC has combined legal action with what has been termed a 'radical' or 'confrontational' stance vis-à-vis the government's perceived lethargy on this issue, tactics derived we are told from the experience of the struggles of the 1980s (e.g. Robins 2004: 666, Mbali 2005). It is therefore seen by many as the true inheritor, not to say the bearer, of the popular traditions of struggle of the 1980s, thus vindicating the idea of a 'vibrant' civil society as a genuine indicator of democracy and the exercise of pluralism and citizenship. The conception of politics which enables this statement however is one which reduces politics to 'strategy and tactics' and largely ignores the prescriptions of the organisation and the manner in which decisions are made. This in no way constitutes a conception of politics as emancipatory and universal, but simply as a reflection of interests and the most appropriate manner to achieve them. In this context then, the TAC is seen as a model movement/NGO, with perfect 'left' credentials; it has been able to touch the world liberal conscience to such a remarkable extent that it was even nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2003.

I shall argue here that this rosy picture does not conform to reality, but rather that the politics of the TAC operate squarely within the state domain of politics and have, in spite of appearances, disabled rather than enabled a genuine active citizenship by the poor. There are several reasons for this, including its mode of organisation and massive funding, its hierarchical structure, its congruence with the international bio-medical power system and the fact that it re-enforces the ideology of the bio-medical paradigm for which people are seen as 'patients', passive recipients of medical and state *delivery*, rather than as active agents in their own cure with the help of experts. For most left-liberal politics today, the extension of the life of HIV-AIDS sufferers (not their cure, which is so far

unavailable) is to be traded for their ultimate political passivity; life is to be extended (death is to be postponed) at the expense of genuine political agency[26].

In order to stress this point, I shall contrast the TAC's politics with those of a completely different organisation, which has largely remained uncelebrated, the movement of the shack dwellers of Durban or Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). Here we have a small movement of the poor run by the poor themselves. Not an NGO, it has fought the local state tenaciously for the provision of decent housing for its members. Its politics however have remained squarely outside civil society - i.e. it has steadfastly refused to enter the realm of state and donor politics - relying rather on the commitment of a leadership drawn from its own ranks, democratic decision-making, and a rejection of state cooption and donor funding when this threatened to compromise its independence. Its politics and conceptions of itself have so far been at a distance from state politics (for which it has paid a heavy price as I have noted already), its decision-making processes have been consistently democratic, constantly involving the community. It has remained proudly independent, forcing the local state to listen to it and to take it seriously. It has contributed systematically to the production of confidence and political citizenship among the communities where it has been operating and has been expanding its membership dramatically. It is this organisation I shall argue, which has shown, at least until now, the closest fidelity to the People's Power event of 1984-86, through its democratic prescriptions on a state, which has systematically fought it at every turn using both legal and illegal means to do so.

6.1 The Treatment Action Campaign and the politics of civil society

Discussion of the politics of HIV-AIDS in South Africa have been coloured by the government's (particularly the previous president Thabo Mbeki's) attempt to place, during the early 2000s a discussion of the aetiology of the disease in the public domain, contesting the mainstream medical establishment's view of the causes of the disease, while simultaneously dragging its feet on instituting plans for providing medical care to sufferers, on the grounds of the inappropriateness of Western medical solutions to African conditions. While the government rightly attempted to question the confronting of the disease exclusively on the basis of the provision of expensive medical treatment in conditions of extreme poverty, it did it so clumsily - by seemingly refusing existing treatment to sufferers - that it alienated the national and world medical establishment, its own media, as well as middle class AIDS patients and liberal opinion in the country. As a result it soon found itself on the defensive, and was eventually forced into capitulation to existing bio-medical paradigms. Today the public debate, insofar as it exists, concerns exclusively the provision of treatment. While the TAC has been able to provide the conditions for the access

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[26] See here Badiou's discussion around the issue of euthanasia (Badiou 2001) as well as his discussion of the centrality of bodies and languages in what he calls the 'democratic materialism' of the capitalo-parliamentary system; Badiou 2006a.

to treatment of greater numbers of people, it has succeeded in doing so *ultimately* at the expense of reinforcing a culture of political passivity. This has arguably been largely because of its insistence in operating within civil society, within the state domain of politics.

The organisational structure of the TAC is similar to a trade union or party in that it is composed of local branches with provincial structures and an overall national one; indeed Friedman and Mottiar's (2004: 17) detailed study makes much of this, stressing not only the structural similarities, but also the technical knowledge required by the leadership as in labour unions. Given the collapse of the latter from popular-driven organisations in the 1970s and 1980s to bureaucratic institutions today, the comparison is instructive. Of course as with all such structures, one is not surprised to hear the centrality of the national body in decision-making and that 'major strategic decisions are initiated by the national leadership' so that there is a danger 'that the concerns of the grassroots are not informing the agenda of the leadership' (2004: 15, 9). Branches concern themselves with mobilising around campaigns largely decided at the national level and also engage in educational programmes for their members in medical matters, a process which Robins (2004: 663) refers to, rather optimistically, as 'democratising science'. This branch structure has also led to observable contradictions between leaders and membership given that the former is overwhelmingly White and educated while the latter is Black and poor, leading one activist to remark that 'historically dominant voices - primarily white-left intellectuals - have been the main mediators of the identity and aspirations of the poor' (Mngxitama 2004, cit. Friedman and Mottiar 2004: 36).

The TAC is 'an organisation with substantial full-time staff, administration and donor funded programmes'; it employed 40 people and had a budget of R18 million in 2004, 98 percent of its income being grants from donors (2004: 6). In the words of its leaders, the TAC is 'neither anti-government nor anti-ANC' (2004: 7) and according to Friedman and Mottiar, the 'TAC has a political identity which ensures a relationship with the government and ANC unlike that of most social movements' (loc.cit.). In sum then, the TAC's purpose is to ensure the delivery of treatment to all sufferers and it uses the organisation, expertise (legal and medical) and tactics to do so within the parameters set out by the state as a legitimate organisation of civil society. In one of its leader's words: 'we want to get medicine to people - we do not want to cause a revolution' (2004: 10). As such then, it is agreed by commentators that the TAC operates clearly within civil society, and combines features of both a social movement as well as an NGO, as it provides important services to its members (2004: 40). The TAC then has been described 'as a civil society organisation which seeks to make gains by mobilising grassroots people as well as by using the constitutional system' (2004: 38).

The fact that the TAC has been successful has been put down precisely to these tactics of combining 'a rights based approach as well as grassroots mobilisation' (equated in the literature with 'politics') (Robins 2004: 671). For Robins (2004) for example it is the TAC's counterpoising of (working-) 'class politics' to those

of nationalism followed by the state, which lie at the root of its success. 'Class politics' here seems to mean mobilisation 'within working-class black communities and the trade union movement' (2004: 663), a very strange understanding as if 'ethnic' or 'communitarian' politics did not also mobilise within the same social sector. To argue that the TAC's success vis-à-vis government is to be put down to the fact that the 'TAC was participating in a class-based politics that departed significantly from the cultural nationalist/identity politics promoted by the new ruling elite of Mbeki and Mokaba' (2004: 664) is quite simply a spurious argument harking back to the crude 'workerist' versus 'populist' slogans of the 1980s[27]. Apart from the fact that the TAC offered hope to sufferers, which the government did not, the fundamental reason for its success was arguably that it never challenged elite conceptions of politics or elite interests, and was concurrently able to exercise pressure on the ANC by mobilising its own constituency against the government. In particular the TAC had massive support from a sustained anti-government campaign in the media (the print media and radio in particular) on the causes of AIDS.

Moreover, the TAC never contradicted the world medical establishment - 'a highly organised and connected "community" of scientists, health professionals, and civil society organisations who contested the dissident line' upheld by the government (Robins 2004: 657) - but rather relied on, and thus reinforced, the established positions and power of the bio-medical scientific model. Unlike in the United States where AIDS activists had directly challenged the production of scientific knowledge on the matter (Epstein 1996), this was never advocated by the TAC, but only by the South African government. As such it is the TAC which has been consistently on the side of 'world opinion' and power, and the government which has been at odds with it (Vandormael 2007a, 2007b). The TAC's challenge to the drug manufacturers in court did not fundamentally impact on the 'bio-medical industrial complex' (to paraphrase Marcuse), as the TNCs could not mobilise support on an issue which quite evidently put profit before people's lives in a very public way (Robins 2004: 664).

Despite its numerous successes, this has constituted the main problem with the TAC, namely a tragic failure to criticise the bio-medical model in order to enable a genuine active citizenship and self-help, beyond the advocating for the delivery of medication. There is in fact indication that certain individuals may have understood this point, one doctor pointing out that: 'whereas anti-retroviral therapy can undoubtedly prolong lives, it can also become a conduit for the "medicalisation of poverty" and the creation of dependencies on medical experts and drugs' (see Robins, op.cit.: 666, 669). Yet this issue has not influenced the workings of the organisation, nor has it been the subject of systematic public debate. The constant reference by TAC activists to 'accepted scientific expertise' (e.g. Mbali 2004: 326) has failed to see, let alone contest,

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[27] For a lengthy discussion of this debate and its nefarious effects on popular politics in the 1980s see Neocosmos, 1999.

the political nature of the medical scientific establishment, and has relied on the weight of medical authority to argue and to win its case.

Yet surely one is entitled to look additionally into alternatives and to be suspicious of Western medicine's exclusive reliance on technology. This is even more so when AIDS treatment has to be provided to a population living in poverty which refuses to be tested for the disease, and does not have the required levels of bio-medical knowledge or indeed middle-class standards of life. The government was not wrong to question the appropriateness of Western technology in tackling the disease. An African nationalist perspective is crucially important in this respect, as Western medicine has been found wanting on numerous occasions. Witness the multinational Nestlé's advocating of bottle feeding in the 1970s for example; was this not also 'accepted scientific expertise' at the time? The political failure of the TAC has always been its inability to develop a critical perspective towards the Western bio-medical model and its unquestioning valorisation of scientificity and liberalism.

The problem with the state nationalism on which the government founded its discourse was its authoritarianism and arrogance, evidenced by the manner it went about imposing its views. The idea of insisting on the provision of vitamin cocktails is not in itself 'quackery' but sound medical practice for boosting the immune system, as is the encouragement of the setting up of community vegetable gardens in poor areas to enable a healthy diet, although these are clearly not substitutes for drugs in the case of full blown AIDS sufferers. The taking of anti-retroviral drugs is not like taking aspirin, they can only be taken at a certain level of development of the virus[28] and also presuppose a regular and substantial food diet not available to all. Moreover, they must be taken on a very strictly observed regular basis which also requires systematic and regular counselling. Additionally, patients cannot be put on alternative medication if they do not respond to treatment. Moreover, general practitioners have to go through training to prescribe such medication, as the medical profession is socialised to test medication and if the response is not appropriate to move to an alternative.

The consequences for popular democratic politics of the TAC's apparent victory over the government have arguably been twofold: first the public debate has been restricted to the provision of drugs or not; in other words the public debate exclusively revolved around technology as the primary solution to the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Second the possibility of a politics of agency for the people was replaced ultimately by passivity and reliance on 'experts', as they were now to wait for the 'rolling out' of drugs by government. This could not have been in greater conformity with political liberalism which fetishizes expertise and science and which thus systematically disempowers the people (Neocosmos 2006b). The politics of sexuality, control over one's body, the organising of community initiatives from support groups to cooperative food cultivation, all

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[28] A debate exists among experts as to whether treatment should be provided at a CD4 count of below 200 or not. The 'CD4 count' measures the antibodies produced against the viral load.

of which enable popular political self-activity, were all marginalised (or reduced to moralising) in favour of waiting for the cure to be delivered. This is the antithesis of the politics of the event of 1984-86 and People's Power.

6.2 The Abahlali baseMjondolo: beyond the politics of civil society[29]

The AbM is a Durban located movement of shack dwellers which began in 2005 after a road blockade was organised by the shack dwellers of Kennedy Road after a plot of land which had long been promised by the local municipality for housing was sold to a local industrialist. The 19th of March 2005 became an event during which shack dwellers realised that if they were not to take direct action, the promises of land and housing which they had been given would never be fulfilled. The context of this movement is the disastrous housing policies of most South African municipal authorities, which have continued with the apartheid policy of removing the poor from inner city areas to beyond the city and dumping them in environments where jobs, schools and amenities are scarce if non-existent. Given the high prices of central urban real estate, along with the fact that the poor make the place look dirty for middle class sensibilities and advertising images, the local bureaucracy is not particularly keen on thinking in terms of upgrading the areas in which people live, and simply wishes to remove the problem elsewhere. To force people to get out, the municipality has cut all amenities particularly electricity, and there are no sewage facilities, little running water (from a few taps) and approximately one toilet per thousand people. Yet the national constitution's mention of the right to housing and the social-democratic aspirations of many ANC politicians have meant that it is possible to contest this perspective, especially in Durban with its long tradition of popular militancy[30]. The following is a brief excerpt from an exchange between Deputy City Manager Derek Naidoo and residents of Kennedy Road in Durban on September 8th 2005:

> *It was put to Naidoo that this was the same as apartheid - black people were being pushed out of the city. It was put to Naidoo that this sounded like a slower and more considered version of Mugabe's attack on the poor in Harare. Naidoo said that if people didn't like it 'they should go to the constitutional court'. This is, he observed, a democracy. He was told that people would rather block the roads than go to the court. Everyone knows that the courts are for the government and the rich. When the Kennedy Road 14 first appeared in court they chose to speak for themselves. Magistrate Asmal didn't allow [them] to say one word. She just sent them back down to the cells … (Khan and Pithouse, 2005: 3).*

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[29] See the interview with S'bu Zikode of Abahlali elsewhere in this issue.

[30] There is a growing literature on the AbM and they have their own website http://abahlali.bayareafood.org/ An introduction to the history of AbM with very useful links concerning the movement can be found at http://www.metamute.org/en/A-Short-History-of-Abahlali-baseMjondolo See also the publications of the Centre For Civil Society at UKZN and in particular their Research Reports 2006, Vol1 in particular reports 40 to 43. I rely particularly here on the detailed arguments in the very important report by Pithouse (2006) which contains a detailed discussion and evaluation of the movement.

The movement grew rapidly and by November 2005 there were 14 settlements formally affiliated to it:

> *all of the 14 affiliated settlements were governed on a fully democratic basis, were holding weekly mass meetings and sending delegations, elected afresh each week, to weekly Abahlali baseMjondolo meetings. Around 20 000people had been actively mobilised by the movement in different ways and word of the movement had spread beyond the settlements in which there was regular formal participation (Pithouse 2006: 39n).*

By the end of 2006 there were 34 settlements affiliated (Richard Pithouse, personal communication). The kinds of action the AbM has been involved in have been very innovative and have included ceremonies of 'burying councillors', mass demonstrations and marches as well as the skilful use of the media which have been on the whole quite sympathetic. These have concerned the provision of housing, the upgrading of local conditions (including the provision of toilet facilities), protests against the contempt shown them by local state officials and the violence of the police. In fact they asserted their right to think as one of their number stressed: 'we are not animals. We are human beings that feel and want nice things. We think. People must understand that we think' (cit. Pithouse 2006: 37).

The politics of AbM are resolutely independent of state subjectivity. This comes across clearly in Pithouse's account which stresses the fact that AbM are not simply demanding 'delivery' by the state, rather 'they were demanding the right to co-determine their future' (2006: 35). After intense discussions they have:

> *decided to refrain from electoral politics in order to preserve the integrity, autonomy and reputation of their struggle [it was] concluded that there is a difference between 'party politics' and 'people's politics' and that the former, identified as a mechanism of elite control, will always seek to capture the latter, identified as a space for popular democracy … The principled decision to keep a distance from what is widely seen as a mode of politics that has an inevitably corrupting influence on any attempt to keep a struggle grounded in truth, was key to the rapid building of a mass movement (Pithouse op.cit.: 32).*

In a footnote Pithouse adds: 'the commitment to keeping people's politics autonomous from the corrupting influence of state power included a commitment by everyone who accepted elected office to place themselves last on the list when housing was won. This was a dramatic break with the politics of local patronage so typical of the ANC and SANCO [the South African National Civics Organisation].' In the words of S'bu Zikode one of the leaders of the movement: 'the struggle that started at Kennedy Road was the beginning of a new era … This movement is a kind of social tool by which the community hopes to get quicker results. This has nothing to do with politics or parties. Our members are part of every political organisation you may think of. This is a non-[party] political movement' (Zikode 2006a: 3).

> *The politics of the poor is an anti-party politics. Our politics is not to put someone in an office. Our politics is to put our people above that office. And when we have finished with one office we move on to the next office. Our politics is also not a politics of a few people who have learnt some fancy words and who expect everyone to follow them because they know these words. Our politics is a traditional home politics which is understood very well by all the old mamas and gogos (grannies) because it affects their lives and gives them a home. In this home everybody is important, everybody can speak and we look after each other and think about situation (sic) and plan our fight together … the … poor have no choice but to play a role in shaping and re-shaping this country into an anti-capitalist system. This is the task which the betrayal of our struggle and the struggles of our ancestors has given to us (Zikode, 2006b: 2-3).*

This politics which Zikode refers to a 'living politics' or a 'living communism' as opposed to a 'party politics' is the guiding perspective of the movement (Zikode 2009); and an axiom of equality is strictly adhered to so that all people are treated the same: 'there is only one human race. Our struggle and every struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off (sic). An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal'[31]. A person is thus a person wherever they may find themselves. Their political independence extends to donors and NGO politics in general with the result that the organisation only survives on contributions from its members and people work for it for free as they have no outside funding at all. Studies on the movement all concur that meetings are conducted democratically and that the leadership which regularly reports back on its activities to its constituency have the community's full support (Bryant 2006: 62)[32]. In the words of one leader: 'When you lead people you don't tell them what to do. You listen. The people tell you what to do' (Zikode, cit Pithouse 2006: 26). According to Pithouse (2006: 46) the democratic nature of decision making and accountability of leadership is not only born from 'deeply valued ethical commitments' but is also a necessity as 'there is no other way to build popular consent for a risky project amongst a hugely diverse group of vulnerable people with profound experiences of marginalisation and exploitation …'.

Clearly the shack dwellers in this movement do not want handouts or to be pushed around and patronised. They want to be listened to, to be taken seriously. They have tried to make the liberal democratic system work but they

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[31] All the appropriate statements (including this one by Abahlali baseMjondolo 'Statement on the Xenophobic Attacks in Johannesburg', 21/05/2008) and other documents concerning AbM can be found on their excellent website www.abahlali.org

[32] There is evidence of strong continuity between many of the democratic practices of AbM and those of the 'people's power' mode of politics of the 1980s including report backs and democratic decision making. Pithouse notes that 'Abahlali take the position that everyone in the settlement is from the settlement and so meetings are absolutely open to all adults independent of age, place of origin, ethnicity, degree of poverty, time spent in the settlement and gender'; although he stresses that, in practice, mothers with small children are politically disadvantaged due to the absence of crèches. Pithouse, op.cit.: 39n.

have been systematically betrayed and let down by their local representatives. They have therefore decided to operate beyond the state domain of politics by rejecting their own councillors as well as municipal and local elections more generally along with the state celebrations of 'freedom day', asserting that there is no freedom for the poor. In their political practice they have insisted on a steadfast principled distance from state politics which they see as totally corrupt. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will continue, nor indeed that the movement will be able to sustain itself in the face of the state onslaught and the offer of help and funds from the donor-NGO sector[33]. We should beware the temptation to idealise AbM. Yet at present this movement offers a clear indication of what a fidelity to the event of 1984-86 can look like. It is therefore, in Badiou's words, producing a truth. This truth concerns the fact that emancipatory politics can no longer be understood as state-led as was the case with the NLS mode, and this despite the central presence of the state in the field of politics. This new truth is fundamentally that ways have to be discovered to change the world without taking power (Holloway 2002).

In comparing TAC and AbM we are confronted with two modes of politics, the former 'of civil society' and fundamentally embodied within state politics, the latter at a principled distance from the state and its politics. It is as a result of engaging in state politics that the TAC has been able to successfully pressurise the government to set out a delivery programme of medication to HIV-AIDS sufferers. This success, as I have argued, has resulted from the overwhelming power of the coalition of conservative forces arraigned behind the TAC as well as from its ability to turn out large numbers of poor people desperate for treatment onto the streets. Yet it has been achieved at the expense of the possibility of development of emancipatory politics; life has been extended at the expense of ultimate passivity in the face of power. Mass mobilization here was turned on and off tactically like a tap, much as it had been in the late 1980s after the emancipatory sequence of 1984-86 had faded, according to the dictates of a national leadership seeing itself as acting in the greater good (see Cronin 1992; Neocosmos 1999).

But an evaluation of social movements from an emancipatory perspective cannot remain within the ultimately apolitical platitudes of the sociology of social movements which concerns itself with debating 'reformist' vs. 'radical' or 'accommodationist' versus 'adversarial' dichotomies. Moreover, of course, the strategy and tactics ('politics' in the language of that sociology) of the TAC and the AbM have been very similar, combining legal action with mass mobilization. Rather, such an evaluation should concern itself with whether or not movements are able to show an alternative future in the present, a possible in

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[33] The recent events of October 2009 already noted in which AbM has been systematically attacked by the state and its agencies in one of its areas of mass support in Durban show how difficult it is to undertake a politics at a distance from the state in contemporary Africa. The full consequences of these occurrences which are still ongoing as the membership of AbM have been turned into refugees in their own country, city and neighborhoods have yet to be elucidated. See the various commentaries at www.abahlali.org

the extant as Lazarus would say. The possible then can be understood as of the order of the now. In this sense, AbM may not have succeeded yet in acquiring proper housing for its members, but rather it has been successful at something arguably much more important, in asserting that the poor count and cannot be ignored and are capable of theorising on their own the basis of an emancipatory politics independent of the state and its bureaucratic managerialism. They have rediscovered a truth that any politics worthy of the name is for all and not only for some. They have been able to assert that, in the words of the *Freedom Charter*, 'South Africa Belongs to *All* who live in it'.

7. Concluding remarks

I have been concerned in this work to open up debate on the conditions for emancipatory politics in Africa. In so doing I have argued against the liberal notion of civil society as the site of an alternative politics and have rather been concerned to show that civil society is in actual fact today a domain of state politics. I have used the South African case to ague this at length. Alternative politics which hold the possibility of containing emancipatory alternatives have to be sought out in sites beyond civil society, at its margins so to speak. The possibility of the impossible, to use Badiou's expression can only be found among those who have been totally excluded by the system – the 'part of no part' in Rancière's (e.g. 2001) formulation - , including by civil society as Marx had recognised long ago when he referred to the working class as 'a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society' (Marx 1844: 186).

I have tried to show that the period 1984-86 in South Africa was an event for politics - an event of 'People's Power' - on the continent, as it provided a critique in consciousness and practice of the subjective limits of the national liberation struggle mode of politics, which had hitherto been the major point of reference for all the liberation movements in Africa including the ANC. The reasons why this event can be transformed into a truth, concern the ability of ordinary people in communities to assert themselves independently on the political stage, by constituting a politics independent of that of the state whose object is not the attainment of state power, but the changing of conditions of life. In this sense that event has been truly revolutionary. In order for this event to have the status of a truth according to Badiou, fidelity to the event must be sustained in the face of all opposition. It seems to me that by asserting that they count, by screaming 'we exist!' AbM have come the closest today to an understanding of this truth.

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About the author

Michael Neocosmos is Honorary Professor in Global Movements at Monash University, Australia and South Africa, and one of the leading social movement intellectuals in Africa. He can be contacted at michaelneocosmos AT yahoo.com