

The sublime object of nationalism¹

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Despite the extraordinary growth of articles and books about nations and nationalism over the last twenty years, critical studies of African nationalism are not reflected in this literature. This is surprising for two reasons. In the first place, resistance to French, British, Belgian and Portuguese colonialism usually happened in the name of nationalism and in pursuit of independent African nation states. In the second place, the pursuit of independent African nations was not the only form that resistance to colonialism took. Opposition to French colonialism, in particular, sought not so much the dissolution of Empire than its democratisation. Before his conversion to nationalism, for example, Leopold Senghor, the first President of Senegal, was a deputy in the French national assembly. He only reluctantly sought independence for the country². Closer to home, we will find in the figure of Sol Plaatje an ambivalence to the British Empire. On the one hand he regaled against its injustices. On the other hand he thought of himself as a loyal subject of the British crown³. What this means is that it is necessary to account for the rise of nationalism and African nationalism, in particular, as the pre-eminent form of resistance to apartheid and colonialism. This other vision of what freedom from colonialism might have looked like has been a victim of nationalist mythologies themselves. They narrate the story of an African people oppressed and exploited by foreign ones. In other words, the 'people' is taken as something that preceded the period of nationalist struggle. What this conceals, however, is how an African 'people' came into being in the first place. This book addresses itself to this question in the South African context.

African peoples emerged in and through the process of nationalist resistance to colonialism. Here we must distinguish between the people as datum and people as political subject. In the first case, the people refers to an empirical collection of individuals in a given geography. In the second, it refers to a collectivity organised in pursuit of a political end. I am interested in this second sense of the term. The argument here is that the South African 'people' came to be defined and produced in and through the politics and culture of nationalist struggle. Even if there are traces of other notions of the 'people' (clannic, for example), the image of the South African nation looms large in the political imaginary.

¹ An extract from *The Sublime Object of Nationalism. Nationalism and Democracy in South Africa*, forthcoming in 2007 with Wits University Press.

² Meredith, Martin, *The State of Africa. A history of fifty years of independence*, Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers and London, New York, Sydney, Toronto: Free Press, 2005

³ Willan, Brian, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography. Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje 1876-1932*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 2001.

This view helps us recover the specificity of the nation, not simply as a cultural artefact, but as a *political* one. I will say more about this in the course of this book. I will argue that the nation is a political community whose form is given in relation to the pursuit of democracy and freedom. If democratic authority is lodged in the 'people', what matters is the way that this 'people' is defined, delimited and produced. In this sense, the nation precedes the State, not because it has always already existed, but because it emerges in and through the nationalist struggle for State power. The history of the postcolony is, in this sense, the history of this 'people' *qua* production.

From this perspective we have to re-evaluate knee-jerk judgements about the failure of modernity in Africa. If the mark of 'modern' power, as opposed to tribal, monarchical or dynastic authority, is that it vests sovereignty in the 'people' itself, African nationalism too "locates the source of individual identity within a 'people', which is seen to be the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity"⁴. What matters is a) the limit and character of the 'people' in whom power is supposed to repose and b) the political forms through which the 'people' is represented. Simply put, the democratic project firmly places the identity of the 'people' on the agenda. We should not be surprised, therefore, to observe that the 'democratisation' of African states during the 1980's has been accompanied by a renewed preoccupation with authenticity⁵. Yet, if the democratic project poses the question of the 'people', we will see that an answer can take one of two forms. The first is that the people is a nation. Alternatively, the people is a democracy.

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As a way of prefacing this argument, I want to consider an advertisement that appeared in the Sunday Times, a major South African weekend newspaper, in 2001. In 'The Media vs President T.M Mbeki', Ashley Mabogoane, Jabu Mabuza, Pearl Mashabela, Prof. Sam Mokgokong, Kgomotso Moroka, Don Ncube, Ndaba Ntsele, Christine Qunta, Mfundu Vundla, Peter Vundla and Sindiwe Zilwa, accused the media of providing a platform for a right-wing plot to subvert South African democracy. They cautioned the President not to "be distracted by the current campaign against you," and added that "under [Mbeki's] leadership we have the best government this country has ever had". Finally, they advised the President to "go ahead and govern: govern fairly; govern with compassion but govern decisively". Let us note the terms of the argument.

On the one hand there was a right-wing conspiracy. It was spearheaded by *White* so-called liberals from the Apartheid era, certain so-called independent/research organisations (it is not clear which ones) run by whites and a 'few' members of the white business community. They were aided by a few black commentators "who unwittingly contribute[d] to this campaign". These forces act in concert; spreading vicious, underhanded 'disinformation' about the President. Their intentions are malicious: to discredit him personally, and by way of him, the competence of Black people generally. Even more sinister is their sabotage of the country's economy (by portraying the country as a place not to do business in) and their attempt to subvert the will of the people (by questioning the fitness of a democratically elected

⁴ Greenfeld, Liah, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, p. 3.

⁵ Geschiere, Peter, 'Funerals and Belonging. Different Patterns in South Cameroon' in *African Studies Review*, 48.2, 2005.

President). In doing all this, Whites want to obstruct the dismantling of the apartheid system to secure the benefits they gained from its workings.

On the other hand, there are *Blacks* who deeply love their country, who balance criticism with constructive mention of the government's landmark achievements, who see in the attacks on the President a hateful, contemptuous assault on democracy. Blacks have faith in the potential of the country to be a well managed, technologically advanced and (truly) egalitarian society. Moreover, whereas racist Whites see in the 'errors' of the President the necessary failure of a black man, they observe in them the all too human weaknesses of a man. Whereas Whites question the very competence of Mbeki's leadership, and by association the leadership of all Blacks, they propose guidance to a leader whose only weakness is that he is human.

Let us not worry about the truthfulness of this claim – that there is a conspiracy – other than to note how commonplace such claims have become in South Africa. Let us note rather that the advert makes certain epistemological claims that will help us determine its political genealogy. In particular, what is at stake is the nature of certain 'facts'. Do they consist of independent and mostly unrelated actions or events? Or are they merely moments in a larger drama that is unfolding. Take, for example, the question of the media 'campaign'. Here a number of articles, appearing in different newspapers and at different times, and written by diverse journalists are seen to evidence an underlying unity, one that exceeds their literality (as newspaper articles), to reveal the secret and underhanded work of (racist) conspirators. Of course, many journalists and newspaper editors, in countering this claim, asserted precisely the opposite. Abbey Makoe wrote in the *Saturday Star*, for example, that "[t]he era of white-owned media dominating public opinion in South Africa can no longer be used as an excuse for lazy black professionals who hardly ever make an effort to participate in matters of public debate" (*Saturday Star* 12/5/2001). Rather than symptomatic of a conspiracy, these "awful" claims against Mbeki were the work of "individuals". More importantly, their predominance was less a sign of White conspiracy than it was of something else: the "quietude of silence" into which black commentators had fallen. Unlike the 1960's and 1970's that "ticked" to the eloquence of writers like Steve Biko, Barney Pitso, Nchaupe Mokoape, Mamphela Ramphele (and many others) , the new elite ("self-styled struggle heroes") do not read, they do not write and they fail, therefore, to participate in the processes of national agenda-setting. Instead of whining privately, winging amongst themselves, and then dangling fat chequebooks in front of editors, wrote Makoe, they should state their views in public debate. Unfounded perceptions about Mbeki, he implied, are prevalent in the media because they have not been shown-up for the "horrible" views that they are by literate and articulate black writers. If Makoe, nonetheless, sympathised with their frustration (that Mbeki is the subject of offensive articles), John Matshikiza was more dismissive. In the *Mail and Guardian* he called it, "nonsense". "So, where are these whites?" he asked. "And where are the forums that are endemically racist and reactionary [...]" (*Mail and Guardian* 24/5/2001). What both authors criticize are the so-called facts of the advert: that there is a White right-wing media campaign. What neither raise, however, is the logic of the argument itself. It is composed of the following premises:

- Blacks want to dismantle the legacy of apartheid.
- President Mbeki is Black
- He is head of a democratic Black government.
- Since 1994 a million houses have been built, 1,3 million housing subsidies approved, 400 000 homes electrified and 120 clinics completed.

- Mbeki as the successful leader of a Black government redressing the legacy of apartheid is helping Black people regain their dignity.
- To criticise President Mbeki is to want to preserve the legacy of apartheid, to undermine Black rule, threaten democracy and to insult the dignity of Blacks.

The syllogisms above rest on three argumentative devices. The first is what we might call logical, the second empirical and the third is a rhetorical device. The least interesting part of this argument is its circularity: turning back the legacy of apartheid is included in the very definition of being Black. This makes it *logically* indifferent to any empirical proof. Blacks are, by definition, reversing the apartheid inheritance. Yet the advert is not content with such argumentative fiat. Rather, it invites us to measure the truthfulness of its claims by a 'factual' measure: number of houses built and so on. It begs the question: what if the President cannot be shown empirically to be reversing the legacy of apartheid? For the most part this is the level at which debate happens.

This line of reasoning, whatever its merits and demerits, obscures another more worrying argumentative device. The advert employs a rhetorical claim that appeals to a different standard of evidence than that of the record *in fact* of President Mbeki and his government. On the adverts terms the argument can still be true even if the 'facts' are wrong. Or even: the 'bad' facts are enrolled as further support of why the President is so good. What is at stake are the criteria of good and bad, true and false. Discussing when people have the "right to criticise", the advert, makes the following claims:

"The White rightwing forces do not realise that the right to criticise is accompanied by a responsibility to be fair and to recognise the landmarks and the achievements of the government and Black people in the way Black journalists and commentators do. In the absence of such balance, no amount [sic] of self-righteous claims of the public interest, transparency and press freedom will conceal their real motives".

Valid criticism is premised on love for the country and its people. It is predicated on loyalty to the government. This is what authentic Blacks do: they caution when the President "errs", they lift him when he "stumbles", they know that he is human and sometimes behaves as such, they know too that his government is the best South Africa has ever had. This is the standard of authentic criticism. To act differently is evidence of, at least, a lack of patriotism and, at worst, racism and treason. This is why Black writers and journalists balance their criticism with praise. But there is an anomaly. Certain Blacks, it would seem, do not. In discussing the identities of the plotters, the advertisement makes the following startling claim: "Separately from them (the White right-wingers), there are a few Black commentators who unwittingly contribute to this campaign". What these unspecified Blacks lack is authenticity, presumably because they find fault without praise. It is precisely this rhetorical device that Xolela Mangcu rebuts. He writes:

"[T]he advertisement raises an important point about the moral autonomy of black people. The ad relies on a logic of black authenticity that urges them to put solidarity with their leaders or heroes above everything else. In this case the history of racial oppression is used as racial blackmail, or what Mothubi Mutloatse describes as 'the liberation handcuffs that have given us Mugabe, Nujoma and now Chiluba' (Sunday Independent, 13/5/2001).

Mangcu is troubled that the appeal to Black solidarity is elevated above what he calls 'moral reasoning': the autonomy to make ethical judgments about what is right or

right or wrong. In other words, he refuses to condone the line that the President is due support simply because he is Black (Sunday Independent, 13/5/2001).

Mangcu is defending a notion of Blackness that balances solidarity with what he calls moral autonomy. This, in contrast to the terms of the advert: Blackness/loyalty to the President and government. His remarks go to the core of what is novel in the way Blackness is sometimes (and more and more) discussed. Authentic Blacks support the President and the government, not on the basis of its record in advancing a certain project, but simply because it is populated by Blacks. Herein lies the fundamental rupture with Black Consciousness and the politics of National Democratic Revolution. Blackness no longer denotes a social position (in the racial capitalist relations of production) or a psychological condition. It designates an authentic national subject loyal to the state simply because it is controlled by other blacks like it. The 'facts' are irrelevant to the proof. Or rather, the argument appeals to other 'facts'. But what are these facts? Or rather, what is the new mark of authenticity? Who is *Black* and not merely black? If the measure of Blackness is not given by the degree to which the legacy of apartheid is reversed, then nor is it simply a question of complexion. We recall that there are Blacks (more correctly, blacks) in the service of the plotters. So, to what does Blackness refer?

Let us approach this displacement in the following way. In terms of BC and NDR, a black was *Black* to the extent that s/he undertook certain concrete, particular actions: resisted racial oppression, struggled against exploitation, asserted the value of black culture and history. In the same way, and following this logic, a government was Black, that is, *libératoire*, to the extent that it took certain actions to reverse the legacy of apartheid: ended racial discrimination, redressed the material inequality between blacks and white, and so on. Authenticity had a measure that was evidenced by particular facts. What matters here is a certain epistemology: that belief *follows* from evidence. "I support the government because, through a process of reasoning and verification, I have come to the conclusion that it is truly reversing the legacy of apartheid". We recall, however, that this is not the standard of truth suggested by the advert. Valid criticism, criticism in other words that is true, is by definition balanced by praise. And how do we know this? Precisely because blacks that reproach the ANC government (without complimenting it) lose their claim to authenticity. Certainly, President Mbeki makes mistakes, but in essence, the advert holds, he is in turning back the apartheid tide. Or rather: President Mbeki is an excellent Black leader; over and above the details of his actual political record. What is the condition of truth in such a claim? What is at stake is a certain ontology: belief (that the government is authentically Black) derives not from evidence (datum, collected, sorted and interrogated by reason). Rather, the facts are *revealed through belief*. A mysterious inversion. Only through loyalty to the government (patriotism) is it apparent how President Mbeki and his government are addressing the vestiges of apartheid. Knowledge follows from belief. Or, access to the truth is only attained through *faith*. This last term is precise here. For the analogy is Christian religious conviction.

"[...] to believe in Christ because we consider him wise and good is a dreadful blasphemy - it is, on the contrary, only the act of belief itself which can give us insight into his goodness and wisdom" (Kierkegaard cited in Zizek:1992, p.3).

We might say: to gauge the excellence of President Mbeki on the basis of his record is unpatriotic. On the contrary, belief itself in his excellence will reveal just how the legacy of apartheid is being redressed. The 'facts' by which we measure the merit of President Mbeki (as a Black) are those of a mysterious and sublime quality.

Blackness here is attached to a spiritual knowing; a knowing through faith, where turning back the vestiges of apartheid refers to some spiritual, metaphysical redress. And: this knowledge is accessible only to authentic Blacks because they alone are true believers. What Nation-Building does is transform the presidency and the government into quasi-religious objects that endure all torments and survive with immaculate beauty.

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Unless we recognise that there is a profoundly new articulation of Blackness today we will not be in a position properly to evaluate its politics. The measure of Blackness is today that of National Sovereignty. By this term I do not intend State Sovereignty. If the latter refers to the ability, in Agamben's terms, to define the state of exception⁶, National Sovereignty refers to the control of state institutions by authentic representatives of the Nation. An Authentic National Community is merely that group deemed the veritable bearer of the national mission; whatever it may be. In other words, a distinction must be entered between a citizen as such and an Authentic National Subject. So, even if citizenship is founded on principles of universal human rights, for example, Nation-Building would have us say that some citizens are more authentically members of the nation than others. At stake is the measure of freedom. Nationalism associates 'being free', the ability to see the world as it really is and act accordingly, with a determinate state of being – being, for example, a 'white man' or an 'individual'. Conversely, the absence of these marks of population is associated with a state of unfreedom – being, for example, 'black' or a 'woman'. We might say, that citizens who are not national subjects are not equal because they are not free and they are not free because they are not national subjects⁷. What we are discussing here, essentially, is the nature of legitimate authority. Who, in other words is a legitimate bearer of state power in society?

On these terms the current struggle within the African National Congress over the identity of President Thabo Mbeki's successor is a national conflict par excellence. At stake is less an ideological struggle between, say, (neo)liberalism and socialism, than a conflict about the measure of national authenticity. Who is more authentically a representative of the nation, Thabo Mbeki or Jacob Zuma?

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Let me end by discussing something of the concepts and vocabulary of this analysis. I have used a range of familiar terms in an unfamiliar way and also made-up some new ones. Most important amongst these are 'citizen' and 'authentic national subject'; discussed throughout the text, for the sake of ease, as a 'national subject'. I have opposed these two terms in order to capture the difference between two kinds of political community. The first is a democracy, conceived not simply as a mode of government, but as a *form of society*. The second is a nation, also understood as a particular kind of society. The first is composed of 'citizens' and the, second, of

⁶ See Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* (translated by Kevin Attell), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

⁷ I have borrowed this schema from Etienne Balibar who describes the "double conditional proposition" on which universalism rests: "if men are free (and must be treated as such by political institutions), it is because they are equal, and if they are equal (and must be recognized as such) it is because they are all free". Hence exclusions to citizenship are no longer based on what is outside humanity, but rather on what is not free (Balibar, Etienne, *We, The People of Europe. Reflections on transnational citizenship* (translated by James Swenson), Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 59).

'national subjects'. I have invoked this last term, national subject, in order to avoid confusion.

We will see, for reasons associated with the historical origins of democracy, that the term 'democracy' is seldom opposed to that of 'nation'. In other words, the two terms are hardly thought to be contradictory, except when nationalism goes 'bad' - when it is associated with fascism and racism. In this regard, in conversational and some academic writing, it makes sense to talk and write of 'citizens of the nation'. Here the two terms are reconciled by an appeal to distinct 'levels'. The nation refers to the political community (demos) in which citizens are entitled to exercise their rights and responsibilities. We might say that the nation belongs to the ontology of the political, whereas the citizen belongs to the ontic. In other words, the term 'citizen' is simply the name for the subject of the nation. We will see later that this is the way that Jurgen Habermas conceptualises the relationship between them⁸. The purpose of this book is to argue that there is a heavy price to pay for this seemingly benign formulation. It comes at the expense of a certain idea and practice of democracy. The citizen is the subject *par excellence* of democracy, not of the nation.

When we discuss democracy simply as a kind of politics, as a way of exercising power, it becomes akin to, say, dictatorship or oligarchy or republicanism or liberalism. What such a notion foregrounds is democracy *qua* system of institutions, practices of decision-making, rules and regulations, rights and obligations. As a form of society, what comes into view, in contrast, are the very persons that inhabit the political community. What are the customs and codes that govern how they relate to one another? From such a perspective, we are able, that is, to undertake a political anthropology of the demos. This is where the difference between the citizen and the national subject becomes most apparent. The citizen is hailed through democratic institutions and acts according to democratic norms – what I will call ethical values. The national subject is produced in and through the nationalist movement; supplemented by state bodies if it comes to power.

The key point to emphasise is that individuals are not simply caught in disciplinary apparatuses, they are also interpellated as subjects. What counts is the way that power is subjectivised, internalised as something one believes in for oneself. Let us recall an example of the way that interpellation happens. In the case of Christianity, writes Althusser, Christian religious ideology says: "I address myself to you, a human individual called Peter (every individual is called by his name, in the passive tense, it is never he who provides his own name), in order to tell you that God exists and that you are answerable to him. It adds: God addresses himself to you through my voice (Scripture having collected the Word of God, Tradition having transmitted it, Papal Infallibility fixing it for ever on 'nice' points). It says: this is who you are: you are Peter! This is your origin, you were created by God for all eternity, although you were born in the 1920th year of Our Lord! This is your place in the world! This is what you must do! By these means, if you observe the 'law of God' you will be saved, you, Peter, and will become part of the Glorious Body of Christ"⁹.

This is a banal discourse, Althusser tells us, until something new and remarkable happens. Peter is interpellated as a subject when he replies: "Yes, it really is me"¹⁰. "I am Peter, a Christian who believes in God and follows His laws and customs". The

⁸ Habermas, Jurgen. *The Postnational Constellation. Political Essays* (Max Pensky, translator, editor), Cambridge : Polity Press, 2001.

⁹ Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)' in *Mapping Ideology* (ed. Slavoj Zizek), Verso: London and New York, 1997, p. 133,

¹⁰ Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 133.

key moment, the moment of interpellation, happens, that is, when the subject (with a small 's') recognises that he or she does occupy the place that ideology designates for him or her; whether as a Christian, or a boss or a worker (i.e. becomes a Subject with a capital 'S'). The key point to note is that obedience to the law comes when the law itself is internalised, when, that is, the subject of the rule obeys the law because he or she believes in it.

I want to extend this logic to the figure of the citizen. Citizens are hailed as Subjects through democratic apparatuses. Democratic Ideology says: "Peter, you are a citizen. Even if you believe in God, here in the demos, the Law arises from the decisions that you and other citizens take collectively. You are free to have your own ideas. You are free to act upon them, but only in so far as you respect the equality of others, who are citizens too".

A Citizen as such, that is, *qua* Subject, emerges when he or she says: "Yes, I really am a citizen. I have the same rights and responsibilities as those around me and I will respect them as citizens like me". What counts is a process (rituals, ceremonies) through which the individual comes to see that he or she really is like those around him or her, that they are equal in worth, and that despite their differences, they share with each other a deep solidarity. This is how an election functions; even if its effects are short-lived. There in the queue, waiting to cast one's ballot, standing between others also waiting to cast theirs, irrespective of one's politics, background, wealth, culture, religion and so on, one comes to see and feel that one really is an individual, equal to those around one. Listen to Desmond Tutu about South Africa's first democratic elections. Writing at the time he had this to say: "What an incredible week it has been for us South Africans. We all voted on 27 and 28 April [1994] in the first truly democratic election in this beautiful country. We are still on Cloud Nine and have not yet touched terra firma. I said it was like falling in love. That is why it seems the sun is shining brighter, the flowers seem more beautiful, the birds sing more sweetly and the people – you know, the people are really beautiful. They are smiling, they are walking taller than before 27 April. They have suddenly discovered that they are all South Africans. And they are proud of that fact. [...] They stood in the voting queues together – white, black, coloured, Indian – and they discovered that they were compatriots"¹¹. We should take Bishop Tutu seriously here. In those queues, whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians became South Africans. It is there, even if only for a short moment, that they became beautiful to each other, fell in love, developed a deep horizontal solidarity.

Is this not the challenge of democracy: to regularise such encounters so that they are part of the ordinary lived experience of people?

Is this not the proper measure of deliberative or participatory democratic forums? They socialise individuals according to democratic norms and values. There, in the forum, one is called to listen to the other, to accord him or her respect, and, even when one disagrees forcefully with what he or she says, open oneself to his or her thinking. Hence, we might say that the value of multiplying the instances of democratic participation *viz* the allocation of state budgets, the development of policy, the delivery of services and so on, is that it will proliferate democratic encounters. Aren't these forums, ultimately, likely to function efficiently and effectively when their members accord each other the respect due to citizens? We can begin to develop a critique of liberalism from such a perspective. Liberalism asks individuals to treat each other with respect and tolerance in the political arena; it expects them to

¹¹ Tutu, Desmond, *The Rainbow People of God. A spiritual journey from apartheid to freedom* (edited by John Allen), Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006, p. 257.

behave, that is, according to democratic norms. Yet, by valorising the market, and by reducing the (potential) opportunities for democratic participation, through privatisation, for example, it a) lessens the chances of democratic socialisation and b) encourages institutions which interpellate individuals as self-interested (selfish) competitors. Is this not the same problem with certain kinds of postcolonial theory? It looks forward to cosmopolitan conviviality while finding the principle of 'sameness' between people of different cultures, geographies, religions and so on, in their participation as consumers. In the same way, it values democratic norms while encouraging practices that are at odds with them.

What is important to note is that democratic interpellation opens the individual to the reasoning and demands of those around him or her. The citizen, in other words, is open to a measure of evidence (empirical facts and logical argumentation) upon which his or her beliefs are founded or against which they can be confounded.

Despite appearances, this is not how popular interpellation happens. The nationalist subject is interpellated within a *structure of circularity*¹². Democratic interpellation is short-circuited so that any opening to the other is closed off.

We have an excellent insight into how this mechanism functions in the 1963 essay of Nat Nakasa, *Johannesburg, Johannesburg*. It is worth citing at length.

"I remember having dinner with a friend in one of the less prosperous white suburbs. One of the guests that night was a talented Afrikaner painter. [...] My host had hinted earlier that the painter was a Nationalist, a supporter of Dr. Verwoerd's apartheid policy. The same man had spent much of his afternoon trying to keep alive a newborn African baby which had been abandoned on a pavement. [...] Having talked about his paintings and jazz we gravitated inevitably to the colour question. I wanted to know if he really was a Nationalist, and he said yes. We had by now warmed to each other, lighting cigarettes for one and all, sharing the same concern about the food which seemed to take a long time getting ready.

'But what kind of a Nationalist are you', I asked.

'But why?'

'How can you vote for apartheid and then come and drink brandy with me?'

'But there is nothing wrong in drinking brandy with you. I would like to drink with you anywhere. At my place or yours, for that matter'.

'What if I told you that I have no place?'

'What do you mean?'

'Just that, I have no place and that's because of the laws you vote for.'

'What? Where are you going to sleep tonight, for instance?'

'I don't know. I may sleep here; wherever I can find a bed tonight.'

The painter was moved. I liked seeing his puzzled face.

'Well, if... you mean what you've said, you can come and live with me. We have a whole empty room in that house.'

Now I stopped being amused. Something was wrong somewhere.

¹² My thanks to Peter Hudson for this expression.

'But the party you vote for has passed the law which says that's illegal, too,' I said.

Now the painter was blushing. He looked the other way and picked up his glass. I became more and more irritated.

'Why are you a Nationalist if you are willing to stay with me? Don't you want the races to be separated?'

Suddenly, the painter took off his glasses and looked at me appealingly: 'You see,' he said, 'I am an Afrikaner. The Nationalist Party is my people's party. That's why I vote for it'¹³.

Let us note that as individuals the painter and Nakasa have much in common: they are both jazz enthusiasts, enjoy painting and are concerned by the delay in the serving of dinner. The painter is even worried that Nakasa is homeless and offers him a place to stay. What is important for our purposes is that Nakasa captures precisely the logic that governs the movement from a democratic logic to nationalism. The moment the painter becomes an Afrikaner, that is, a nationalist, he ceases to belong to the same society as Nakasa. He ceases to belong to that world where strangers meet as equals and learn to like or dislike each other on the basis of their social qualities (common interests, common values, sense of humour and so on). There we have a precise description of the nation. It is that domain where people do not meet as equals, but always already as representatives of 'peoples'. Therein lies the nationalist short-circuit.

Nationalist ideology says: "You are Nat Nakasa, a black person". "You may love jazz and painting and good conversation. You are likeable and friendly and interesting. But as a Black, you are essentially unlike me, a White person". The nationalist subject is rigidly caught in a tautological structure where his or her relation to others is defined in advance, before meeting or experiencing them, if you like. Every encounter is always already closed, it can only confirm what one already knows (that Blacks have good rhythm, that Jews are miserly, that Arabs are fundamentalists, that Germans like beer, that the English have a good sense of humour, that Nigerians are corrupt, that the French are arrogant and so on).

This is the general form of the nation. It is composed of subjects who are marked by a surplus vis-à-vis belief. They are indifferent to empirical vicissitudes, because their attitude to other persons and things is always already built into their identity as authentic national subjects. Interpellation does not so much instil within individuals a 'dominant ideology', in the sense of ideas and beliefs, as organise a way of thinking and acting. In other words, the particular content of democratic and/or nationalist ideas is not necessarily 'born' in either the democratic organisation or the nationalist movement. The point is that popular interpellation organises ideas and concepts in a tautological structure such that the relation between terms is always already given in advance.

Let us finish by giving to the demos its proper limit as a democracy. The boundary encloses citizens who are bonded by a special solidarity as democrats. What lies beyond the demos is not another nation, but the nation full stop.

¹³ Nakasa, Nat, 'Johannesburg, Johannesburg' in *The World of Nat Nakasa* (ed. Patel, E), Johannesburg : Ravan Press, 1975, p. 21- 23.