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During the past decades traditional notions of sovereignty have been challenged in Europe. First, we have the erosion of sovereignty induced by the process of European Integration. Secondly, the new waves of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe and the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee policies of 'Fortress Europe' and 'closed borders' along with the intensification of racism and islamophobia, both as ideological climate but also as official state policy, have opened up the debate regarding the relation between sovereignty and ethnicity. On the one hand, any attempt towards a rupture with the embedded and constitutionalised neoliberalism of the EU in order to initiate processes of social transformation and emancipation, should necessarily take the form of a reclaiming of popular sovereignty and democratic control over crucial aspects of economic and social policy. On the other hand, we must deal with the association of sovereignty with nationalism, racism and colonialism, tragically exemplified in the way the Far Right links the question of sovereignty to its own authoritarian racist agenda. To deal with these challenges I take a critical position to both neo-Kantian conceptions of cosmopolitan rights and 'neo-republican' defences of the nation-state and the people as common history and shared values. In contrast I suggest that we rethink the people in a 'post-nationalist' and de-colonial way as the emerging community of all the persons that work, struggle and hope on a particular territory, as the reflection of the emergence of a potential historical bloc

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Introduction

The very notion of sovereignty and all the political notions associated with it have been facing a series of important challenges, especially in Europe. On the one hand we have all the recent developments in the construction of the European Project and the entrance to the era of the 'Memoranda of Understanding' that represent an even more aggressive version of the reduced sovereignty that has been, one way or the other, at the centre of European Integration from the beginning. The very notion that a country, such as Greece and to a lesser degree Ireland or Portugal, can be put under supervision and surveillance, with all major policy decisions being referred to the endless negotiations with the European institutions, exemplifies this tendency. From the euro as a form of ceding of national monetary sovereignty to the Treaties that give priority to European Institutions and the new mechanisms of disciplinary supervision of member states' economies, exemplified in the Greek experience, the European Integration process has been a process of imposition of a condition of reduced and limited sovereignty, affecting not only 'peripheral countries' but also countries of the EU core. Moreover, these developments make sovereignty a particular exigency, in the sense that any break with austerity and neoliberalism has to take the form of the exercise of a sovereign collective will over other institutional constraints, such as the terms of the EU treaties, the role of the ECB or the financial, monetary and institutional architecture of the Eurozone.

On the other hand, the new waves of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe and the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee policies of 'Fortress Europe' and 'closed borders' along with the intensification of racism and Islamophobia, both as ideological

climate but also as official state policy, have opened up the debate regarding the relation between sovereignty and ethnicity.

The reaction to the current wave of refugees and migrants from the entire systemic political spectrum, along with the new versions of the 'clash of civilizations' associated with an antiterrorist policy that is based even more upon Islamophobia, stress the fact that questions of identity and ethnicity remain a highly contested terrain and that we are facing a return to nationalist and racist discourses and practices. The same goes for the recurring insistence of the Far Right on a form of sovereignty strongly associated with the nation, defined in an almost racist way.

Recent developments, such as the British vote in favour of recuperating the aspects of sovereignty that were ceded as part of participation in the European Union, and the political and ideological confrontations surrounding the British debate, before and after the referendum, also brought forward this challenge. Without underestimating all the ugly aspects of xenophobia and racism expressed in parts of the Brexit campaign, it is obvious that important segments of the working class and other subaltern classes saw in the reclaiming of sovereignty a way out of austerity, lack of democracy, lack of control over their lives.[1]

At the same time, in contemporary debates in the Left one can see the tension between different positions but also the tension *inside* each position. For example, the supporters of the position that any attempt to establish social and political rights for those who fall outside the limits of the nation necessarily implies some form of transnational polity have to face the fact that contemporary transnational institutions such as the EU in fact not only are instrumental in establishing new forms of exclusion (such as increased barriers on refugees and migrants and in general non 'EU-nationals'), but also play an important part in the erosion of any possibility of democratically opting for policies representing the collective interests of the subaltern classes.[2] At the same time, those who support some form of reclaiming sovereignty as part of an attempt to re-establish democracy in opposition to neoliberalism

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[1] For a detailed analysis of the different dynamics inside the Leave vote in the British Referendum see Watkins 2016.

[2] This was exemplified in Jean Claude-Juncker's statement that "there can be no choice against European treaties" (Sudais 2015).

have to face the fact that any return to a traditional 'national' definition of the collective political body of democracy will lead to various forms of exclusion.

So the question I will try to deal with in this text, albeit in a rather schematic way, is whether it is possible to articulate the demand to reclaim sovereignty as part of a democratic and emancipative project on the part of the subaltern classes, which will take account of the fact of mass migration and mass refugee movements and avoid falling into the pitfalls of varieties of nationalism, exclusion and even state-sanctioned racism. But first we must see the answers that have been offered so far.

1. *The limits of neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism*

One is what we might call the Neo-Kantian answer. Kant (1795) formulated his conception of cosmopolitan rights in his text on perpetual peace when he suggested three interconnected principles in order to attain peace in the new international landscape that was formed by the emergence of the nation-State: a) that the civil constitution of every state must be republican; b) that the rights of nations shall be based on a federation of free states; and c) that the cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality. As many commentators have already noted,[3] one can already see here the expression of tensions that we also see today, such as the tension between the nation-State and a universal form of rights, leading to Kant substituting the fully cosmopolitan right, namely a global form of full political rights, with a right of hospitality. We also know, both from historical experience and from writings such as Hannah Arendt's, how the contemporary international law on migrants and refugees was formed after the experience of big masses of stateless populations in the first half of the twentieth century and the emergence as a political and juridical question of the "right to have rights".

Man of the twentieth century has become just as emancipated from nature as eighteenth-century man was from history. History and nature have become equally alien to us, namely, in the sense that the essence of man can no longer be comprehended in terms of either category. On the other hand, humanity,

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[3] See for example Benhabib 2004.

which for the eighteenth century, in Kantian terminology, was no more than a regulative idea, has today become an inescapable fact. This new situation, in which "humanity" has in effect assumed the role formerly ascribed to nature or history, would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain whether this is possible. For, contrary to the best-intentioned humanitarian attempts to obtain new declarations of human rights from international organizations, it should be understood that this idea transcends the present sphere of international law which still operates in terms of reciprocal agreements and treaties between sovereign states; and, for the time being, a sphere that is above the nations does not exist. (Arendt 1958, p. 298)

Today, the neo-Kantian perspective mainly takes the form of an increased emphasis on the emergence of institutional forms of transnational political cooperation and the potential creation of elements of a global political cooperative and even federative form that would guarantee the universal character of basic human rights and exactly guarantee the "right to have rights".

Jürgen Habermas' propositions regarding the emergence of a postnational configuration presents exactly this tendency. Naturally, Habermas is well aware of the neoliberal and undemocratic character of the actual construction of European Union, yet he sees it as the only way to actually create a postnational political form that would guarantee rights and reinstate the welfare state, provided that there is an enhancement of democratic procedures and forms of postnational political education. Habermas' suggestion that it is possible as part of the process of European Integration to see the emergence of democratic forms at the European level that could foster the development of a cosmopolitan consciousness and forms of truly global citizenship is based upon his particular conception of democracy itself. Democracy is not the exercise of a collective popular will, but rather a complex series of deliberative processes as communicative practices that enhance the emergence of more rational forms:

> Today, the public sovereignty of the people has withdrawn into legally institutionalized procedures and the informal, more or less discursive opinion- and will-formation made possible by basic rights. I am assuming here a network of different communicative forms, which, however, must be organized in such a way that one can presume they bind public

administration to rational premises. In so doing, they also impose social and ecological limits on the economic system, yet without impinging on its inner logic. This provides a model of deliberative politics. This model no longer starts with the macrosubject of a communal whole but with anonymously intermeshing discourses. (Habermas 1996, p. 505)

Then democracy at the European level does not imply the emergence of a European people or demos (as collective will and identity) but rather the intensification of these processes of deliberation in all their complexity.

The European market will set in motion a greater horizontal mobility and multiply the contacts among members of different nationalities. In addition to this, immigration from Eastern Europe and the poverty-stricken regions of the Third World will heighten the multicultural diversity of society. This will no doubt give rise to social tensions. But if those tensions are dealt with productively, they can foster a political mobilization that will give additional impetus to the new endogenous social movements already emergent within nation-States – I am thinking of the peace, environmental, and women's movements. These tendencies would strengthen the relevance that public issues have for the lifeworld. At the same time, there is a growing pressure of problems that can be solved only at a coordinated European level. Under these conditions, communication complexes could develop in Europe-wide public spheres. These publics would provide a favorable context both for new parliamentary bodies of regions that are now in the process of merging and for a European Parliament furnished with greater authority. (Habermas 1996, pp. 506-507)

Habermas is fully aware that at the international level there are difficulties even for this communicative and argumentative form of deliberation that he offers as an alternative to popular sovereignty with the boundaries of the nation-State.

In a politically constituted community organized via a state, this compromise formation is more closely meshed with procedures of deliberative politics, so that agreements are not simply produced by an equalization of interests in terms of power politics. Within the framework of a common political culture, negotiation partners also have recourse to common value orientations and shared conceptions of justice, which make an understanding beyond instrumental-rational agreements possible. But on the international level this "thick" communicative embeddedness is missing. (Habermas 2001, p. 109)

Habermas thinks that we can find new forms of postnational unifying identity in exactly this attachment to these democratic procedures, at the national and transnational level, which he defines as a form of "constitutional patriotism".

As the examples of multicultural societies like Switzerland and the United States demonstrate, a political culture in which constitutional principles can take root need by no means depend on all citizens' sharing the same language or the same ethnic and cultural origins. A liberal political culture is only the common denominator for a constitutional patriotism *(Verfassungspatriotismus)* that heightens an awareness of both the diversity and the integrity of the different forms of life coexisting in a multicultural society. In a future Federal Republic of European States, the same legal principles would also have to be interpreted from the perspectives of different national traditions and histories. (Habermas 1996, p. 500)

However, it is exactly here that the problem with Habermas' position lies: in his conception of democratic politics. His communicative conception of the "categorical imperative", ever since his *Theory of Communicative Action,* means that, both at the national and the international level, he has moved away from politics as confrontation or struggle between antagonistic class strategies (even if they are articulated as competing versions of what is the "collective will" of society), towards a normative and procedural conception of politics as attempt towards creating optimal conditions of communication and argumentation.

Such a discourse-theoretical understanding of democracy changes the theoretical demands placed on the legitimacy conditions for democratic politics. A functioning public sphere, the quality of discussion, accessibility, and the discursive structure of opinion- and will-formation: all of these could never entirely replace conventional procedures for decision-making and political representation. But they do tip the balance, from the concrete embodiments of sovereign will in persons, votes, and collectives to the procedural demands of communicative and decision-making processes. And this loosens the conceptual ties between democratic legitimacy and the familiar forms of state organization. (Habermas 2001, pp. 110-111)

That is why Habermas tends towards rather modest proposals for increased participation of NGOs and social movements in negotiation processes, as part of this procedural and communicative conception of collective practice.

> [T]he institutionalized participation of non-governmental organizations in the deliberations of international negotiating systems would strengthen the legitimacy of the procedure insofar as mid-level transnational decision-making processes could then be rendered transparent for national public spheres, and thus be reconnected with decision-making procedures at the grassroots level. (Habermas 2001, p. 111)

However, the experience of all recent negotiations of international agreements and treaties along with the everyday functioning of the EU has shown that such deliberations do not fundamentally alter the course of things or affect the actual decision processes. In certain cases, they are simply attempts to offer legitimization to processes that are fundamentally authoritarian and undemocratic.

On her part, Seyla Benhabib has offered a problematized version of the Kantian conceptualization of cosmopolitan rights, by means of a reading of Arendt's critical approach to both the nation-State and world government. She is aware of what she defines as the "paradox of democratic legitimacy", namely the fact that the rights of the subaltern have to be negotiated upon a terrain "flanked by human rights on the hand and sovereignty assertions on the other" (Benhabib 2004, p. 47). Consequently, what she suggests is a form of cosmopolitan federalism, based upon porous – not open – borders based upon a combination between the rights of refugees and migrants and the acceptance of the continuous existence of nation-States.

> In the spirit of Kant, therefore, I have pleaded for moral universalism and cosmopolitan federalism. I have not advocated *open* but rather *porous* borders. I have pleaded for first-admittance rights for refugees and asylum-seekers, but have accepted the right of democracies to regulate the transition from full membership. (Benhabib 2004, p. 220-221)

The main problem with this neo-Kantian approach is, in my opinion, two-fold. Faced with the contradiction between the abstract universalism of a normative conception of cosmopolitan rights, itself based upon the projection of a universal community of human beings as subjects, which is obviously unattainable, they easily opt for a more realistic approach of trying to guarantee some

aspects of these rights as part of actual national or supranational configuration, leading to all forms of compromises with current policies, policies that in the end run counter to exactly this conception of universal rights.

In this sense, it is exactly the European Union and its evolution that up to now offers a very material counterargument to the neo-Kantian position. The emerging constitutionalism without democracy, in the form of a guarantee of basic rights (for 'EU nationals') that goes hand and in hand with an authoritarian erosion of democratic process without precedent, and with the dismantling of social rights and the welfare state, offers the absolute limit of any attempt to think of European Integration as the materialization of Kant's vision.[4]

Moreover, the new forms of exclusion and the new barriers to migration and the right to safe passage of refugees make it evident that the EU is far from enforcing any kind of cosmopolitan rights. Finally, the new forms of anti-terrorist preventive practices such as attempts at detecting early signs of 'radicalization', along with officially treating the Muslim segments of the European working classes as potentially 'dangerous classes', imply the continuity of elements of a colonial ideology and practice, this time turned towards the interior of European Union.[5]

Some, exemplified by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's conceptualization of a radical politics of border struggles as productions of new commons, have attempted to go beyond the normative universalism of this Kantian conception of cosmopolitan rights. However, in the end, they cannot avoid the oscillation between a radical emphasis on the singularity of struggles that create, in their multitudinous plurality, the new translations of the common, and an acceptance of the framework of European Integration or other institutional forms of 'globalization' as given. This is based upon the premise that many struggles can no longer be waged at the level of the national-state:

While the exclusionary dimension of the nation-State, symbolized and implemented by the border, is still very much present in the contemporary

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[4] On the evolution of the EU see Anderson 2009; Lapavitsas *et al.* 2012; Durand (ed.) 2013.

[5] On Islamophobia as an alarming global trend see Kumar 2012; Kundnani 2014; Todd 2015.

world, there still are "defensive" struggles, for instance, for social commons, that are fought at the level of the state. This is probably rightly so. But independently of what we have written about the structural antinomy between the public and the common, the political production of space historically associated with the state no longer offers an effective shield against capital. This means it is a matter of realism for the political project of the common to refuse the idea of positioning itself within existing bounded institutional spaces and to look for the necessary production of new political spaces. (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 303)

This leads to a position that, while it is oriented toward radical forms of emancipation that transcend the capitalist horizon, at the same time it is ready to accept the possibility of more 'realist' positions within the framework even of European Integration.

It would be too easy, but no less true, to maintain that the current crisis of European integration makes the huge intellectual investments since the early 1990s in the postnational citizenship emerging in its frame at least over-proportioned. This is not to say that we do not see a chance for the political project of the common in the gaps of official institutional structures, which are themselves in-the-making, multilevel, and crisscrossed by multiple crises in Europe and elsewhere in the world. We are convinced that social struggles can nurture a new political imagination capable of working through current processes of regional integration and of opening them toward a reinvention of internationalism. (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 305)

In a similar manner we see in Saskia Sassen's work an attempt to re-think the possibility of a "global civil society" not in terms of a normative conception but of an articulation of struggles at the global level that also has the problem of taking as somewhat given the current forms of 'globalization', even if the emphasis is on struggles rather than institutional forms.

The category of global civil society is, in a way, too general to capture the specific transboundary networks and formations connecting or articulating multiple places and actors. A focus on these specifics brings "global civil society" down to the spaces and practices of daily life, furthered by today's powerful imaginaries around the idea that others around the world are engaged in the same struggles. This begins to constitute a sense of global civil society that is rooted in the daily spaces of people rather than on some global stage. It also means that the poor, those who cannot travel, can be part of global civil society. I include here cross-border networks of activists engaged in specific localized struggles with an explicit or implicit global agenda and

non- cosmopolitan forms of global politics and imaginaries attached to local issues and struggles. (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, p. 305)

2. *Balibar and the contradictions of citizenship*

In light of the above, Étienne Balibar's attempts to rethink questions of citizenship are of great interest. Balibar underlines the fact that the exclusionary aspect of nationalism and even racism were one pole of the contradiction of the emergence of contemporary political forms associated with the nation-State, the other being the demand for equality and liberty, what he defines with the neologism "equaliberty".

Here is the extraordinary novelty and at the same time the root of all the difficulties, the nub of the contradiction. If one really wants to read it literally, the Declaration in fact says that equality is identical to freedom, is equal to freedom, and vice versa. Each is the exact measure of the other. This is what I propose to call, with a deliberately baroque phrase, the proposition of equaliberty – a portmanteau term, impossible and yet possible only as a play on words, that alone expresses the central proposition. (Balibar 2014, p. 46)

The key point is a new form of citizenship based upon the contradictory identification of rights of citizen and rights of man. This new form of citizenship opens up a way for the expansion of the very sphere of politics in ways that also enable the political participation and demands of the subaltern classes.

[T]he signification of the equation Man = Citizen is not so much the definition of a political right as the affirmation of a universal right to politics. Formally, at least – but this is the very type of a form that can become a material weapon – the Declaration opens an indefinite sphere for the politicization of rights claims, each of which reiterates in its own way the demand for citizenship or for an institutional, public inscription of freedom and equality. The rights claims of workers or of dependents as well as those of women or slaves, and later those of the colonized, is inscribed within this indefinite opening, as we see in attempts beginning in the revolutionary period. (Balibar 2014, p. 50)

Moreover, this emerging new conception of citizenship is also accompanied by a new conception of sovereignty based upon this new conception of politics, this new politicization of society, this new opening up of the political space.

As far as sovereignty is concerned, as I have tried to show elsewhere, the revolutionary innovation consists precisely in subverting the traditional concept by posing the highly paradoxical thesis of an egalitarian sovereignty – practically a contradiction in terms, but the only way to radically get rid of all transcendence and inscribe the political and social order in the element of immanence, of the self-constitution of the people. From there, however, begins the immediate development of a whole series of contradictions that proceed from the fact that so-called civil society and especially the state are entirely structured by hierarchies or dependencies that are both indifferent to political sovereignty and essential to its institutionalization, even though society or the modern city no longer has at its disposal the means of the ancient city for neutralizing these contradictions and pushing them out of the public sphere, namely, the rigorous compartmentalization of the *oikos* and the polis. (Balibar 2014, p. 42)

However, this new formulation of politics is from the beginning traversed by an important contradiction between a politics of insurrection, the revolutionary aspect of the emergence of democratic politics, and a politics of constitution, the politics associated with the State and the established order.

[T]his affirmation introduces an individual oscillation, induces a structural equivocation between two obviously antinomic politics: a politics of insurrection and a politics of constitution – or, if you prefer, a politics of permanent, uninterrupted revolution and a politics of the state as institutional order. (Balibar 2014, p.p. 52-53)

It is here that we find the problem with the emergence of the Nation as the political and ideological form of the new collective subject of democratic politics. Balibar insists that we can witness this tension even at the moment of the French Revolution:

The system of Fraternity tends to be doubled into a national fraternity and, before long, a statist, revolutionary, social fraternity wherein extreme egalitarianism finds expression in communism. The meaning of the Nation changes: it no longer means all the citizens in opposition to the monarch and the privileged, but the idea of a historical belonging centered on the state. At the extreme, through the mythification of language, culture, and national traditions, it will become the French version of nationalism, the idea of a moral and cultural community founded on institutional traditions. Opposed to it, on the contrary, the notion of the people drifts toward the general idea of the proletariat as the people's people. (Balibar 2014, p. 55)

For Balibar this tension points to the fact that "political modernity comprises two antithetical movements with respect to 'anthropological differences'". On the one hand, we have the universalism that "promoted or invented a notion of the citizen that implies not only that an individual belongs to a community but also that he has access to a system of rights from which *no human being can be legitimately excluded.*" (Balibar 2017, p. 275). On the other hand, "modernity enlarges as never before the project of *classifying* human beings precisely in terms of their differences" (Balibar 2017, p. 276). This can explain the violence and brutality of modern forms of exclusion and racism.

> *Because the human and the political* (the "rights of man" and the "rights of the citizen") *are coextensive "by right," the human being cannot be denied access to citizenship unless, contradictorily, he is also excised from humanity.* Therefore – and I apologize for the brutality of a formulation that is nonetheless all-too-relevant in reality because of past and present exclusions based on race, sex, deviance, pathologies, to mention only a few – the human being can be denied such access only by being reduced to subhumanity or defective humanity. (Balibar 2017, p. 276)

Consequently, Balibar's proposition for a "transnational citizenship"(Balibar 2003) is an attempt to answer the problems associated with racism and exclusion and the grand movements of migrants and refugees, at the same time acknowledging the persistence of the nation-State and the new challenges posed by the emergence of forms like the European Union. This is also evident in his attempt to discuss ways to "democratize democracy" in ways that incorporate contemporary struggles, treating insurrection as the "active modality of citizenship: the modality that it brings into *action.*" (Balibar 2015, p. 131). The problem is that, although Balibar is in no way a naive partisan of European Integration, something exemplified in his insistence that "along with the development of a formal 'European Citizenship', a real 'European Apartheid' has emerged" (Balibar 2003, p. 121), in the end he attempts to take it for granted as the terrain for such a strategy.

3. *The problems with the neo-republican defence of the nation-State*

A certain opposition to the above discussed positions comes in the form of what we can define as a neo-republican defence of the nation-State and of national identities. Here the line of reasoning is the following. Despite the rhetoric of globalization, nation-States remain indispensable nodes for the reproduction of capitalism. Emerging supranational forms, such as the European Union and the entire drive towards European Integration tend to undermine nation-States in favour of the forces of globalized capital and also to erode democracy by sharply reducing the terrain and scope of popular sovereignty. Capitalist elites accept this condition of limited or eroded sovereignty because they want to be part of globalized reproduction of capitalist accumulation. This erosion of democracy undermines democracy, because democracy can only be an active political condition when there are a demos and a popular will that can be exercised in a particular territory. There can be no supranational demos and consequently no cosmopolitan democracy.

Up until this point, this neo-republican argument indeed points to actual problems with contemporary forms of reduced sovereignty and the absence of real democratic process at the level of supranational institutional arrangements such as the European Union. However, there is another aspect to this argument: the association of demos with the nation. According to this argument the political body, in order to be a democratic political body, requires an element of common culture, history and community, a necessary commitment to a common identity. Consequently, the argument goes, contemporary 'multiculturalism', in the sense of mass migration but also in the sense of emergence of a globalized mass culture has undermined the necessary common identity and common commitment that is the backbone of the emergence of the modern forms of popular sovereignty. Some versions of this argument have been used by the Far Right in order to defend their own version of neo-racist politics, especially in relation to closed borders and discriminations against migrants and refugees in the name of a return to the necessary supposed 'purity of the nation' or of the purity of the 'national culture'.

In other instances, this discourse distances itself from any openly racist arguments, but it does centre upon the need for some common elements of political culture that supposedly enable this

re-emergence of the demos-people of the nation-State. The French version of 'Republicanism' offers such a case.[6] And it is interesting to see the positions of some of the left-wing proponents of neo-republicanism.

Perhaps the most telling case is that of Régis Debray. The former *guerrillero* already in 1978 was insisting on the importance of the national aspects of any revolutionary sequence:

> The reason is that if the masses do make history, and if they are not an abstraction roaming around above existing frontiers and languages – if they exist only within circumscribed cultural and natural communities – then they make history as and where they are, from below and not above, piece-meal and not globally. There is no one single history for everybody; the time of history is not the same in Tokyo, Paris, Peking and Venezuela. When a world revolutionary programme attempts to gather multiplicity into unity and rationalize the whole movement, it goes against the historical process itself, for the latter proceeds from unity to multiplicity. Things always happen from below, multiplicity is always victorious. (Debray 1978, p. 37)

It is obvious that we are still dealing here with an attempt to see the national aspects of any potential revolutionary sequence, echoing in a certain manner the relation of national and social struggles in the revolutionary movements in the Third World. However, from the 1980s onwards, Debray's positions moved from the question of revolution to the question of what constitutes the reclaiming of the French republican tradition. As Émile Chabal has stressed, for Debray the Republic as "a repository of national memory, cultural heritage and enlightenment values [...] is the only possible bulwark against the decadence of Democracy and the warped ethics of financial capitalism" (Chabal 2015, p. 41). More recently, he has offered an impressive defence of frontiers in which he attacks all those who call for a world without borders as being defenders of the economism of the 'global marketplace', of 'technicism', of 'absolutism' and of imperialism, against which he calls for "a right to the frontier"(Debray 2010).

Another example is the work of Jacques Sapir, a former student of Charles Bettelheim, a specialist in the transition from the USSR to Russia and one of the fiercest critics of globalization but also of

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[6] For a definition and critique of current neo-republicanism in the French context, see Todd 2015.

European Integration. However interesting are many of his observations regarding globalization, the problems with the Eurozone and his critique of the EU, at the same time his positions encapsulate the problem with a certain version of the neo-republican argument. Sapir is careful to avoid any identification of the Nation to race or even common origin. What he insists upon is the centrality of the people, defined as political body sharing common values and not common ancestry. This unity of the political body is threatened, according to Sapir, by new forms of communitarianism, especially those related to religion. For Sapir the attack on sovereignty opens up the way for its dissolution. The unity of the people requires secularism, because it is secularism that relegates these religious and communitarian elements to the private sphere. "We cannot have a people, the base of the political construction of popular sovereignty, without secularism which confines to the private sphere the divergences upon which no discussion can be held" (Sapir 2016, Kindle locations 308-314). Sapir refuses any conceptualization of ethnicity in biological terms, yet he insists on the need for anyone participating in the nation to share the history and the language of any society s/he participates in. Consequently, in a certain way he is *a posteriori* making a certain reference to national identity a prerequisite for participation in the political process.

Ethnicity [*l'ethnie*] is a social construction and not a biological reality and sometimes it has to do with a discursive myth used to separate one population from another. But after we have repeated these truths, we will, nevertheless, be confronted with the acquisition of the necessary rules for a life in society by those that newly arrive to become part of a population. And it is here that we find the frontier between the mythical discourse of a "big replacement" and the fact, equally real, of the failure of integration of a part of the immigrant populations, because these do not have the references that they could assimilate. Integration is a process of assimilation of rules and customs which is in part conscious – we make an effort to learn the language and history into which we want to integrate into – but it is equally unconscious. For this unconscious mechanism to be put into motion there is also need of a reference point. Disappearing or effacing this reference point in the name of a multiculturalism that only means the tolerance to practices that are very different is a real obstacle to this integration. (Sapir 2016, Kindle location 1058-1067)

It is here that we see the crucial semantic shift of this neo-republican defence of the nation. The very notion of common culture brings us very close to classical nationalism and it is a well-documented fact that most versions of racism in Europe in the past decades do not focus on origin but upon sharing of a common culture. Sapir is very clear that the formation of a people requires common values: "it is clear that without 'common value', a human community cannot constitute a political community" (Sapir 2016, Kindle locations 1542-1544). And here is the problem with this position: How can we define these common values? How we deal with the fact that in class societies these values represent hegemonic strategies? What about the challenge posed by colonialism, both in its past but also in its present in the form of discrimination against former colonial subjects now living in the metropolis.

Moreover, Sapir is very clear that he considers that there is a problem with certain immigrant communities and that he believes that they cannot integrate. He thinks that there is a certain segment of the immigrant youth that shows elements of anomie and their opting of identity reveals the kind of narcissism that Sapir associates with fundamentalism. It is in these terms that he designates multiculturalism as the enemy, in the sense that he thinks that a multiculturalist embracing of heterogeneity undermines the convergence in terms of culture of values that is necessary for the political construction of the people.

> There is here a dialectic that we cannot surpass and with which we are condemned to live. If heterogeneity is a state of the political community, its constitution in 'people for itself' can only be made by means of a convergence of aspirations and views on the future. This convergence implies a common political culture and this is contradictory with multiculturalism. (Sapir 2016, Kindle locations 873-879).

However, despite Sapir's attempts to offer a conceptualization of the political construction of the people of popular sovereignty, in the end he opts for a rather classical conception of the Nation, along with the State, as the basis of popular sovereignty, a position that brings us back to all the classical problems associated with a national conception of contemporary societies.

Therefore, the idea of separating the people from the nation and from the State, even if it is necessary from an analytical point of view, is impossible from the point of view of practical result. The people, conceived as political community, have no concrete existence outside the State and the nation, even if it can consciously, but also unconsciously, transform both. There are complex relations between the people, the nation and the State and these relations defy simplifications. The constitution of a people united in its will to live together and to create in common, even if this will may partly be the fruit of institutions that have constructed necessary affects, is indeed the point of obligatory passage without which the constitution of a nation will fail. This is one of the lessons that we must retain from the centrality of the concept of sovereignty. When a population, whatever it is, desires to make something in common, there is sovereignty. But from the moment that this population is heterogeneous, it helps to move certain questions out of the public space. That is why, for many centuries, a necessary alliance pact has been in force between sovereignty and secularism. (Sapir 2016, Kindle locations 2829-2838)

Therefore, in the case of Sapir, from the question of the political construction of the people, we move back to the nation as common culture, history, and language and as the need to exclude from the political (and cultural) space of the people certain cultural or religious reference points, however important they might be for large segments of the subaltern classes of immigrant origin. And in the case of Sapir, this can lead to dangerous political associations, such as his recent insistence to treat the Far Right *Front National* as a potential part of a broader front in favour of sovereignty.

In general, it would be unfair to say that this conception of the secular and democratic nation as the community of the demos is based upon strictly national or racial elements. One might say that most supporters of a neo-republican conception of the nation-State opt for some form of a performative conception of nationhood. For them it is not a question of race, ethnicity or colour, but of the performance of certain cultural and discursive elements that guarantee the unity of the demos: rationalism, secularism, tolerance, multiculturalism and a certain form of feminism. Especially the feminist aspect was particularly important in France, in the support given by mainstream feminism to repressive measures such as the ban on the headscarf in the name of liberation of women, despite the opposition from exactly the subjects supposed to be liberated (Levy 2010; Boggio Éwanjé-Épée and Magliani-Belkacem 2012). However, the end result is the same as with 'typical' racism: a multiplication of forms of exclusion and

an increasing tendency towards treating collective practices, cultures, discourses as inappropriate for democratic participation, as reasons to forbid the participation in the collective political body of the people.

4. *The colonial trauma at the heart of the nation-State*

Moreover, in the debates on secularism, especially in France with all the political confrontations around the notion of *laïcité* we can see the reproduction of elements of a certain Islamophobia and a certain reluctance to deal with the colonial past and its continuous effectivity in order to understand the forms of contemporary racism. The 2003 debate around the question of the scarf brought forward the unease of certain segments of the Left, including some from the anticapitalist Left, with the reality of the cultural referents of subaltern strata of immigrant origin, and the danger that a certain kind of neo-republican defence of secularism and *laïcité* can lead to alliances with systemic political forces. Laurent Lévy (2010) has offered a very powerful account of these debates. It is also important to note that there have also been other important contributions recently to these debates that highlight that the 'divergences' in French society that Sapir stressed are not the result of the supposed narcissistic attachment of immigrant youth to fundamentalism but of the actual continuation of colonialism *inside* French society, not only in the form of ideological prejudice but also of real exclusion. Sadri Khiari offers an important account of the history of racism and discrimination in France and how racism was in fact a class political strategy on the part of the dominant classes (Khiari 2009). Moreover, recent developments and anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles have shown that integration is not an attempt towards creating a more open political community but in reality a way to enhance exclusion and separation. It is obvious that we are also dealing here with the fact that, from the very beginning, colonialism was the dark side of the construction of the modern nation-State, especially in Europe, exemplified in the way in which both the war and the liberation of Algeria was perceived in France. In a similar manner, contemporary interventions on the part of radical antiracism especially in France, such as the collective effort of the current associated with the *Parti des Indigènes de la*

République (Bouteldja and Khiari 2012), offer an important reminder of the persistence of a neo-colonial form of state-induced racism still active at the heart of the European Project. Moreover, they make it evident that contemporary forms of attacks against the Muslim segments of the working classes of Europe, supposedly in the name of containing 'radical Islam', in fact represent class strategies in order to keep them in a very particular condition of subalternity. However, what is most worrying is the tendency by certain segments of the radical Left, including the anticapitalist left, to accept some of the basic tenets of such positions, exemplified in the support of the Left of certain forms of 'forced emancipation' in the name of the secular state.

However, the same trauma at the heart of the modern nation-State could also be observed elsewhere. Hannah Arendt, a critical witness to one of the most important recent conscious attempts at nation-building, namely the formation of modern Israel, offered important warnings in the 1940s about the association of popular sovereignty and nationalism, especially in cases where the political establishment of the nation was also based on a founding moment of exclusion and oppression of other people already there (Arendt 2007).

5. *Gramsci's thinking on the national-popular*

So the question remains: is it possible to conceive of some form of recuperation of popular sovereignty, without having to fall back into some form of nationalism or any variety of the political and ideological constructions that tend to reproduce exclusion or neo-colonial exclusion?

One way to deal with this is by a return to Gramsci. Gramsci's preoccupation with the emergence of what he defined the national-popular will is well known.[7] For Gramsci the "national-popular" collective will represents a form of modern statehood associated with the revolutionary "Jacobin" tradition of the bourgeoisie, an element missing from the emergence of the Italian State, in many instances.

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[7] On the broader notion of the "national-popular" in Gramsci, from literature to politics, see Durante 2009.

One of the first sections must precisely be devoted to the "collective will", posing the question in the following terms: "When can the conditions for awakening and developing a national-popular collective will be said to exist?" Hence an historical (economic) analysis of the social structure of the given country and a "dramatic" representation of the attempts made in the course of the centuries to awaken this will, together with the reasons for the successive failures. Why was there no absolute monarchy in Italy in Machiavelli's time? One has to go back to the Roman Empire (the language question, problem of the intellectuals, etc.), and understand the function of the mediaeval Communes, the significance of Catholicism etc. In short, one has to make an outline of the whole history of Italy – in synthesis, but accurate.

The reason for the failures of the successive attempts to create a national-popular collective will is to be sought in the existence of certain specific social groups which were formed at the dissolution of the Communal bourgeoisie; in the particular character of other groups which reflect the international function of Italy as seat of the Church and depositary of the Holy Roman Empire; and so on. [...] An effective *Jacobin* force was always missing, and could not be constituted; and it was precisely such a Jacobin force which in other nations awakened and organised the national-popular collective will, and founded the modem States. (Q 13, §1; *SPN*, pp. 130-131)

However, Gramsci stresses the fact that this kind of formation of the national-popular will represents only a particular 'revolutionary' phase of the bourgeoisie and that "[a]ll history from 1815 onwards shows the efforts of the traditional classes to prevent the formation of a collective will of this kind, and to maintain 'economic-corporate' power in an international system of passive equilibrium" (Q 13, §1; *SPN*, p. 132).

Gramsci uses the French example and the particular importance of the role of the subaltern classes in the formation of the national-popular will in order to emphasize the absence of such an element in the Italian case. However schematic his conceptualization of the French case might be, the important point lies in his attempt to emphasize the possibilities of alternative forms of formation of the national-popular element, depending upon different national histories.

The works of French historians and French culture in general have been able to develop and become 'national-popular' because of the very complexity and variety of French political history in the last 150 years. [...] A unilinear national 'hagiography' is impossible: any attempt of this sort appears immediately sectarian, false, utopian, and anti-national because one is forced to cut out or undervalue unforgettable pages of national history (see Maurras'

current line and Bainville's miserable history of France). That is why the permanent element of these political variations, the people-nation, has become the protagonist of French history. Hence a type of political and cultural nationalism that goes beyond the bounds of the strictly nationalist parties and impregnates the whole culture. Hence also a close and dependent relationship between people-nation and intellectuals.

There is nothing of the sort in Italy, where one must search the past by torchlight to discover national feeling, and move with the aid of distinctions, interpretations, and discreet silences. [...] Consequently, in the history of the nineteenth century, there could not have been national unity, since the permanent element, the people-nation, was missing. On the one hand, the dynastic element had to prevail given the support it received from the state apparatus, and the divergent political currents could not have had a shared minimum objective. [...] Due to this position of theirs, the intellectuals had to distinguish themselves from the people, place themselves outside, create or reinforce among themselves a spirit of caste and have a deep *distrust* of the people, feeling them to be foreign, fearing them, because, in reality, the people were something unknown, a mysterious hydra with innumerable heads.

[...] But one must not deny that many steps forward have been taken in every sense: to do so would be to fall into an opposite rhetoric. On the contrary, many intellectual movements, especially before the war, attempted to renew the culture, strip away its rhetoric and bring it nearer to the people, in other words nationalize it. (The two tendencies could be called nation-people and nation-rhetoric.) (Q 3, §82; *CW*, pp. 255-7)

It is interesting to note the distinction that Gramsci makes between nation-people (popolo-nazione) and nation-rhetoric, which marks exactly the negative version of nationalism, one that does not incorporate the popular, the subaltern element. The same goes for Gramsci's critique of any conception of the eternity of the nation (an important point taking into consideration the element of a perceived historical continuity in the Italian peninsula). "The preconception that Italy has always been a nation complicates its entire history and requires anti-historical intellectual acrobatics" (Q 3, §82; *CW*, pp. 255-7). Hence, we have Gramsci's denouncement of easy nationalist rhetorical constructions.

This fact is the most peremptory confirmation that in Italy writers are separated from the public and that the public seeks 'its' literature abroad because it feels that this literature is more 'its own' than the so-called national literature. In this fact lies an essential problem of national life. If it is true that each century or fraction of a century has its own literature, it is not always true that this literature is produced in the same national community. Every people has its own literature, but this can come to it from another people, in other

words the people in question can be subordinated to the intellectual and moral hegemony of other peoples. This is often the most strident paradox for many monopolistic tendencies of a nationalistic and repressive character: while they make magnificent hegemonic plans, they fail to realize that they are the object of foreign hegemonies, just as while they make imperialistic plans, they are in fact the object of other imperialisms. (Q 23, §57; *CW*, p. 255)

For Gramsci the national element cannot be identified with the nationalistic element. The national element, regarding culture and ideological production, refers to a particular relation with a national history and a historical / cultural environment not with loyalty to a national group. One might say that it is an analytic not a prescriptive term:

National, in other words, is different from nationalist. Goethe was a German 'national', Stendhal a French 'national', but neither of them was a nationalist. An idea is not effective if it is not expressed in some way, artistically, that is, particularly. But is a spirit particular in as much as it is national? Nationality is a primary particularity, but the great writer is further particularized among his fellow countrymen and this second 'particularity' is not the extension of the first. Renan, as Renan, is by no means a *necessary* consequence of the French spirit. Through his relation to it he is an original event, arbitrary and (as Bergson says) *unpredictable*. And yet, Renan remains French, just as man, while being man, remains animal. But his value, as is true of man, lies precisely in his difference from the group from which he was born.

It is precisely this that the nationalists do not want. For them the value of the masters (great intellectuals) consists in their likeness to the spirit of their group, in their loyalty, in their punctual expression of this spirit (which is, moreover, defined as the spirit of the masters (great intellectuals) so one always ends up being right). (Q 2, §2; *CW*, pp. 260-1)

For Gramsci the national element refers not to some ideal or some form of social essence but rather to the different and specific histories of each social formation, and the different historicities expressed in the particular relations of force that determine the context of each society. Moreover, this is something that has to be taken into account in any attempt to formulate a revolutionary strategy that has to be national, in the sense that the point of departure of any revolutionary project is national, any hegemonic project must take into account these national peculiarities.

In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is "original" and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is "national" – and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class [the proletariat] will have to lead and develop, in accordance with the international perspective and directives [i.e. those of the Comintern[8]]. The leading class is in fact only such if it accurately interprets this combination – of which it is itself a component and precisely as such is able to give the movement a certain direction, within certain perspectives. (Q 14, §17; *SPN*, p. 240)

Despite the fact that the working class is the only class truly internationalist in scope and in a sense the bearer of a new type of universalism, any strategy for working class hegemony passes through this attention to the national element, this need to 'nationalize' itself to a certain extent:

It is in the concept of hegemony that those exigencies which are national in character are knotted together; one can well understand how certain tendencies either do not mention such a concept, or merely skim over it. A class that is international in character has – in as much as it guides social strata which are narrowly national (intellectuals), and indeed frequently even less than national: particularistic and municipalistic (the peasants) – to 'nationalise' itself in a certain sense. (Q 14, §17; *SPN*, p. 241)

It is also interesting that Gramsci insisted on the different qualities that a proletarian or popular version of collective will might have, emphasizing the 'cosmopolitan' and internationalist elements in the proletarian collective will. In contrast to the attempt by Enrico Corradini to justify nationalism and imperialist expansion on the basis of the character of Italy as "proletarian nation" and Giovanni Pascoli's hybrid 'proletarian nationalism',[9] Gramsci insists on the emancipatory and transformative elements in a potential Italian working class "cosmopolitanism", enhanced

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[8] "i.e. those of the Comintern" is an explanatory note added by the *SPN* translators [ed.].

[9] On Gramsci's interest in this attempt towards the construction of a 'proletarian nationalism', which coincided with Italian imperial ambitions at the beginning of the twentieth century (leading to the invasion and occupation of Libya in 1911), see the references in the text on the "Southern Question" (Gramsci 1978, p. 450) and in the *Prison Notebooks*: Q 2, §§51 and 52 (*PN1*, p. 295-300).

by the experience of migration and based not upon some abstract universalism but upon the very particular universality of the working class condition, the universality of subalternity. It is this that makes it part of a broader project of social transformation and emancipation.

At present in Italy the element 'man' is either 'man-capital' or 'man-labour'. Italian expansion can only be that of 'man-labour' and the intellectual who represents 'man-labour' is not the traditional intellectual, swollen with rhetoric and literary memories of the past. Traditional Italian cosmopolitanism should become a modern type of cosmopolitanism, one that can assure the best conditions for the development of Italian 'man-labour' in whatever part of the world he happens to be. Not the citizen of the world as *civis romanus* or as Catholic, but as producer of civilization. One can therefore maintain that the Italian tradition is continued dialectically in the working people and their intellectuals, not in the traditional citizen and the traditional intellectual. The Italian people are the people with the greatest 'national' interest in a modern form of cosmopolitanism. Not only the worker but also the peasant, especially the southern peasant. It is in the tradition of the Italian people and Italian history to collaborate in rebuilding the world in an economically unified way not in order to dominate it hegemonically and appropriate the fruit of others' labour but to exist and develop precisely as the Italian people. It can be shown that Caesar is at the source of this tradition. Nationalism of the French stamp is an anachronistic excrescence in Italian history, proper to people who have their heads turned backwards like the damned in Dante. The 'mission' of the Italian people lies in the recovery of Roman and medieval cosmopolitanism, but in its most modern and advanced form. Even indeed a proletarian nation, as Pascoli wanted; proletarian as a nation because it has been the reserve army of foreign capitalism, because together with the Slavic peoples it has given skilled workers to the entire world. For this very reason, it must join the modern front struggling to reorganize also the non-Italian world, which it has helped to create with its labour. (Q 19, §5, p. 1988; *CW*, pp. 246-247)

Gramsci had this conception of the proletariat as the only truly 'national' class – in the sense of achieving a higher form of unity of a society but also with an internationalist scope – already in 1919. In an article in October 1919 in *Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci insists that:

Today, the 'national' class is the proletariat, and the multitude of the workers and peasants, of Italian working people, who cannot allow the break-up of the nation, because the unity of the State is the form of the organization of production and of exchange constructed by Italian labour, is the patrimony of social wealth that the proletarians want to bring to the Communist International. Only the proletarian State, the proletarian dictatorship, can

today stop the process of dissolution of the national unity (Gramsci 2008, p. 19; originally in "L'Ordine Nuovo", 4 October 1919).[10]

It is on the basis of this assumption regarding the inability of the bourgeoisie to actually lead the project for the formation of such a national-popular will, that Gramsci assigns this task to the "Modern Prince" the political form of a potential working class hegemony. Here the emergence and formation of national-popular will is linked both to a process of socialist transformation at the economic sphere, but also to "intellectual and moral reform":

The modern Prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation.

These two basic points – the formation of a national-popular collective will, of which the modern Prince is at one and the same time the organiser and the active, operative expression; and intellectual and moral reform – should structure the entire work. The concrete, programmatic points must be incorporated in the first part, that is they should result from the line of discussion "dramatically", and not be a cold and pedantic exposition of arguments.

Can there be cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and a change in their position in the social and economic fields? Intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform-indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself. The modern Prince, as it develops, revolutionises the whole system of intellectual and moral relations, in that its development means precisely that any given act is seen as useful or harmful, as virtuous or as wicked, only in so far as it has as its point of reference the modern Prince itself, and helps to strengthen or to oppose it. In men's consciences, the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative, and becomes the basis for a modern laicism and for a complete laicisation of all aspects of life and of all customary relationships (Q 13, §1; *SPN*, pp. 132-133).

It is important to note that the notion of "moral and intellectual reform", which Gramsci borrows from but uses beyond its original coinage by Ernest Renan and its reading by Sorel, not only forms an important part of Gramsci's critique of Croce, but also can be associated with Lenin's notion of the "cultural revolution",

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[10] On Gramsci's thinking on the "national question" see Santoro 2009.

referring to the extent and depth of the intellectual, ideological and cultural transformation that any hegemonic project requires (Frosini 2009; Thomas 2009, p. 420; Rapone 2011, p. 113). Leonardo Rapone, in his detailed study of Gramsci's formative years (1914-1919) has shown that Gramsci from the beginning, faced with various forms of Italian nationalism had this conception of socialism not only as a transformation of the economic structure but also as a profound "intellectual renovation and moral transformation" (Rapone 2011, p. 109) of Italian life. It is obvious that here Gramsci refers to the national popular will being the result of a process of profound economic, social and ideological transformation as part of a socialist strategy and not just the articulation of existing national elements. It is also significant that in the first version of this passage in Q4, §33, instead of people-nation the reference is to people-masses, something that emphasizes that for Gramsci the emergence of the contemporary nation is inextricably linked to the collective practices of the popular masses. Moreover, it stresses the fact that for Gramsci the "nation" in fact refers, to a great extent, to the subaltern classes and in particular the working class.

Now, can we find in Gramsci's writings a way to deal with the challenges associated with questions of popular sovereignty and the potential collective body that would express and implement it? I understand that a possible objection would be that Gramsci dealt with a period when the question was still about recognizing subalternity as part of nationhood, that is of actually unifying the nation and dealing with forms of internal exclusion, exemplified in the Italian case with all the contradictions of the vicissitudes and complexities of the Southern Question [*quistione meridionale*]. However, a closer reading of Gramsci's various references to the Southern Question even in his pre-prison writings suggests that his conception of new process of unification under proletarian leadership was not just about "unity" but also overcoming forms of exclusion that resemble contemporary questions about decolonial struggles.[11] Already in January 1920 Gramsci was insisting that

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[11] And of course there are many references in his writings for his clear support of decolonial struggles. See the following extract from a 1919 *Ordine Nuovo* article: "For several years we Europeans have lived at the expense of the death of the coloured peoples: unconscious vampires that we are, we have fed off their innocent blood. […] But today flames of revolt are being fanned throughout the colonial world. This is the class struggle of the

The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies; by emancipating itself from capitalist slavery, the Northern proletariat will emancipate the Southern peasant masses enslaved to the banks and the parasitic industry of the North. The economic and political regeneration of the peasants should not be sought in a division of uncultivated or poorly cultivated lands, but in the solidarity of the industrial proletariat. This in turn needs the solidarity of the peasantry and has an "interest" in ensuring that capitalism is not re-born economically from landed property; that Southern Italy and the Islands do not become a military base for capitalist counter-revolution (Gramsci 1977, p. 148).

Gramsci elaborates these questions more in his 1926 *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* (Gramsci 1978, pp. 441-462), which deals more with the complexities and difficulties in the creation of this new form of national-popular unity, the role of intellectuals and the questions that would late drive a great part of his elaborations around the concept of hegemony.

At the same time, it is obvious that Gramsci's writings dealt with another conjuncture which, to a certain extent, justifies Stefan Kipfer and Gillian Hart's assessment that Gramsci is "both vital and insufficient to approach anti- and post-colonial nationalisms" (Kipfer and Hart 2013, p. 335). I would also agree with Kipfer and Hart on the need to 'stretch' Gramsci beyond whatever 'Eurocentric' limitations his view had, into questions of "'race' and ethnicity, as well as sexuality and gender" (Kipfer and Hart 2013, p. 332) and into a dialogue with the work of Fanon, since "[l]ike Gramsci, Fanon saw organic intellectuals as organizers whose leadership grows out of and constantly returns to the common and good sense of subaltern life" (Kipfer and Hart 2013, p. 333).[12]

coloured peoples against their white exploiters and murderers. It is the vast irresistible drive towards autonomy and independence of a whole world, with all its spiritual riches" (Gramsci 1977, pp. 59-60). See also the following passage, again from a 1920 *Ordine Nuovo* article: "In this way the colonial populations become the foundation on which the whole edifice of capitalist exploitation is erected. These populations are required to donate the whole of their lives to the development of industrial civilization. For this they can expect no benefit in return; indeed, they see their own countries systematically despoiled of their natural resources, i.e. of the necessary conditions for their own autonomous development." (Gramsci 1977, p. 302).

[12] In a similar tone, Ato Sekyi-Otu has suggested that "I am tempted to call Gramsci a precocious Fanonist. A Fanonist reading of Gramsci would indeed locate the historical conditions of possibility of the 'popular-national' as project of the modern prince in his portrait of the arrested development of the Italian bourgeoisie, the poverty of what he calls (again prefiguring Fanon) its 'national consciousness', its twin cultural vices of cosmopolitanism and narcissism, its historical inability to summon the oppressed of the

Yet I would like to insist that, despite certain blind spots in his thinking, Gramsci remains more pertinent in these contemporary debates, exactly because he suggested a redefinition of the popolo-nazione based upon the determining inclusion and influence of the subaltern classes, of the popular masses. In a certain manner, this remains the case today.

6. *Reconstructing the people*

Therefore, I would suggest that the only way to rethink the possibility of reclaiming popular sovereignty in a manner that does avoid the pitfalls of both cosmopolitan universalism and exclusionist nationalism is by means of a redefinition of the people based upon the contemporary condition of subalternity in the context of contemporary capitalist accumulation, which in fact has expanded the linkages between subalternity and the subjection to capitalist accumulation, in both direct and indirect ways. This implies a redefinition of the people that delinks it from ethnicity, origin or common history and instead links it to common condition, present and struggle. It is a rather scissionist conception of the people because it also includes an oppositional approach to the 'enemies of the people', many of them nominally 'members of the nation'. Frédéric Lordon has offered a sufficiently provocative description of this transformative and emancipatory conception of the people, in terms of what he defines as the new landscape of the nation, one which includes also this conception that not everyone can belong to the people...

Here is the new landscape of nationality: Bernard Arnault? Not French. Cahuzac? Not French. Johnny and Depardieu who wander around the world like a self-service shop for passports? Not French. The Mamadous and the Mohammeds that toil in sweatshops, that do the work that no one else wants to do and pay their taxes are a thousand times more French than this race of masters. The blue-bloods of tax evasion, out! Passport and welcome to all the dark-coloured people are dwelling on this territory, those that have contributed twice, by their labour and their taxes to collective life, a double

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countryside onto the stage of national regeneration. [...] Without a doubt, the conceptual supports of Fanon's vision of the national, the social and the revolutionary as cognate terms of a new political practice, have an elective affinity with Gramsci's philosophy of praxis and its political implications." (Sekyi-Otu 1996, pp. 118-119).

contribution that gives its own unique criterion to the belonging to what, yes, continues to be called a nation! (Lordon 2013)

It is obvious that we need a conception of the people that is post-national and de-colonial. I would like to insist that we can have a political conception or more exactly a *politically performative* conception of the people and of – to use Gramscian terminology – the people-nation. We are no longer dealing with the 'imaginary community' of 'common blood'; it is the unity in struggle of the subaltern classes, the unity of those that share the same problems, the same misery, the same hope, the same struggles. The people are not a common origin; they represent a common condition and perspective. It is an antagonistic conception of the nation that also demands a 'decolonialization' of the nation, as recognition of the consequences of colonialism and state racism, the struggle against all forms of racism within a potential alliance of the subaltern classes. And in this sense such a construction of the people is by itself a terrain of social and political antagonism. In the words of Stuart Hall,

> The capacity to *constitute* classes and individuals as a popular force – that is the nature of political and cultural struggle: to *make* the divided classes and the separated peoples – divided and separated by culture as much as by other factors – *into* a popular-democratic cultural force. (Hall 1998, pp. 452-453)

Institutionally, it is based upon the offering of full political rights and not just 'rights of hospitality', to everyone living and working in a given territory. Culturally it answers the dangers of predefined cultural norms and values with a conception of democratic political culture as constant reconstruction and constant 'work in progress'.

I have stressed the element of the struggle against racism in all its form as an important aspect of this (re)construction of people. In contemporary societies, where racial divisions inside the working class are becoming more important, the challenge of overcoming racism is not just about unity of the working and popular masses. As Jacques Rancière has suggested, the crucial aspect is the identification with the cause of the other as a constituent moment of the production of the people. Writing about the importance of the movement against the French State's war in Algeria as a crucial aspect of political subjectification, he

insists that the crucial step was the dis-identification with the French State that was responsible for repression, including the infamous 17 October 1961 police murders of more than 100 Algerian protesters in Paris. This process of dis-identification with the State and the identification with the cause of the other is "the production of a *people* that is different from the people that is seen, talked, counted by the State, a people defined by the manifestation of a harm made to the constitution of a common, which constructs by itself another space of community" (Rancière 1997, p. 43).

In this sense, following Deleuze we are talking about a people that is missing, a people that has to be produced, a people-to-come, "[n]ot the myth of a past people, but the story-telling of the people to come. The speech-act must create itself as a foreign language in a dominant language, precisely in order to express an impossibility of living under domination" (Deleuze 1989, p. 223).

7. *From the popolo-nazione to the historical bloc*

Consequently, we must return to Gramsci and his strategic and transformative conception that links the popolo-nazione and a potential historical bloc:

> If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force with the creation of the "historical bloc" (Q 11, §67; *SPN,* p. 418).

Now this conception of the historical bloc points to something more complex than the formation of the people by means of a process of signification that creates both a common identity and an opposition to a common 'enemy', however important such aspects are for this re-emergence of the people as the collective agent of transformation and emancipation. When dealing with the particular problems posed by the need to create new forms of popular unity between the different segments of the subaltern classes and groups divided as they are by ethnic or religious lines, but also by the institutional division between citizens and migrants as well as undocumented migrants, more important than the common

'cultural referents' are the collective practices, demands, strategies, re-writings of histories, understandings of each other, and – above all – common aspirations, that can indeed induce the common identification as people. This process also requires concrete struggles for the institutional forms that enable this convergence, especially full social and political rights, but also the forms of political organizing and mass political intellectuality that link this common condition to common hegemonic projects of transformation and emancipation and help the articulation of common struggles and alliances. In sum, it is what Gramsci tried to define as the "Modern Prince", the political form of a modern United Front.

Moreover, the people are not just a 'discursive' construction, in the sense of an arbitrary articulation of disparate elements into a temporary form of coherence. Our conception of the people in based upon class analysis and the potential for alliances of the subaltern classes. Following Poulantzas we can say the people is a "concept for strategy",[13] that today points to the direction of an actual social alliance, formed as a result of the evolution of the contemporary forms of capitalist accumulation that create 'objective' material conditions that bring together working class strata with new petty bourgeois strata (in the Poulantzian sense), state employees and even segments of the traditional petty-bourgeois strata as a result of the inability of contemporary neoliberal policies to enhance a lasting historical bloc around finance and multinational capitals, and the new forms of precariousness, flexibility and over-exploitation that have been intensified against both manual and intellectual labour. This indeed creates common demands and interests, based upon the common condition of labour, precariousness, unemployment, exploitation, increased difficulty in dealing with basic needs that, in a certain manner, unite the undocumented migrant with the young degree holder moving from unemployment into precarious part-time work

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[13] "The articulation of the structural determination of classes and of class positions within a social formation, the locus of existence of conjunctures, requires particular concepts. I shall call these *concepts of strategy,* embracing in particular such phenomena as class polarization and class alliance. Among these, on the side of the dominant classes, is the concept of the 'power bloc', designating a specific alliance of dominant classes and fractions; also, on the side of the dominated classes, the concept of the 'people', designating a specific alliance of these classes and fractions." (Poulantzas 1975, p. 24).

and back into unemployment. Moreover, all these segments share the same contradiction running through contemporary capitalism: the fact that the contemporary labour force is at the same time more precarious, more insecure, more subject to forms of systemic violence, more fragmented, but also more in possession of those intellectual and communicative skills to realize its role as producer of social wealth and also to articulate demands and grievances (a comparison between the communication strategies of modern grass-root movements and certain aspects of the ingenuity of collective resistances by refugees and undocumented migrants can be really illuminating on this subject). Moreover, all these have also taken actual collective forms of 'encounters' between the different segments of a potential 'people' in contemporary movements.

Such a perspective poses important challenges regarding the hegemonic aspects of such a strategy. They pose the need to rethink the question of re-creating the collective subject of emancipation to look directly at the traumas linked to oppression and colonialism and to reconfigure, as Houria Bouteldja has suggested, the 'we' of a new political identity to be collectively invented.[14] They require a certain encounter between different currents, not only in the sense of political differences but also of the differences created by the reproduction of the colonial condition inside European States. Sadri Khiari posits this exigency when he calls for the construction of a "decolonial majority, which will be constituted by an alliance between indigenous political forces and non-indigenous decolonial political forces" or when he calls for a

politics of hegemony inside the French white population, a cultural, moral, ideological politics in order to be, one day, conceivable that there are inside the white political forces decolonial composing elements that will be based upon a broad consensus inside the population (Bouteldja and Khiari (eds) 2012, p. 394).

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[14] "We are the sum of our acts of cowardice and of our resistances. We will be what we will be worthy to be. That's all. This is true for all of us, whites or blacks. It is there that the question of the big WE will be posed. The We of our encounter, the We of the surpassing of race and its abolition, the We of a new political identity that we must invent together, the We of the decolonial majority. [...] This will be the We of a revolutionary love" (Bouteldja 2016, pp. 139-140).

In a like manner it is interesting to note his suggestions on how the movements of what he defines as "indigenous" (namely the former colonial subjects living as citizens or migrants in European states) can contribute to the broader redefinition of movements of emancipation.

[T]he French Indigenous but also non indigenous population suffers a degradation not only of its economic conditions of life but also of its entire life environment, a destruction of cultures, of popular knowledges, of traditions, of citizenship, of many social links, problems that cannot be resolved simply by the nationalisation of the means of production and by planification, either statist or self-managed. To these questions, which are complicated questions, I think that the indigenous are maybe more in position than the left or the far left to find answers, to the extent that these are questions that are being directly posed to them because they are the fundamental forms of racialisation (Bouteldja and Khiari (eds.) 2012, 396-397).

And it is here that we find the importance of solidarity and solidarity movements to refugees, especially forms that attempt to create common spaces and practices of solidarity, such as self-managed forms of hospitality that combine an immediate answer to a humanitarian crisis with struggles that treat refugees as collective subjects and not simply 'victims'. The example of the self-managed Plaza Hotel in Athens and other self-managed centres that offer forms of hospitality to refugees is one such example. The same goes for all forms of common struggle across Europe, all attempts to create new alliances based upon a common condition of subalternity. From struggles for the rights of migrant labour to initiatives such as the 'March for Dignity' in France, these are all aspects of an attempt to 'create people'.

It is also important to note that this conception of the people in terms of a potential new "historical bloc", in sharp contrast to both a certain version of 'multiculturalism'[15] that treats societies as simple aggregations of individuals and differences but also to the neo-republican version of the people as common history and shared values. It points to a people to be created, it accepts all the referents of subaltern classes as necessarily contradictory elements of a people to come, of a "national-popular" element that has yet

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[15] Especially since, as Himani Bannerji (2000) has suggested, a certain version of multiculturalism can be fully compatible with neoliberalism.

to be constructed, in a constant process of reconstruction / reproduction / renewal. Above all, it is a conception of the construction of the people that does not put class antagonism into brackets: rather, it takes it as a starting point.

All this suggests that simply thinking about the rights of those not included in the nation, however important this might be, is not enough, because it does not challenge the current erosion of both democracy and popular sovereignty as part of very specific social and political strategies that enhance developments such as European Integration. Moreover, an emphasis upon rights, without a challenge of European Integration can lead either to the fruitless pursuit of inscribing those rights within the institutional framework of 'Fortress-Europe', in a phase when the opposite is more probable, or to various forms of compromises, such the current distinctions between 'refugees' and 'migrants'. And the answer to this impasse cannot be the invocation of a utopian 'global' right to nomadic movement – however important it is to guarantee full social and political rights to anyone living and working in a country – exactly because, as in the former case, it does not point to the actual political forms than can account both for the defence of these rights but also for the possibility to really struggle against racism by creating the kind of antagonistic political body that would re-signify both democracy and social transformation. In contrast, the choice of reclaiming popular sovereignty, in the form of ruptures with international institutional forms that undermine democracy, such as the EU and the Eurozone, along with demanding full rights and citizenship for anyone living and working in a country (and in general contributing to its collective social life), indeed offers an alternative, creating conditions for a broader process of trans-formation. It is exactly the prospect of social transformation, a common future instead of a common history or origin that creates a different antagonistic (and agonistic) form of 'popular unity'.[16] In this sense, a renewed socialist perspective, along the lines of such an emergence of a new historical bloc, is both a potential outcome and a necessary condition of dealing with the new forms of exclusion that emerge.

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[16] "Our politics must sidestep the paradigm of 'unity' based on 'fragmentation or integration' and instead engage in struggles based on the genuine contradictions of our society." (Bannerji 2000, p. 120).

And it is here that we can find the basis of a new inter-nationalism, new forms of cooperation and solidarity. Solidarity inside a country is the condition for solidarity abroad; a different social and political configuration is the condition for a different 'foreign policy'.

Consequently, it is exactly the emergence of a new historical bloc than can actually give a different meaning to sovereignty, linking it to social transformation and emancipation, basing it upon a strategy to actually fight racism and neocolonialism and transforming into a form of a potentially revolutionary 'general will', representing the democratic instance that is at the heart of communism as a material tendency.

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