

Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the Limits of History

Michael Neocosmos

Journal of Asian and African Studies 2012 47: 530

DOI: 10.1177/0021909612452701

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jas.sagepub.com/content/47/5/530>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Asian and African Studies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jas.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://jas.sagepub.com/content/47/5/530.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Oct 1, 2012

[What is This?](#)

Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the Limits of History*

Journal of Asian and African Studies
47(5) 530–547
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0021909612452701
jas.sagepub.com


Michael Neocosmos

University of South Africa, South Africa

Abstract

This article is concerned to show that the historical science of the (neo-)colonial world is unable to allow for an analysis of the political subjectivities of ‘those-who-do-not-count’ or ‘subalterns’ as rational beings. Rather, it can only think such subjectivities as the products of people who are merely bearers of their social location, not thinking subjects. As a result, such history can only be a history of place, not a history of the transcending of place; it therefore amounts to colonial or state history. Historical objectivity invariably produces state history. The thought of the possibility of emancipatory politics, which always exceeds place, is thus precluded. This is an unavoidable epistemic problem in history and the social sciences in their current form. Following the work of Lazarus, I argue for an alternative historical methodology in Africa in terms of an internal analysis of the idioms of politics as discontinuous subjective sequences.

Keywords

Africa, emancipation, history, political subjectivities, sequence, subaltern

For the colonized, objectivity is always directed against him. (Fanon, 1990: 61, translation modified)

There is a history of states but there is no history of politics. (Badiou, 1992: 234, my translation)

The Problem of Historical Analysis and Political Subjectivity

In thinking a politics of emancipation in which people themselves are the agents of their own transformation, we cannot begin by thinking of such subjectivity from social location, from place, but only from resistance to location, from the subversion of place. If one begins from place or location, ‘people’s voices, their subjectivities can be nothing more than the naturalized, homogenized expressions of those spaces’ (Ross, 2009: 21). This does not mean that place is of no concern, of course. It could even be argued that it is only from the subjective subversion of place, from a

Corresponding author:

Michael Neocosmos, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Pretoria 0003, South Africa.
Email: michaelneocosmos@yahoo.com

position outside place, that both place and its questioning can be understood so that the new can become the object of thought. When the oppressed refuse and resist oppression, they place themselves beyond the place of oppression both subjectively and politically and often even physically. By so doing they make that oppression visible and force a rethinking of conceptual categories. Slavery, for example, could only begin to be fully understood as an oppressive relation – and per force the universal truth of humanity could only be fully grasped – when slaves were able to place themselves subjectively outside a location founded on inhumanity in all its aspects and act upon it so as to thereby affirm the universality of the human, as African slaves did in Saint Domingue from 1791 to 1804.¹ In other words, there is a close relationship, largely unrecognized, between militancy and political subjectivity on the one hand, and the understanding of the social divisions and hierarchies which are always upheld by the state on the other, through making the latter apparent. In sum, there is an intimate relation between militancy and truth. In this sense a politics of the contestation of place can be understood as a condition of critical thought.²

It is important to emphasize that the inability to make sense of the subversion of place and social location – that is, to grasp categories of ‘displacement’ – is the main obstacle to thinking politics beyond the state and hence to thinking emancipation, for it is the state which is the manager of places and their relations to each other within a social division of labour and hierarchy and which is thus opposed to any emancipatory idea. All states without exception reproduce inequalities, differences, hierarchies and a social division of labour against which a politics of equality is directed.³ As states manage what exists, they therefore cannot be the source of the new. I have shown elsewhere that, while the ideas of the nation or nationalism, for example, as understood by the state are founded on a social conception of indigeneity which is then naturalized, during periods of national emancipation – as theorized particularly by Fanon (1990) – the nation consists of a purely subjective affirmation distinct from any social objective place (Neocosmos, 2011a). The thinking of a politics of freedom – the core emancipatory idea whatever forms it may take – is therefore impossible from within the confines of state subjectivities.

It is thus the movement out of place (and ‘out of order’) which is at the origin of any genuine politics, whether this evolves into emancipatory politics or not. Zikode has explained the politics of Abahlali baseMjondolo in a way which makes this point precisely: ‘a living politics is the movement out of the places where oppression has assigned those who do not count’.⁴ The philosopher Jacques Rancière makes the same point when he notes that ‘politics begins exactly when those who “cannot” do something show that in fact they can’ (Rancière, 2003: 202). Politics as the expression of human agency – politics proper – begins then when those who are allocated to a place wherein they are not supposed to think (‘beyond their station in life’ as the English expression goes) in fact do so. Thus politics begins at the point of displacement,⁵ and it is the inability to grasp the subversion of place which lies at the core of a failure to understand the politics of emancipation, a characteristic typical of the sociology of social movements, for example. This is because such a sociology always accounts for subjectivity as a ‘reflection’ or ‘representation’ of social place: class ‘consciousness’, ethnic, gender or youth ‘identities’, ‘masculinities’, nationalist ‘ideologies’ and so on, and not from displacement. In addition, and as a result, politics is seen as existing only within a specifically allocated space where the politics of such interests are ‘fought out’, that of ‘the political’ – in other words that of the state.

Of course not all displacement is in itself indicative of an emancipatory politics. Yet an emancipatory politics can only emanate from those most likely to contest their place, from people to whom Badiou refers as the ‘in-existent’, those who have a minimal existence in the political world. It is only in relation to the ‘in-existent’ then that new thinking may emerge.⁶ This placing of oneself beyond place is initially in essence a purely subjective gesture, the result of a decision or refusal of

the existing objective regularities of the world (the extant) and an affirmation of something new. An understanding of this subjective displacement has been ignored by social science and regularly relegated to the psychological domain, yet it is only on the basis of understanding such displacement that emancipation can begin to become the object of thought.

What this argument suggests is that political subjectivity cannot be understood simply as of the order of 'representation' (or 'reflection') of an abstract notion of 'Man' or of social location as in the ubiquitous analyses of 'identities' so fashionable today. One must begin by recognizing that political subjectivity – or 'consciousness', as it used to be called – is not simply a reflection of objective location, but that it may be an indication of 'excess' over that social location. All emancipatory subjectivities are 'excessive' in this sense, because they propose something new which was unthinkable within the objective regularity of places managed by the state. As a result, it is the state which is the 'guardian' of the objective and subjective extant, and particularly of the reduction of the subjective to the objective.⁷

The trajectory of emancipatory subjectivities – of politics in the true sense of the term – can of course vary,⁸ but politics in this sense has one fundamental feature: it is historically sequential and discontinuous. This is so because, as Lazarus (1996) has convincingly argued, politics in this subjective sense does not always exist, it is rare; it rises and later fades away. Hence the first step in any attempt to understand emancipatory political subjectivity must be to come to grips with historical analysis, for it is the discipline of history which is said to account for the continuous unfolding of politics over time. History sees time as continuous and thereby conflates the objective passage of time with the conscious agency of people, as people (individually or combined in institutions, classes and so on; i.e. as historical 'actors') are seen as making history through their politics. This conflation of subjectivity with the apparent objectivity of time (apparent for example in the work of Marc Bloch) thereby naturalizes specific understandings of time (and historical breaks), and structures a state mode of thinking, for this process always 'objectifies' and naturalizes subjectivity.⁹ This then leads to historicism and the visualizing of a *telos* of history.

It can be noted, for example, that the standard (and apparently 'obvious') procedure of demarcating African history along the pre-colonial–colonial–post-colonial temporal dimension – apart from focussing on changes in state forms and privileging European domination as the norm around which history is plotted and thought – has had the consequence of occluding what is arguably the most important event in modern African history: the slave trade. The Atlantic slave trade simply disappears from this vision of time altogether or, if it is mentioned at all, it appears as an 'add on', not as an effect of the periodization itself. It is not pre-colonial as this concerns distinct African societies untrammelled by Western domination. It is not a feature of colonialism as this concerns the political dominance of Africa by the Western powers and the construction of colonial states beginning in the late 19th century when the slave trade had apparently ended. The result is that it simply disappears from the horizon of thought. Thus the naturalization of such notions of time has drastic effects on analytical thought. In any case history is always *ex-post-facto*, so to speak. It does not consist of an analysis of politics as it is happening.

For historicism of any variety, not only is there an essence unfolding, but a concept of totality makes possible the reduction of consciousness to social categories and the allocation of all politics to a specific domain of the political, the domain of the contestation over power. This is because politics (understood as concerning the conflicts between and the management of interests) is seen as an immediately recognizable form of action which takes place only within a universally existing social domain of the public, of the civil, of the state. Class consciousness, ethnic consciousness, national consciousness and so on, in brief identities, have a history because a continuity of action can be established and their essence identified through relating them to a location. But the locating

of subjectivity within place or social position, as I have noted, is the prerogative of state thinking as it is the state which is subjectively the manager and regulator of place and hierarchy in the interest of the dominant. Emancipatory politics (in particular) on the other hand can only be understood as sequential and discontinuous, or as Badiou puts it, only as a 'singular trace where the truth of a collective situation sees the light of day' (Badiou, 1992: 234, my translation). Displacement is thus discontinuous and sequential. In sum, what are usually said to be historical periods are continuous structurally conceived phases of state or imperial politics (the politics of power), whereas emancipatory politics are discontinuous, singular and purely subjective affirmations which can only be understood in terms of themselves and not as 'representations' of anything else.

The fundamental theoretical issue at stake, it should be apparent, is that posed by Hegel (1952) who understood history in terms of subjectivity – for whom history was the unfolding of the *Idea* – and his adherence to an essence or subject of history actualized in his case in the state.¹⁰ A different philosophy of the subjective is necessary and Badiou (2009b: 201) argues that the *Idea* must be understood simply as 'the affirmation that a new truth is historically possible'. A history of emancipatory politics must be understood then in terms of changing subjectivities, while at the same time not collapsing into historicism of either the 'idealist' or 'materialist' kind. Lazarus' (1996) original solution to the problem posed by Hegel is to understand politics as not always extant; as discontinuous, sequential and rare and as composed of subjective political sequences embodied in what he calls historical 'modes of politics'.¹¹ These modes of politics are analysed 'internally' in terms of the specific categories and concepts which they deploy. For example, for Marx in what Lazarus terms the 'classist mode': 'class struggle', 'working-class movement', 'communists', and so forth; for Lenin and the 'Bolshevik mode': the 'proletariat', the 'party', 'professional revolutionaries' and so on; for Fanon and the National Liberation Struggle mode of politics the operative categories are those of 'national consciousness', the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized', the 'damned of the earth', the 'national bourgeoisie', and so on (Neocosmos, 2009). The categories through which emancipatory politics are thought or grasped in each mode of conceiving politics are thus quite distinct.

Social Reductionism and Political Subjectivities in Colonial Africa

It is important to note that, in the case of the study of anti-colonial resistance movements in Africa, not only has political subjectivity rarely been central, but when it has indeed been the object of study, it has been regularly reduced to its social location as well as interpreted, 'anthropologized' and translated into an idiom comprehensible to liberal or Marxist post-enlightenment historical science. Various described as 'religious', 'tribal', 'ethnic', 'traditional' or 'pre-capitalist', many such subjectivities have been distinguished from those of modernity precisely by relating them to their apparent social foundations. While so-called traditional, ethnic and religious expressions of resistance have been seen as being typical of 'tribal', 'peasant' and other primarily rural-based movements, urban ones have been seen as focussed on more evidently recognizably modern characteristics such as those of class and nation.

Until the 1980s it was rarely thought that ethnic and religious subjectivities could perfectly well be modern expressions of resistance (contemporary to capitalism) and that ethnic and religious movements, for example, could also deploy nationalist idioms. The dominance of historicism in Africanist social science was evidenced by Terence Ranger's (1968) famous distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' forms of resistance to colonialism, the former being understood as largely peasant, ethnically circumscribed and rural based, the latter being urban nationalist and

modern in their thinking. Closely following the arguments of social historians such as Hobsbawm, who distinguished between 'primitive' and 'modern' rebels, the former being characterized by a 'pre-political' consciousness, historians and social scientists of Africa restricted their understanding of political subjectivities to their evidently recognizable Western modern forms. Modernity in political subjectivity could not take other forms but those recognizably articulating issues of citizenship and democracy, organized in political parties, unions and other interest groups and using a language of rights within a specific domain of 'the political'.¹² This apparent Eurocentrism could rarely come to terms with the fact that supposedly 'ethnic', 'traditional', 'religious' or any so-called 'pre-modern' cultural idioms could be deployed in the field of politics not to advocate a return to a supposedly golden past, but to affirm humanistic and popular-democratic demands for a better future.¹³ It then clearly conflated subjective politics with the objectively political and also assumed a public-private distinction in the form of an extraction of the human from spirituality which was largely misplaced and irrelevant in African conditions.¹⁴

The difficulty, however, has not only consisted in a failure to recognize the fact that ostensibly 'religious' idioms, for example, could be in essence political, but also in the fact that history and social science have only been able to analyse forms of consciousness by reducing them to the objectively social and thereby disabling any understanding of their possible universal emancipatory content through denying the reason of participants any effectivity. The colonial character of modernity in Africa, as in other post-colonial locations, inevitably led to an often unrecognizable and indecipherable fusing of the 'modern' and the 'traditional' in politics which could rarely be disentangled from within the logic of a Eurocentric scientific discourse. One of the movements which clearly illustrates some of these analytical difficulties has been the so-called Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in the 1950s.¹⁵ This largely peasant uprising was clearly an event for Kenyan politics, as although the movement lost militarily, ultimately its consequences were far-reaching as a class of rich peasants was created through land redistribution through the Swynnerton Plan and the country achieved its independence soon after (Mamdani, 1996).

Mamdani (1996: 189) has rightly dismissed the crude debate between those who see Mau Mau as a 'tribal' movement and those who see it as a 'nationalist' one. It was evidently both, being overwhelmingly an organization whose main adherents were in terms of their social location peasants ('squatters' in settler-colonial parlance) and workers of the Gikuyu nationality (ethnicity) who demanded both 'land and freedom' and an 'African government', demands which were obviously nationalist in content and could be supported by all the colonized (e.g. Barnett and Njama, 1966: 278 and *passim*). Obviously the distinction between tribe and nation is quite impossible to sustain in this particular case, a fact which clearly illustrates the limits placed on understanding by historicist and positivist conceptions and their separation of the particular from the universal and tradition from modernity. Yet we can also note that whether the literature stresses the socio-economic location of the participants or emphasizes cultural characteristics, it is in all cases their supposed 'particular interests' in the form of 'class', 'tribe', 'ethnicity', 'race', 'nation', and so forth which are seen to be the fundamental explanatory foundation of consciousness (e.g. Furedi, 1989; Kanogo, 1985; Maughan-Brown, 1985; Throup, 1987 *inter alia*). The guerrilla rebels themselves are then simply painted in historical accounts as 'bearers' of their socio-economic location or place within a structural context, not as rational 'subjects' of their own history who are able to make choices and exercise their will and reason.

However, there is one interesting and important attempt to provide a picture of what participants themselves may have thought and of their motivations provided by John Lonsdale (1992). Lonsdale criticizes those accounts from the colonial state based on tribe, atavism and social pathology, from nationalists founded on state nationalism and from Marxists based on class, and proposes a 'many

stranded narrative' which connects some of these factors while grounding his own account ultimately in a set of cultural practices he refers to as 'moral economy' and a sense of civic virtue and reciprocity which he refers to as 'moral ethnicity' (1992: 403, 405, 467). While Gikuyu nationalists did not have one voice, 'they still argued about one ideal, the civic virtue of self-mastery; some voices were light with hope, others hoarse with despair' (p. 402). There was simultaneously, he argues, a battle for Gikuyu authority over age and class lines for which 'the issue was civic virtue, achieved by one party but seemingly out of the other's reach' (p. 403). Those for whom 'civic virtue' was out of reach were precisely the poor, the young, particularly men – young men without access to land, which had been stolen by the colonizers – without the exercise of economic independence and political participation, without the ability to fulfil their moral and civic duties within their ethnic domain. In the absence of these capacities they could not be full ethnic citizens, as what 'the ancestors had taught, or were said to have taught, on the relation between labour and civilization was the only widely known measure of achievement or failure in man- or womanhood' (p. 316).

In sum for Lonsdale, 'Mau Mau fought as much for virtue as for freedom' (p. 317). Asked by the colonial official: 'Why did you join Mau Mau?', a formal guerrilla answered: 'to regain the stolen lands and to become an adult' (p. 326). In this manner, Lonsdale interprets the answer of the militant to the colonial authority's question as giving 'Mau Mau's open purpose and its inner meaning. His political language . . . linked external power to internal virtue. His personal maturity depended on a public power to win land'. Without 'moral agency' Gikuyu men could not achieve the full maturity exercised by elders (p. 326). Lonsdale thus distinguishes what he calls 'moral ethnicity' from 'political tribalism'. The former 'creates communities from within through domestic controversy over civic virtue', the latter 'flows down from high-political intrigue; it constitutes communities through external competition' (p. 466). He concludes:

Moral ethnicity may not be an institutionalized force; but it is the nearest Kenya has to a national memory and a watchful political culture. Because native, it is a more trenchant critic of the abuse of power than any Western political thought; it imagines freedom in laborious idioms of self-mastery which intellectuals too easily dismiss. High-political awareness of the vigilance of moral ethnicity may be, as much as canny political tribalism and a lively civil society, what keeps Kenya at peace. (p. 467)

The merit of Lonsdale's argument is that it brings out quite clearly the idea that ethnic identity is always contested, although for him it appears that the Mau Mau contestation concerned simply the position of various (age) 'actors' within the hierarchy, but importantly not the character of the hierarchy itself. His differentiating of an idealized moral conception of the ethnic from an authoritarian personalized and communitarian ('tribal') politics is welcome as it reminds us that not all politics which use traditional and cultural idioms are of necessity communitarian. Yet at the same time, by virtue of the fact that Lonsdale finds it necessary to explain to himself and to us what the response of the Mau Mau activist 'really meant' and thus to develop a culturalist argument which goes beyond the mere pointing to the fact of cultural idioms as forms of resistance, not only seems to counterpose an idealized version of 'ethnic consciousness' to a despised 'tribalist' one, but also anthropologizes what could be easily read as a simple statement of political citizenship. The danger of Lonsdale's argument is that it fails to completely transcend the Western colonial image of the Gikuyu as tribal or ethnic 'subjects' and therefore fails to allow either the militant rebel to speak for him/herself, or failing that to provide at least an opening for the understanding of politics as subjectivity in Africa which does not collapse into culturalism of the neo-colonial variety.

I want to suggest in what follows that this problem illustrated here by Lonsdale's argument is largely inherent in what, following Foucault, could be called the 'epistemic reason' of the human

sciences as presently constituted, and is not simply the result of bias, of the limits of Lonsdale's choice of theory, or indeed of the scientific method itself. In order to do this I wish to discuss some of the debates which arose within the Indian *Subaltern Studies Collective* as they constitute to my mind the currently most sophisticated way of addressing this particular question of the Eurocentricism of the human sciences and the subjectivity of the subaltern.

Before doing so, however, it is important to note that the idea of 'the moral' in the notion of 'moral economy' in the Mau Mau case seems to be a signifier of the fact that Western categories are inapplicable (or applicable only with difficulty), rather than a coherent alternative conceptual proposal which would allow the consciousness of the subaltern to speak for itself in its own categories.¹⁶ There are three general points to make regarding this notion which are of relevance to the present discussion. First, it is applied to the situation of 'outsiders' or those 'marginal' to capitalist market economy who, it is said, propose a distinct social ethic in the face of expanding and encroaching capitalist relations; this ethic is to be celebrated in opposition to capitalism as it exhibits features of a 'non-capitalist' economy extolled as 'virtuous'. Of course few seriously celebrate an ethical content to the capitalist market economy; at best the obvious point is noted that any economy is always socially embedded and that this may include various moral features. Second, and as a result of this celebration, such an alternative conception is often idealized and seen as unchanging with the consequent inability to fully investigate the contradictions within it. Thus Lonsdale takes as given that Gikuyu 'civic virtue' is given in a form which leaves the location – for example, of age differences – uncontested; of course, younger men want to become elders, this is why they uphold such civic virtue. Finally, of course, the subaltern does not speak here as Spivak (1988) would say. The category of moral economy is simply invented by Western scholars to make sense of popular consciousness in the 'non-modern' or at the margins of modernity.¹⁷ We have little sense of what the Mau Mau rebel would say let alone think, about his/her own conception of 'land and freedom'; if the idea is to understand popular consciousness, then we are not much closer to doing so. The Mau Mau rebel is simply said to think as an (African) tribal peasant; s/he is simply the bearer of that structural category and hence must think access to land in primordial 'ethnic' and 'traditional' terms and hence in 'moral' terms which are to be celebrated or deplored depending on one's political orientation. For Lonsdale there is no attempt to think of the Gikuyu as a nationality, for example like the Scots or the Irish; they are African therefore they must be ethnic. There is little fundamental difference here between the prejudices of colonial and post-colonial human science. Moreover, Lonsdale himself admits that he cannot speak Gikuyu and that his analysis 'gives weight to the words of senior men' (p. 321). He thus admits that his work 'will not explain Mau Mau. It hopes to uncover the moral and intellectual context in which explanations may be found' (p. 326). Of course, despite the personal diffidence and the protocols of positivist science, what Lonsdale offers is a reading of both the objective location (the Gikuyu peasantry) and the subjective (civic virtue) of Mau Mau militants based on his theoretical assumptions and the evidence which, as a historian, he is able and willing to muster from the archive.

Thinking Subaltern Consciousness and the Limits of History

It is at this point that some of the debates in *Subaltern Studies* become pertinent, for the concerns of that historical school, at least in its early phase, have been precisely to understand the political consciousness of the anti-colonial peasant rebel primarily in colonial India. The emphasis is then directly placed on making sense of the political subjectivities of the subaltern. In undertaking this project *Subaltern Studies* have been forced to distance themselves from colonial, from nationalist, as well as from Marxist social history with the result that the disciplinary logic of history – what

Lalu (2009) calls ‘disciplinary reason’ – has had to be unpacked. I shall attempt to do this via a discussion of some aspects of the work of Ranajit Guha, the founding intellectual figure of *Subaltern Studies*.

The whole of Guha’s intellectual enterprise, as I understand it, is to begin from the statement that if the anti-colonial peasant rebel is to be understood as the *subject* of his/her own history, then it is the political consciousness of the subaltern which must be the object of the discipline of history. It is a rigorous fidelity to this axiom which it seems to me guides Guha’s historical work on India. This I will argue leads him and the *Subaltern Studies* project into an impasse as the discipline of history is unable to provide the means whereby this axiom can be fully effectuated. Ultimately *Subaltern Studies* is caught up in a ‘disciplinary’ or perhaps better an ‘epistemic’ reason which is unable to transcend a state-thought of politics from which the subjectivity of the subaltern is excluded. In this sense, Spivak (1988) is quite right, the subaltern cannot speak from the confines of history; her voice cannot be heard without transcending the discipline of history itself as history, which by virtue of its construction as ‘science’ is unable to identify political subjects, only bearers of social locations.

Guha’s starting point is that there existed, during the colonial period in India, a distinct domain of politics beyond the elite domain of state institutions, policies, laws and practices introduced by the British colonial power (‘the political’). This domain was an ‘autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter’ (2000: 3). The ‘principal actors’ in this realm were neither the dominant groups of indigenous society nor the authorities ‘but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is the people’. It is within this parallel and autonomous domain that could be found ‘*the politics of the people*’ (Guha, 2000: 3, emphasis in original). One of the more important distinctions between the politics of the two domains, according to Guha, related to political mobilization as in the elite domain this ‘was achieved vertically whereas in that of subaltern politics this was achieved horizontally’. In the first case this meant reliance on the ‘colonial adaptation of British parliamentary institutions and the residua of . . . the political institutions of the pre-colonial period’, while the latter ‘relied on traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class associations’; the former was more ‘legalistic’, the later more ‘violent’, the former more ‘controlled, the latter more spontaneous’ (2000: 4). In his commentary on the originality of *Subaltern Studies*, Chakrabarty emphasizes the fact that:

By explicitly rejecting the characterization of peasant consciousness as prepolitical, and by avoiding evolutionary models of consciousness, Guha was prepared to suggest that the nature of collective action against exploitation in colonial India was such that effectively led to a new constellation of the *political* . . . Guha insisted that, instead of being an anachronism in a modernizing colonial world, the peasant was a real contemporary of colonialism and a fundamental part of the modernity to which colonial rule gave rise in India. The peasant’s was not a backward consciousness . . . Elitist histories of peasant uprisings missed the significance of this gesture by seeing it as prepolitical. (2002: 8, emphasis in original)

Of course, it was evidently not only ‘elitist histories’ which were being criticized here but also the writings of the British and other Marxist social historians such as Hobsbawm. This argument is developed at length in Guha’s (1992a) justly famous piece on *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*. Guha starts from the observation that, given the risks faced by peasants and how much was at stake for them, it is mistaken to see peasant insurgency in any other way than as a ‘motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses’. Yet historiography has not been prepared to deal with the peasant ‘as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion’ (p. 2) but simply ‘as an empirical person or member of a class’. As a result ‘insurgency is regarded

as *external* to the peasant's consciousness and Cause is made to stand in as a phantom surrogate for Reason, the logic of that consciousness' (p. 3). In other words, peasants were not considered as thinking subjects in the historical literature but simply as bearers of a social place or location. Guha undertakes a detailed assessment of the discourse of this history from the colonial period to the present and concludes that whether it is colonial history, liberal history, nationalist history or Marxist history which is produced, 'the rebel has no place in this history as the subject of rebellion' (p. 27):

Once a peasant rebellion has been assimilated to the career of the Raj, the Nation or the people, it becomes easy for the historian to abdicate the responsibility he has of exploring and describing the consciousness specific to that rebellion and be content to ascribe to it a transcendental consciousness. In operative terms this means denying a will to the mass of the rebels themselves and representing them merely as instruments of some other will. (p. 38)

A major consequence of this general perspective is to fail to recognize the central role played in rebellions by the spirituality of the insurgents, which modernist historiography refers to as 'religion'. Guha uses the example of the Santal rebellion of 1855–1857 to make his point, yet in doing so he opens up a major problem for the history of political consciousness which he is ultimately unable to resolve.¹⁸ The leading protagonists of the rebellion express themselves in an idiom which denies their own agency and rather ascribes it to their god 'Thakur' who is said to do the fighting himself so that it is 'not possible to speak of insurgency in this case except as a religious consciousness . . . as predicated on a will other than their own' (p. 35). As Chakrabarty asks:

What does it then mean when we both take the subaltern's views seriously – the subaltern ascribes the agency for their rebellion to some god – and we want to confer on the subaltern agency or subjecthood in their own history, a status the subaltern's status denies? (1998: 20)

Neither Guha nor Chakrabarty are able to find an adequate solution to this conundrum which thus remains aporetic as 'the supernatural was part of what constituted public life for the non-modern Santals of the 19th century' (p. 20). Guha distances himself from those positions which see religion as an irrational expression of the secular, yet, as Chakrabarty notes, his position 'becomes a combination of the anthropologist's politeness . . . and a Marxist (or modern) sense of frustration with the intrusion of the supernatural into public life' (p. 21) calling it a 'massive demonstration of self-estrangement' (Guha, 1992a: 34). Although Guha understands that we are faced with a religious idiom of politics, he is unable to attempt an analysis of it in its own terms ('internally'):

It was this consciousness, an unquestionably false consciousness if ever there was one, which also generated a certain kind of alienation: it made the subject look upon his destiny not as a function of his own will and action, but as that of forces outside and independent of himself (Guha, 1999: 268).

Yet that consciousness was never so false as to not recognize the real enemy or as to not sustain a mass popular rebellion against colonialism of extreme importance. Unfortunately, then, the Santals' statements are treated as 'beliefs' and anthropologized with the consequence that 'we cannot write history from *within* those beliefs. We thus produce "good", not subversive histories' (Chakrabarty, 1998: 22, emphasis added).

Guha concludes that 'there is nothing that historiography can do to eliminate such distortion altogether . . . what it can do, however, is to acknowledge such distortion as parametric – as a datum which determines the form of the exercise itself, and to stop pretending that it can fully grasp a past

consciousness and reconstitute it' (Guha, 1992a: 33). Thus the only way out for Guha and indeed Chakrabarty also is to introduce an element of 'self-criticism' into historical analysis so as to place the coercive content of the episteme or the discipline under scrutiny. Chakrabarty (1998: 27) himself concludes that we need to take more seriously the fact that 'other [spiritual] ways of being are not without questions of power and justice but these questions are raised . . . on terms other than those of the political modern'. We are left suspended as though we have reached the limit of what it is possible to think within the confines of history; yet it is indeed possible to think beyond this contradiction and to give 'non-modern' political idioms a more important place without abandoning rationality. In order to see how we can do this we need to re-focus on the question of the idiom of politics.

Guha (1992b) argues that, in Indian history, it is centrally important to distinguish analytically the history of state power from that of capital. This largely follows from his earlier argument distinguishing between two domains of politics which leads him to maintain that capitalism dominated in India but without creating a hegemonic capitalist culture; it is this which he calls 'dominance without hegemony' (p. 275). Chakrabarty (2002: 13) notes that 'the history of colonial modernity in India created a domain of the political that was heteroglossic in its idioms and irreducibly plural in its structure, interlocking within itself strands of different types of relationships that did not make up a logical whole'. Because of this a theory of power independent from that of capital had to be developed. In doing so Guha argues that the power relation can be understood as composed of *dominance* (D) and *subordination* (S), each in turn being made up of a further relation: between *coercion* (C) and *persuasion* (P) for *dominance*, and between *collaboration* (C*) and *resistance* (R) for *subordination* (1992b: 229). Through the use of this double matrix, Guha is able to show how the political domain of power was structured by a number of discourses and idioms of British and Indian origin interacting to make coercion or persuasion possible. In particular, the latter was made possible by a combination of the colonial state notion of 'improvement' with the Indian idea of Dharma 'understood, broadly, as the quintessence of "virtue, the moral duty"', which implied a social duty conforming to one's place in the caste hierarchy as well as the local power structures' (p. 244).

Here, then, we have a political idiom not too dissimilar, if more extensive, than that of the Gikuyu 'civic morality' noted by Lonsdale, yet here it is not labelled as 'ethnic' (the analysis is by an insider) while it is said to contribute to making persuasive collaboration with colonialism possible. Evidently the British colonialists were somewhat more successful in integrating Indian idioms into their forms of rule in the 19th century than they were in Kenya in the 20th. But overall we have a fundamental recognition by Guha that politics can take religious and cultural forms not always evidently 'political' in the modern sense, yet central to elite political subjectivity. Guha views these idioms 'from the inside' – that is, not as an anthropologist – analysing their names and political effects noting 'that something as contemporary as 19th and 20th-century nationalism often made its appearance in political discourse dressed up as ancient Hindu wisdom' (p. 245). We are probably here in the presence of a historically specific 'mode of politics' in Lazarus' sense, yet Guha fails to take the same step when it comes to the political discourse of the Santal rebel. Why should a discourse of 'social duty' be more easily recognizable as 'political' than one which is ostensibly (crudely?) 'religious'? Could it be that the idiom of Dharma, despite its ancient origins, is more recognizably political as it directly concerns a state politics of which the main feature has universally been the maintenance and reproduction of difference and hierarchy? Could it be that the idiom of Dharma is evaluated from within its own subjectivity, while that of the Santal is not?

What distinguishes the idiom of Dharma from that of the Santal cannot be that the one is 'modern' and the other 'traditional', nor can it be that one is religious and the other not; but it can

only be that the former is 'evidently' a state discourse of power while the latter is not. This it seems to me is the nub of the fundamental problem faced by Guha's work, by Chakrabarty's and indeed by *Subaltern Studies*. Politics is equated throughout their analyses with 'the political', with power, with the public, the civil, the state. It is not consistently and exclusively seen as a collective subjectivity, as an affirmation, with the result that it is equated with that particular consciousness which is effectuated within the parameters of state conceptions. It therefore becomes impossible for them to break from an idea of politics as reflective of the social. The subject is not conceived as prescribing a universal in their work, it is exclusively socially located; after all it is 'peasant subjecthood' as such, which Guha in particular is wedded to.¹⁹ In fact, the term 'subaltern' expresses this aporia: it refers to a social category which is only vaguely located socially, but it is politically recognizable. Despite the enormous step forward taken by Guha in understanding that 'the political included actions that challenged the theorist's usual and inherited separation between politics and religion' (Chakrabarty, 2002: 19), the 'religious' idiom is still understood as an analytical deviation from the obviously 'political'; it has to be shown to be political by analysis, while presumably the obviously 'political' needs no such work of analytical nomination.

The fallacy of this view can be seen through a contemporary example which is so common it is scarcely commented on. A commonplace account of the politics of ethnic, religious or xenophobic violence today in Africa and elsewhere is one which emphasizes the poverty of those involved. It is regularly stressed, within the 'public sphere' as in academia in South Africa, for example, that it is socio-economic location which is ultimately to account for the xenophobic political subjectivity or consciousness of the poor (Neocosmos, 2010). Agency here is simply foreclosed; it is assumed that perpetrators of violence, who are poor, are unable to think for themselves and to make political choices; they are said to simply (re)act as automata to their social condition with the result that their agency is denied much as that of the Santal rebels had been denied by the Santals themselves as well as by their historians (although in different ways). What indeed is the difference between maintaining that 'God made me do it' or 'Poverty made him do it'? *None whatsoever insofar as the denial of agency is concerned*. Yet there is in fact a very important difference in that the second statement is considered a valid account of politics in modern scientific discourse, while the former is not. Even if a survey were to be conducted showing, say, that 77.6% of all adults maintained that God was the active agent in xenophobic or ethnic violence today, this would be interpreted as pathological, as an indication of a 'moral panic' akin to the belief in 'supra-terrestrials' not as a 'fact'. Yet if the same proportion of respondents stress the perceived threat to their rights to housing or jobs for xenophobic violence – interpreted by scholars as resulting from poverty or unemployment – this is said to constitute a legitimate finding (Neocosmos, 2010).

The reason for this difference is that social conditions in general and economic forces in particular constitute scientifically legitimate substitutes for agency and the political subjectivities of people today, whereas 'supernatural' ones do not; it should be clear that such an account is objectivist and hence that it amounts to a state mode of thinking. Moreover, the emphasis placed on poverty is an inference drawn in the work of scholarly commentators, not necessarily by perpetrators themselves who emphasize their citizenship rights (Neocosmos, 2010, 2011b). The epistemic reason at work here is clearly apparent. We should probably also note in passing that 'supernatural' factors are not of the same order as 'religious' ones; it is totally possible today for the latter to be included legitimately in the list of 'causes' in scientific studies of inter-ethnic violence, for example. The most important point, however, is that accounting for violence in terms of poverty (inequality or even 'relative deprivation') is a political discourse of the state today, legitimized by epistemic reason. It is the state which systematically refuses to acknowledge the existence of political subjectivities, reducing them to the socio-economic or to psychology, thus denying agency. On the other

hand, to say as the Santal rebel did that his god Thakur will do the fighting was a subjectivity totally beyond (external to) colonial state comprehension at the time in that situation (although not necessarily outside pre-colonial state subjectivity, incidentally) which meant that colonial state discourse had to locate it elsewhere, outside 'the political', in the domain of the 'superstitious' and 'irrational'.²⁰

What this means is, paradoxically, that the Santal's statement can be considered as political in Badiou's sense of the term in the context (the 'world') of 19th century India, as it was expressive of a collective subject and existed well beyond the (scientific) parameters of state thinking, exceeding thereby the subjective configuration of the colonial world and mere agency; whereas the statement regarding the economic account of violence today is not political, operating as it does totally within the ambit of state (scientific) thought and thereby simply reproducing the extant and denying subjecthood and the transcending of place. An internal analysis of the former in terms of its specific categories and names could possibly have elucidated the singular character of its politics; yet once it had entered the archive, such elucidation became well-nigh impossible (without some fundamental deconstruction) for it was controlled and packaged within a category of 'atavism' and 'irrationality' by the colonial discourse of power. The conclusion, then, must be that, whichever idiom or discourse is being investigated, its political character must be established and it can only be established 'from within', as Lazarus (1996, 2001) maintains, through an analysis of its own statements and categories. It is not the case that just because some statements seem to belong to a realm of 'the political', to the 'public sphere', to 'civil society' or whatever, that because their location labels them as 'politics' within modernist (neo)liberal or Marxist conceptions, that they are indeed idioms of agency, whereas others which seem to occur outside such a domain – such as religion – are not to be considered as politics.

The problem here is that of historicism which, as I have noted, holds to an idea of totality (e.g. 'society', 'nation', 'social formation') within which political agency is confined to a specific domain of 'the political'. A proliferation of the number of political domains does not unfortunately solve the problem of the social reduction of consciousness itself; it is rather the existence of sites which can 'exist anywhere' and which have to be ascertained as such through analysis, which locates politics (Lazarus, 1996). Politics is always singular and located in sites but simultaneously irreducible to a social referent. Unfortunately, Guha, Chakrabarty and *Subaltern Studies*, because of the fact that their analyses are firmly situated within the discipline of history, have been unable to move to an irreducible analysis of the purely subjective. This is quite clear from the fact that they have seen politics as socially located exclusively within two domains, that of the elite and that of the subaltern.

Recently, Chatterjee (2004) has pursued this argument by noting that two domains of politics exist in contemporary India (and by extension in other countries of the Global South) in which the relation of people to the state differs: 'civil society' and 'political society'. While rightly recognizing that politics does not only exist within the narrow confines of the state and can exist in various realms which themselves originate from the colonial encounter, it is here a structural determination, namely that between people and the state established by different modes of state rule, which is taken by Chatterjee to be the ultimate condition of political subjectivity and which is said to account for the difference between these forms of politics. It is different modes of state rule which determine different connections to power and different modes of being; popular subjectivities are given little choice in effecting let alone in transcending these connections themselves. We are back to considering people as simply bearers of their objective location. A proliferation of state modes of rule does not resolve the problem.²¹ Politics does not have to be located within a state domain of 'the political' (or 'political society') for it to be so qualified. This failure, then, is one which leaves

no room for a subjective politics beyond the structural social determinations of the state.²² *Subaltern Studies* ultimately misses out on understanding displacement and emancipatory politics for it is caught in, and unable to extricate itself from, a statist view of what politics is.

Nevertheless, *Subaltern Studies* is able to illustrate the fact that there is a seemingly unavoidable limit to historical knowledge established by what Lalu (2009) calls 'disciplinary reason'. The fact is that history, as presently constituted, is indeed a state discipline by simple virtue of the fact, as we have seen, that through a concept of continuous time, it objectifies the subjective, thus leaving no room for an understanding of subjective affirmations internally or indeed of a problematization and investigation into the relations between subjectivity and objective place (Lazarus, 2001). The current misrecognition by the most progressive Third World historians of the nature of politics is only marginally distinct from the manner in which colonialism saw the actions of the subaltern rebel, as Guha himself makes patently clear. In fact, the disciplines of the human sciences as a whole do not recognize politics other than as a domain of 'the political', and control scientifically the thinking of political subjectivity by psychologizing it in a similar fashion to the ('anthropologizing') practice of colonial discourse, as they combine a knowledge system with power, governed by what Foucault called an 'episteme'. Lalu concludes that 'we might see subaltern studies as a limited field of critique that is aimed at forging the beginnings of a post-colonial episteme' (Lalu, 2009: 255). This may be a valid way of proceeding; however, the forging of such an episteme, I would maintain, would require an analysis in terms of discontinuous historical sequences as Foucault (1968) himself had pointed out long ago, thus indicating a way around the problematic concept of continuous historical time. In fact Foucault notes that it is precisely 'the *episteme* [which] is the "apparatus" (*dispositif*) which makes possible the separation not of the true from the false, but of what may or may not be characterized as scientific' (Foucault, 1980: 197). To which Spivak (1988: 298) adds that it distinguishes 'the superstitious (ritual etc.) from the scientific'. It is this episteme which I have referred to as 'scientism'. Thus the post-colonial episteme proposed by Lalu would have to begin from an understanding of politics as purely subjective and hence sequential in order to fully discard the scientism and the historicism inherent in holding to a correspondence between the subjective and the objective.

In Conclusion

Where then does this discussion leave the subjectivity of the Mau Mau rebel in Kenya in the early 1950s? Well, for a start we do not have to abandon the rational or to embrace a distant anthropologizing of difference to make sense of this. Lonsdale is caught in the trap of the liberal historian sympathetic to the oppressed, but ultimately unable to break from the colonial scientific episteme through the adherence to an implicit superiority which can only locate the consciousness of African rebels within a 'tribal' context of 'moral ethnicity'. The fact that the term 'ethnicity' is given positive attributes while that of 'tribe' is given negative ones does not overcome the neo-colonial perspective. The idealization of ethnic life is such as to not only iron out power contradictions within Gikuyu society, but also to fail to allow for the subaltern to speak in his/her own names and categories regarding what s/he thought and practiced in the rebellion. Lonsdale shows very well how Gikuyu 'moral economy/moral ethnicity' was founded on an understanding of the individual as a 'subject'. Political agency was seen as central to adulthood in particular; he may refer to it as 'virtue', but its essence can be read as fundamentally political not moral.

In other words, in circumstances of colonial domination including the theft of ancestral lands, the destruction of subjecthood and the emasculation of adulthood, their collective and individual being could only be recaptured by Mau Mau activists through fighting the British for the return of

their land. But given his liberal proclivities, Lonsdale feels obliged to link this to an idealization of ethnic culture, something which is not at all clear that the participants themselves were doing. In actual fact it is not clear why Mau Mau could not simply be read as concerning the assertion of human dignity, the simple attainment of their humanity as Fanon had stated; the kinds of idioms used should not affect recognition of this. We are provided by Lonsdale not so much with a view of what the collective consciousness of militants looked like, but rather with the anthropologizing of a very complex subjective system from which we are supposed to deduce a subjectivity which combined the notion of the human as 'subject', spirituality, political affirmation and economic demand for land. What is said to hold all this together is 'ethnicity', a quite unhelpful notion in this case as such 'a holding together' had to be achieved in actual practice through collective struggle under extreme conditions of crisis – as Fanon indeed showed in the context of the nation²³ – thus clearly redefining the 'ethnic' in the process. Of course, the human individual as 'subject' (and thereby culture and being) had to be (re-)created by Mau Mau: it had not been given or 'preserved' by colonialism. What had been given, in fact, were evidently servitude, passivity and victimhood and the attempted destruction of any idea of a 'human subject'.

At the same time, colonial obscure subjectivity was simultaneously also to deny that humanity – and the assertion of humanity by the colonized – through an emphasis on atavism, backwardness and incomprehensible brutish behaviour on their part.²⁴ The post-independence national leadership, which actually emanated from within the same Gikuyu nationality, chose not so much to echo the colonial view, but to stress that nothing of importance really happened and what may have occurred was pathological and simply violent, and should therefore be forgotten as quickly as possible. Thus Kenyatta was to assert in 1967: 'We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred toward one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been [sic] eradicated, and must never be remembered again' (cited in Furedi, 1989: 212). Hence Mau Mau is of more general import for understanding, in Badiou's (2009a) terms, the 'obscure' subjectivity of the imperial world as such, the 'reactive' politics of the post-colonial state, as well as some of the African features of emancipatory political subjectivity in the sequence of national liberation.

African political idioms have systematically and necessarily been misrecognized and distorted by Eurocentric scientism particularly as these have taken the form of subjective affirmations within the idioms of 'tradition' or 'religion', as for the scientific colonial episteme, subjectivity is always related to the objective in the final analysis. In Depelchin's (2005) terms, 'silences' have been produced in African history by (epistemic) 'syndromes' which necessarily lead to the occlusion of African agency, let alone of subjecthood. The character of scientism has meant, as Fanon recognized, that 'for the colonized, objectivity is always directed against him' (1990: 61, translation modified). The human sciences in general, and history in particular, however, are Eurocentric only in a contextual and derivative sense, for they are currently governed fundamentally by an episteme which ensures that they remain *disciplines of state power* and not of emancipation, wherever they may be deployed. History is unable to express the subjectivity of displacement due to its epistemic configuration. It therefore cannot express the discontinuity which constitutes the defining characteristic of emancipatory subjectivity with the result that it is wedded to a continuity of time. It is therefore only a state history.

To corroborate and somewhat paraphrase Spivak's (1988) well-known argument, the subaltern cannot be heard from within the parameters of the scientific episteme – those-who-do-not-count have no reason; the only voices to be heard are the monotonous drone of obscure neo-colonialism and the oppressive beat of the reactive African state. What binds both in current discourse and what blinds us to the possible political content of African idioms are the notions of 'civil society',

'human rights' and 'multiculturalism' for which politics is fundamentally reducible to the social and thus cannot be understood outside of a state subjectivity. History as it exists today is a state discourse, as are all the social sciences. To transform such disciplines in a manner that makes it possible to think emancipation and to open up an understanding of popular consciousness within specific singularities requires the development of a new methodology for the analysis of political subjectivities within delimited historical sequences. In this manner we can begin to develop categories for the understanding of people as reasoning beings with a will to make political choices which they and we all have to confront in thinking freedom.

Notes

1. *'The events that shook up Saint-Domingue from 1791 to 1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference. They were "unthinkable facts" in the framework of Western thought'* (Trouillot, 1995: 82, emphasis in original). For an important discussion of the 'impossibility' of politics in a given situation in Badiou's philosophy see Bosteels, 2011: chapter 7.
2. This is arguably the fundamental reason for the fecundity of the humanities in the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa; see Neocosmos, 2009.
3. For Rancière, all states without exception are oligarchies as they can only allow small group of rulers. Thus the notion of a 'democratic state' is an oxymoron. The term 'democracy' refers to two distinct notions which are wrongly conflated: to a form of state and to a popular practice. It is the latter to which Rancière refers by the term 'democracy'; see Rancière, 2006.
4. S'bu Zikode, President, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), speaking at the Church Land Programme (CLP) Fanomenal Event, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, May 2011. Zodwa Nsibande also of AbM prefers the expression 'out of order'.
5. Of course, any emancipatory politics cannot end at the point of displacement. Apart from anything else, that subjective displacement requires an organized form for it and the collective subject of politics thus produced to be sustained; see Badiou (2011b).
6. 'There exists in any world in-existent multiples on which the world confers a minimal intensity of existence. But any creative affirmation is rooted in the identification of these in-existents of the world. Fundamentally, what counts in any real process of creation, irrespective of its domain, is not so much that which exists as that which in-exists. One must learn from the in-existent' (Badiou, 2011a, my translation).
7. Badiou refers to the state ontologically as the 'state of the situation' (2005: 104–111); it 'is simply the necessary metastructure of every historico-social situation' (p. 105).
8. Badiou develops three distinct categories of subjectivity which result from different subjective orientations to an 'event': fidelity, reaction and obscurantism; see Badiou (2009a: 108ff) and also Žižek (2008: 386–387).
9. In Lazarus's formulation, 'history is a thought-relation-of-the-state' (1996: 17); see also his discussion of Bloch (1954) in the same text. For a recent discussion of the objective-subjective dialectic in the work of Badiou and Lazarus, see Bosteels (2011: 8–13).
10. 'The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea' (Hegel, 1820/1952: 80).
11. The idea of discontinuity in history is originally to be found in Foucault's notion of the episteme, for example 'the last years of the 18th century are broken by a discontinuity similar to that which destroyed Renaissance thought at the beginning of the 17th' (Foucault, 1989: 235). He also notes that 'establishing discontinuities is not an easy task even for history in general. And it is certainly even less so for the history of thought' (p. 55).
12. The reduction of subjectivity to social place is evident throughout the writings of African historians themselves, for example Temu and Swai (1981), Mamdani (1996), Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1995). It is a generalized phenomenon in the human sciences irrespective of the school of thought. Mamdani (1996), despite ostensibly studying a 'traditional' state form as part of his 'bifurcated state' in

- Africa, assumes throughout his work the existence of a discrete domain of 'the political' which is largely absent in African social systems.
13. See Ranger (1968) and Hobsbawm (1974) *inter alia*. In the Congo, for example, the nationalist movement (known as the Radical Movement of Prophets 1921–1951) led by Simon Kimbangu (1887–1951) was a spiritual and prophetic movement as well as a nationalist movement; so was the Nyabingi movement in the Great Lakes Region (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011). There are numerous other such examples in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South.
 14. I must make clear here that I am not simply referring to a distinction between the socially constituted realms of the secular and the religious à la Durkheim, but of the broader notion of separating the idea of the human being from any conception of the spiritual which was simply non-existent in pre-colonial Africa; it could be argued that one of the most destructive effects of colonial domination was precisely to enforce such a separation.
 15. 'Mau Mau' was the term used by the colonial state, the rebels did not use this term for themselves. They referred to themselves in Gikuyu as *itungati* or the 'Land and Freedom Army' (Lonsdale, 1994: 145).
 16. Lonsdale does attempt to provide an account of a debate on citizenship among Mau Mau activists (1994: 142–149) but feels obliged to translate this into Western idioms and hence to anthropologize Gikuyu beliefs.
 17. It should be recalled that the originator of the term 'moral economy' was EP Thompson (1971) who used it as a way of introducing a social dimension into what had previously been a crude economic conception of historical change. What I argue here is that to replace economic determinism by social determinism is an inadequate procedure if what we are interested in understanding are popular subjectivities.
 18. For a brief account of the rebellion but with no assessment of the subjectivity of the rebels see Troisi (2000: 342–348). Santals are referred to as 'tribals' in the Indian literature. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the Santals and African nationalities. Troisi notes 'that for the Santals as also for most of the tribals, land provides not only economic security but a powerful link with one's ancestors' (p. 346).
 19. It is the core features or 'elementary aspects' (following Lévi-Strauss) of the class consciousness of the peasantry which are the central concern of Guha's (1999) work on peasant rebellions in colonial India.
 20. Interestingly the current manifestation of 'tribal' insurgency in India are the 'Maoists' or 'Naxalites' who are addressed in the same way (militarily as well as discursively) by the democratic Indian state as the Santals had been by the colonial state. See in particular Arundhati Roy (2010a, 2010b).
 21. In fact, Chatterjee arguably misses out on another mode of rule (and its corresponding domain of politics), namely that prevalent in rural areas. Without wishing to comment on India, it is apparent that the mode of rule in rural Africa differs fundamentally from those domains which Chatterjee recognizes in the urban; in particular, the deployment of 'tradition', coercion and violence in rural areas in Africa is something which is not (yet?) so apparent in the urban. The classic text on this mode of rule is Mamdani (1996).
 22. Chatterjee's notion of 'political society' has been subjected to critical debate in the pages of the Indian online journal *Kafila* during August and September, 2011; see <http://kafila.org>. I discuss two distinct modes of state rule in urban Africa in my 2011b.
 23. See Fanon (1990) and my detailed discussion in Neocosmos (2011a).
 24. See in particular Maughan-Brown (1985) for a detailed textual analysis of fictional accounts of Mau Mau from different perspectives, colonial, liberal, nationalist and radical.

References

- Badiou A (1992) *Conditions*. Paris: Seuil.
- Badiou A (2005) *Being and Event*. London: Continuum.
- Badiou A (2009a) *Logics of Worlds*. London: Continuum.
- Badiou A (2009b) *L'Hypothèse Communiste* [The Communist Hypothesis]. Circonstances 5. Paris: Lignes.
- Badiou A (2011a) *Que Signifie Changer le Monde?* [What Does it Mean to Change the World?]. Seminar 2010–2011, 6 April 2011. Available at: <http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/Badiou/seminaire.htm> (accessed 20 June 2012).

- Badiou A (2011b) *Le Réveil de L'Histoire* [The Rebirth of History]. Circonstances 6. Paris: Lignes.
- Barnett DL and Njama K (1966) *Mau Mau from Within*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.
- Bloch M (1954) *The Historians Craft*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bosteels B (2011) *Badiou and Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Chakrabarty D (1998) Minority histories, subaltern pasts. *Postcolonial Studies* 1(1): 15–29.
- Chakrabarty D (2002) A small history of subaltern studies. In Chakrabarty D (ed.) *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 3–19.
- Chatterjee P (2004) *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Depelchin J (2005) *Silences in African History*. Dar-es-Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota.
- Fanon F (1990) *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault M (1968) *Réponse au Cercle D'épistémologie* [Response to the Epistemology Study Group]. *Cahiers Pour L'analyse* No 9. Paris: Seuil. Available at: <http://www.web.mdx.ac.uk/cahiers/vol09/> (accessed 20 June 2012).
- Foucault M (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. Brighton: Harvester press.
- Foucault M (1989) *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.
- Furedi F (1989) *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*. London: James Currey.
- Guha R (1992a) The prose of counter-insurgency. In: Guha R (ed.) *Subaltern Studies II*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1–42.
- Guha R (1992b) Domination without hegemony and its historiography. In: Guha R (ed.) *Subaltern Studies VI*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 210–309.
- Guha R (1999) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Guha R (2000) On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India. In: Chaturvedi V (ed.) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London: Verso, 1–7.
- Hegel GWF (1952) *The Philosophy of Right and the Philosophy of History*. London: Encyclopaedia Britannica. (Original work published 1820).
- Hobsbawm E (1974) *Primitive Rebels*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kanogo T (1987) *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*. London: James Currey.
- Lalu P (2009) *The Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts*. Cape Town: HSRC.
- Lazarus S (1996) *Anthropologie du Nom* [Anthropology of the Name]. Paris: Seuil.
- Lazarus S (2001) Anthropologie Ouvrière et enquêtes d'usine: état des lieux et problématique [Worker Anthropology and Factory Studies: Theoretical Introduction]. *Ethnologie Française* 31(3) Juillet-Septembre, 389–400.
- Lonsdale J (1992) The moral economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, poverty and civic virtue in Kikuyu political thought. In: Berman B and Lonsdale J (eds) *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa: Book Two*. London: James Currey, 315–504.
- Lonsdale J (1994) Moral ethnicity and political tribalism. In: Kaarlsholm P and Hultin J (eds) *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Roskilde University, Denmark: International Development Studies (occasional papers 11).
- Mamdani M (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. London: James Currey.
- Mamdani M and Wamba-dia-Wamba E (eds) (1995) *African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy*. Dakar: Codesria.
- Maughan-Brown D (1985) *Land, Freedom and Fiction: history and Ideology in Kenya*. London: Zed Books.
- Murindwa-Rutanga (2011) *Politics, Religion and Power in the Great Lakes Region*, Dakar/Kampala: CODESRIA/Fountain.
- Neocosmos M (2009) The political conditions of social thought: An introduction to the work of Sylvain Lazarus. In: Jacklin H and Vale P (eds) *Re-imagining the Social: Critique and Post-apartheid Knowledge*. Durban: UKZN Press, 111–138.

- Neocosmos M (2010) *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Neocosmos M (2011a) The nation and its politics: Fanon, emancipatory nationalism and political sequences. In: Gibson N (ed.) *Living Fanon*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 189–199.
- Neocosmos M (2011b) Transition, human rights and violence: Rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony. *Interface* 3(2): 359–399. Available at: <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Interface-3-2-Neocosmos.pdf> (accessed 18 July 2012).
- Rancière J (2003) Politics and aesthetics: Interview with Peter Hallward. *Angelaki* 8(2): 191–211.
- Rancière J (2006) *Hatred of Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Ranger TO (1968) Connections between 'primary resistance' movements and modern mass nationalism in east and southern Africa. *The Journal of African History* 9(4): 631–641.
- Ross K (2009) Historicizing untimeliness. In: Rockhill G. and Watts P. (eds) *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1–29.
- Roy Arundathi (2010a) *Walking with the Comrades*. Available at: <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738> (accessed 20 June 2012).
- Roy Arundathi (2010b) *The Trickle-down Revolution*. Available at: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/03-the-trickledown-revolution-ss-05> (accessed 20 June 2012).
- Spivak GC (1988) Can the subaltern speak? In: Nelson C and Grossberg L (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: Illinois, 271–313.
- Temu A and Swai B (1981) *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique*. London: Zed Press.
- Thompson EP (1971) The moral economy of the english crowd in the eighteenth century. *Past and Present* 50: 76–136.
- Throup D (1987) *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*. London: James Currey.
- Troisi J (2000) Social movements among the Santals. In: MSA Rao (ed.) *Social Movements in India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 341–364.
- Trouillot M-R (1995) *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Zikode S (2011) Speech at the *CLP Fanomenal Event*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, May.
- Žižek S (2008) *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.

*Michael Neocosmos wishes it noted that this article was written when he was a Mellon Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17 Belleville South Africa, 7535.