

Chapter 5

The Nation in the National Liberation Struggle

As we have seen, resistance to empire and to the different forms of imperial domination, exploitation and oppression had been present, both actively and passively, from the first stages of imperialism. It could be individual in scope or, more often, based on a collective linked by tribal, family, religious or regional loyalties. The process of transformation of these different movements offering sporadic, isolated, often spontaneous, resistance to the forces of empire into broader movements capable of mobilising the resources of an entire national community was a long one, often taking decades to mature. It required the development of a national consciousness, a national political leadership and a coherent strategy for conducting the struggle for national liberation. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, such developments were taking place all over the colonised world. While each particular national struggle had its own characteristic features and dynamic, none can be analysed in isolation. Just as the forces and structures of imperialism itself, whether French, British, Portuguese or Dutch, were inextricably bound together as part of a global economic and political process, so too was the development of national liberation movements dependent on mutual influence and interaction, conflict as well as cooperation, in the domain of ideas as well as on the ground. Moreover, the forces of nationalism did not develop under the impetus of their own internal dynamic alone. Indeed, their strengthening was often a direct consequence of the weakening of the forces of the imperial power and, even more importantly, a consequence of the perception of this weakness. The fall of France in 1940 and the subsequent German occupation were decisive in this regard, as was the overrunning of both the French and the British colonies of South-East Asia by the Japanese. The presence of German and Allied forces in North Africa and of the British in Syria and Lebanon also supplanted the power structure of the French, and the divisions between Vichy and the Free French increased the impression of weakness and vulnerability.

There were indeed divergences in theoretical analyses and ideological formulations in this burgeoning nationalist resistance, both between the movements of different countries and between internal forces with different perspectives. For

some anti-imperialist nationalists, the nation already existed; it was simply a question of reverting to the precolonial past. Others rejected nationalism altogether, choosing to see the unity of the collective in terms of shared religion or culture.

This chapter will examine some of the different theorisations of the nation and the struggle for national liberation, in their evolution and as they affected some of the countries within the orbit of the French Empire.

The Nation in the Modern World

The growth of nationalism had its origins in the countries of Europe at the dawning of the modern age (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). To some extent, the nation-state can be seen as a staging post in historical developmental terms, providing a factor of unity in the move away from feudalism's hierarchical organisation of local economic and political autonomy. The development of the nation-state was instrumental in freeing the economy from petty restrictions hindering its growth, thus allowing for the movement of goods and labour. On the political plane, the creation of the modern nation helped to bring about a new definition of the role of the individual and a reconfiguration of the relationship of the individual to the wider unit of community. The nation-state assumed that one of its functions was to serve the interests of its citizens, though obviously this required a new definition of the rights and duties of the citizens.

The notion of the wealth of nations was destined to be a temporary one on the route to economic development. It was an essential one nonetheless, with the nation fulfilling the role of a major instrument for the promotion of economic growth and prosperity, providing a protective banner under which the accumulation of riches could take place, until such time as the economy steamed forward into the international dimension.

The development of imperialism, along with the consequent rivalries and wars between the European powers, brought in further modifications to the functions and form of the nation-state. Adjustments were made necessary by economic and political crises, requiring the intervention of the state with new forms of organisation.

Ultimately, the challenge of the anticolonial liberation movements was to turn the ideology of nationalism against their colonial masters, long after it had ceased to be a progressive force in the metropolitan heartlands. It was thus one of the paradoxes of the nationalisms of the national liberation movements that they used the conceptual framework of the progressive, modernist ideas developed in the imperial countries to articulate the demand for freedom, independence, autonomy. At the same time, these nationalisms often mobilised the full gamut of reactionary particularisms and conservatism to articulate their difference in opposition to the dominant imperialist power – to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the country. This might also include the rejection of science and reason, along with the assumption that science and reason were essentially universal human attributes.

In France, the development of the modern nation had taken on a particular shape, which was to prove highly influential in those countries under its influence.

Although the process of nation-building in France had begun under the *Ancien Régime* with the breaking down of autonomous regionally based feudal authorities and the establishment of a strong centralised, absolutist monarchy, at its apogee under Louis XIV, it took a significant leap forward with the French Revolution and the development of a totally new form of the nation-state, in both theory and practice.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, this new concept of the nation that came into its own with the Revolution was uniquely political in scope. It consisted of a body of people, linked together, not by any links to the land or ethnic ties, but by a common political status, summed up in the notion of citizenship, in which the citizen was defined solely in terms of an abstract, universal, political equality of rights and duties. We have also seen how it was but a short step to the subsuming of 'equality' under the more all-embracing concept of 'uniformity'.

The non-incorporation of difference within the political nation did not, however, make it disappear. Instead it was relegated to a private domain, either by the exclusion of certain differentiating factors such as religious affiliation from the scope of public political life, leading to the development of a secular ideology of the Republic, or through the non-inclusion of certain groups of people whose 'difference' did not qualify them for citizenship – notably of French women, on grounds of gender difference, for more than a century and a half after the French Revolution, and then of those subject peoples in the colonies, to whom the universal rights of citizenship were not extended.

The universalism implicit in the modern political concept of the nation was therefore a dual-edged instrument as far as the colonised were concerned. On the one hand, it had served to rationalise the colonial enterprise; on the other, it offered the apparent possibility of inclusion in full citizenship to the colonised, if only the colonising power would take its own rhetoric seriously. However, once both of these ideological selling points had been revealed for the illusions that they were, that was not the end of the matter. Indeed, it was at that point that the French-inspired modernist notion of the political nation was often at its most influential, as a source of inspiration for nationalist liberation struggles.

Of course, this was not the only form of nationalism to hold sway in France itself. The importance of biological and ethnic ties, as well as the notion of belonging to a particular piece of territory were to find new vigour throughout the course of the nineteenth century, leading finally to the ideology based on the notion of 'blood and soil', which eventually fired the development of national socialism, ethnic, religious and gender-based cleansing and other manifestations of a totalitarian view of the nation. By the end of the Second World War, nationalism was generally burdened with some very sordid and sinister baggage, arising from a chain of events, including the fallout from the jingoism of the Franco-Prussian war, the anti-Semitism associated with the Dreyfus Affair in France, the mindless slaughter of the First World War and the atrocities and obscenities of the Second World War. Moreover, the European Left had made the eschewing of nationalism an important part of their analysis, in which class solidarity across the national divides was seen as a vital part of a strategy for the international working class, even though the

internationalism of the socialist movement had been sorely tested and found wanting, first by the expansion of empire, in which the benefits of super-exploitation of the colonised workers and peasantry filtered through to the metropolitan working class to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the position of different sectors within the class hierarchy. The partaking, however meagre for some, in the benefits of imperialism tended to undermine any potential international class solidarity between metropolitan and non-metropolitan workers. Moreover, the strength of what was construed as an essentially French Republicanism also militated against a fully internationalist approach. Finally, any remnants of international solidarity that still existed between the metropolitan workers of Europe were largely crushed by the outbreak of the First World War and the jingoistic political reaction to it.

Internationalism and the Anticolonial Struggle

Now, there were indeed internationalists who attempted to withstand the general tide, such as Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and other critics of the collapse of the Second Socialist International as a result of the war. Yet, if Lenin agreed with Luxemburg's description of the German Social-Democratic movement as a 'stinking corpse' in 1914 (Lenin (1915b)/1972, (1915c)/1972, (1917c)/1970, (1917d)/1970, (1919a)/1977, (1920)/1971), this did not prevent him from recognising the right of nations to self-determination (Lenin (1914)/1970) or the role of nationalist movements in the fight against imperialism, which he saw essentially as a worldwide revolutionary process. Although there would be progress by stages, in different countries, Lenin considered that the revolution would only succeed as a truly international phenomenon (Lenin (1917a)/1974; see also Marx and Engels (1845–46)/1976, (1848)/1970), even though he had recognised the limited possibilities of 'socialism in one country' (Lenin (1915a)/1970). Just as Lenin had assumed that Russia would need to go through a bourgeois, or national democratic, revolution first before the proletariat would proceed to the socialist revolution, so too would the anti-imperialist struggles first have to pass through a national democratic, bourgeois revolution before socialism became a possibility. The national democratic revolution was thus seen as an essential phase, but not an end in itself. It was to be a milestone on the route of the process whereby the universal proletariat would achieve its socialist revolution.

In this analysis, therefore, the national liberation struggles, with their own particular nationalisms, were all part of the same universal process of world revolution. There is no doubt that this analysis was shared by many of those engaged in these struggles. It would be hard to exaggerate the mobilising force of the Bolshevik Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union as a source of inspiration not just for the European working class, but also for the colonised, leading to the establishment of communist parties in the colonised world.

There is equally no doubt that not all anticolonial fighters shared this analysis. On the one hand, there were various types of reformist nationalism, which were content to leave the basic economic system intact, provided there could be a change

of management, giving the indigenous bourgeoisie their share of power. Other strands called on specific religious or cultural traditions, or new ways of thinking, to provide the mobilising tools for ridding the country of foreign domination. Islam was a powerful mobilising force for Muslims, who could call on a long tradition of militancy. On another tack altogether, Gandhi and his followers developed a specifically Indian set of principles for the struggle, which were based on long-standing traditional ways of thinking, as well as breaking with Hindu tradition in novel ways, notably on the question of caste.

However, even for those more inclined to accept that socialism and communism had something to offer to the colonised workers and peasantry, there were significant difficulties. Some of these arose from the problems that much of the European Left had with issues arising from imperialism and colonialism. This could mean that the benefits of subscribing to their version of a socialist/communist-inspired global analysis could be outweighed by the patronising relations of subservience that often marred this vision. The theoretical analysis typical of the international communist movement that developed after the Bolshevik Revolution, especially in the 1930s, invariably put the interests of the universal proletariat before the interests of any specific group. Some, following the analyses of Mensheviks and some Trotskyists, insisted that it was the most advanced, most 'productive' sections of the universal proletariat who would form the vanguard of the world socialist revolution, i.e. the most highly skilled, highly paid workers in the metropolitan countries. In a bizarre distortion of Marx's labour theory of value, it was sometimes claimed that these workers were far more exploited than those in less developed industries and countries, given the high rate of surplus value, or rate of exploitation, which their labour in capital-intensive industries produced. Geoffrey Kay, for instance, claimed that 'the affluent workers of the developed countries are much more exploited than the badly paid workers of the underdeveloped world' (Kay 1975: 53). This was an argument that ignored the distinction between the rate of exploitation/surplus value and the rate of profit and, accordingly, the higher rate of profit produced from the labour of the workers in the underdeveloped country, in spite of the lower rate of surplus value, as Marx himself demonstrated in Volume 3 of *Capital* (Marx (1894)/1974: 150–51). It also ignored the difference between the (relative) rate of exploitation and the (absolute) volume of exploitation, a point also stressed by Marx in *Capital* Volume 1 (Marx (1867)/1970: 218, note 1; see also Amin 1989: 110).

Although there were those in the colonies who were prepared to subscribe to this type of analysis, often with the consequence of having to put off their own claims and demands until the time was ripe, it was nonetheless to prove increasingly galling, especially when it was promoted through the theorising of the metropolitan parties of the Left. In the practice of the communist parties, and particularly the French Communist Party, the universalism of the theory increasingly came to be translated into the prioritisation of the national interests of the Soviet Union (through the policies of the Comintern) and, to a lesser though important extent, the national interests of the colonising power. Although this was not always recognised or flagged up at the time of the national liberation struggles, there was a greater or lesser degree

of ambiguity towards the European-driven theorisation of imperialism and the strategy and tactics of struggle, even amongst those anticolonial fighters, sympathetic to socialism and its goals. This ambiguity was compounded by the fact that the institutional relationship between the colonised and the international communist movement was usually mediated through the agency of the metropolitan communist parties (see Chapter 2) – the French Communist Party oversaw the Communist organisations that were established in the territories colonised by France, as did the CPGB, in the case of the British colonies, most notably in the case of the Communist Party of India. While both communist parties adopted an anticolonialist stance in theory, this tutelage was not helpful to the aims of the nationalists in practice, reproducing as it did the imperialist relations of domination. Indeed, it was, more often than not, seen as an obstacle.

Nonetheless, the successes of communist-led nationalist movements in Asia at the end of the Second World War were to provide a powerful boost to the cause of national liberation inspired by socialist ideas elsewhere. The independent line followed by the Chinese Communists (who had never experienced the tutelage of European communism), leading eventually to the split in the international communist movement, made of them the champions of the struggle of the colonised. Although the origins of the Sino-Soviet split lay in the rejection by the Chinese communists of Khrushchev's critique of Stalin in his secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party in 1956 (Ali 1984), the charges of revisionism were soon extended to the policy of 'peaceful coexistence', which was at odds with the Chinese promotion of worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. Ostensibly about differences in strategy and tactics in relation to the global revolution, culminating in the 25-point letter to the Soviet Party that sealed the split in 1963, what was really at stake was the worldwide leadership of the anti-imperialist movement.

In Vietnam, resistance was deep-rooted and well developed (Cooper 2001). It had taken a number of forms in the early part of the twentieth century, but it was the growth of a strong communist movement, following the foundation in 1930 of the Indochinese Communist Party by Ho Chi Minh, which put it in the forefront of the anticolonial struggle and made it the first to proclaim its independence at the end of the Second World War. There is no doubt that the Vietnamese communists saw their struggle as part of the wider international movement. Although Ho Chi Minh used the words of the American Declaration of Independence in his own declaration in 1945, it was to the international communist movement, and particularly the Soviet Union and China, following the coming to power of a communist-inspired regime in 1949, that the Vietnamese turned for support, and significant aid was given. Support was also forthcoming from communist sympathisers within the colonial armed forces, many of whom came from other French colonies, notably North and West Africa. Moreover, the European Left also showed its international solidarity – even more readily once the Americans became entangled in the conflict.

In Laos, the nationalist movement, led by two royal princes, Souphanouvong and Souvanna Phouma, had brought together two strands, the communist-inspired Pathet Lao and a more liberal strand associated with Souvanna Phouma. After the

Pathet Lao led the country to independence in 1953, Souvanna Phouma was the leader throughout most of the period of the Vietnam War, before the Pathet Lao, now reconstituted as the Patriotic Front, came back to power in the 1973 elections. This was not merely a question of internal politics. Increasingly, the countries of Indochina became embroiled as pawns on the front line of the conflicts of the Cold War (Regaud and Lechervy 1996). In the case of Cambodia, the difficulties of this period, together with the tensions inspired by the Sino-Soviet split, were to lead to the development of a particularly noxious strand of xenophobic obscurantism, ostensibly in the name of communism, with the Khmer Rouge coming to power with policies, strategies and a general mindset quite divorced from any reference to internationalism and intent on purging all foreigners, particularly the Vietnamese, and class enemies from both the party organisations and the country, leading to the physical annihilation of millions.

Where communism appeared to form the dominant ideology of the nationalist resistance to French imperialism in Asia, it had already been challenged and deserted by some of those colonial intellectuals who had made the obligatory passage via the French Communist Party. The Ivory Coast leader, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, had already abandoned attempts to forge an alliance between his RDA (Rassemblement démocratique africain) and the French Communist Party by 1951 and became an increasingly vociferous anti-communist in subsequent years (Amondji 1984; Nandjui 1995). Aimé Césaire left the Party in 1956 over the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, explaining his position in his *Letter to Maurice Thorez* (Césaire 1957) before founding the PPM (Parti Progressiste et Martiniquais) in 1958. Others, such as his fellow Martiniquan and former teacher, Gilbert Gratiant, remained with the Party, while stressing the need to safeguard the Creole culture. René Ménil, a collaborator of the Césaires on the review *Tropiques*, also stayed and continued his critique of Negritude. Elsewhere, the younger Reunionese poet Boris Gamaleya combined a commitment to communism with a strong sense of the particular identity of his homeland.

In the case of Algeria, the relation of communism to the developing nationalist movement has been a complex one, particularly in organisational terms. The ENA (Etoile Nord Africaine), which was the first organised modern expression of Algerian nationalism, was in fact founded in Paris in 1924 by Abdelkader Hadj-Ali, who was a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. In its origins, the ENA was closely connected to the Communist Party. It was aimed specifically at those Algerian workers who were working and living in France (Stora 1989). Messali Hadj, who became its president in 1926, had also been a member of the French Communist Party. However, under his leadership, the ENA moved away from the Party and became increasingly transformed into a nationalist, anticolonial organisation. In 1927, Messali Hadj was the first Algerian nationalist to formulate the demand for independence. Ten years later, in 1937, he broke with the French Communist Party, following the dissolution of the ENA by the Popular Front government. Nonetheless, the movements with which he was associated, the ENA and then the PPA (Parti du peuple algérien) from 1937, the MTLD (Mouvement

pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques) from 1945 and the MNA (Mouvement national algérien) from 1954, were all defined by a mix of elements of Marxism with Arabo-Islamic ideology.

The Algerian Communist Party itself was founded in 1923 as an offshoot of the French Communist Party, eventually gaining independent status in 1936. In its origins, it was a party whose primary membership was made up of left-wing elements of the European population. Although the numbers of indigenous Algerians increased after 1936, and especially after Maurice Thorez's declaration of February 1939 to the effect that the people of Algeria were a nation in formation, not all the European members of the Party embraced this idea. The nature of its membership, combined with the tutelage of the French Communist Party, was to contribute to its sidelining in the development of the nationalist struggle, regardless of the militancy and courage of many of its members involved in the war of liberation. Of the Europeans involved in the PCA and sympathetic to the nationalist struggle, Henri Alleg is one of the most well known. Alleg was actually of Anglo-Jewish origins and had left France for Algeria in 1939, where he joined the PCA. After the Second World War, he became editor of *Alger Républicain* before it was banned in 1955. His subsequent depiction of his arrest and torture in 1957 in *La Question*, published by Editions de Minuit, was, along with the torture and death of Maurice Audin, to give an important boost to the anti-war movement (Alleg 1958; Berchadsky 1994). However, there were many others who were actively engaged in fighting with the Front de Libération nationale (FLN), including Henri Maillot and Maurice Laban, who were killed in the *maquis* in 1956, Fernand Yveton, guillotined in 1957 for attempting to blow up the Hamma gasworks and Raymonde Peschard, who died after being tortured and raped (Kastell 1997). The position of the PCA on the armed struggle has been cloaked in ambiguity and contradictory policy statements. Having condemned the insurrection at the outset and reiterated this condemnation at the beginning of 1955, the central committee allegedly reversed this policy after it met in secret at Bab-el-Oued on 20 June 1955, approving the involvement of communists in the armed struggle. This policy was in contrast with the policy of the PCF, which voted for the special powers asked for by the Mollet government in 1956.

After independence, the Algerian Communist Party disappeared as such, but regrouped in different forms and under different names in a semi-clandestine existence. Algerian communists have lived in a mostly uneasy relationship with the regime in power. When Boumedienne took power in 1965, the communists joined with other opposition groups. He did nonetheless attempt to win their support for his version of state socialism and programme of nationalisations, not surprisingly since communist influence has been highest in the trade unions. Throughout the post-independence period, communist organisations have not had any legal recognition and communists have been subjected to various degrees of persecution. Its oppositional stance is twofold – an opposition to both the existing power regime and fundamentalist Islamic ideology. The Party itself has changed its name several times – from PAGS (Le Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste) to Ettahaddi, or Challenge, in 1993, and relaunching itself in 1998 as MDS (Mouvement Démocratique et

Social). It argues for an unashamedly modernist agenda, claiming that Algeria is still living in the pre-modern era. Its recently deceased leader, the veteran El Hachemi Cherif, saw history as moving forward in generally progressive fashion and described fundamentalism as ‘a movement that is manifestly counter to the movement of history’.¹

The Theorisation of the National Liberation Struggle – Frantz Fanon

In the aftermath of the Second World War, there were a number of factors that coalesced to create a new set of conditions for the furtherance of national liberation struggles, as well as the development of new thinking about related questions. On the historical, geopolitical level, the perceived weakness of the European colonial powers on the one hand, together with the emergence of the USA as an important new imperial power, the rising star of China in the Far East and the successes of the communist-led nationalists in Indochina all gave a boost to nationalist movements elsewhere.

However, each developing nationalist movement had its own specific dimension and dynamic. Each emerging nation asserted its own particular nationhood, more often than not in the face of the denial by French colonial doctrine of the existence of any such nationhood. Nowhere was this truer than in the case of Algeria, where it was denied that Algeria could be a nation, on the grounds that there had not been an autonomous Algerian state before 1830. This was an argument that had been put forward first to justify the original conquest and then, later, to argue against the Algerian nationalist cause. This could be interpreted in a number of different ways, depending on the definition used to characterise the nation. However, as far as ‘Algerian’ territory was concerned, there was very little ambiguity. The boundaries had been largely fixed under Ottoman rule and, indeed, accepted as such by the French, when they took over. To all intents and purposes, Algeria was already a ‘nation-state’ at the time of the French conquest, even if it was one under ‘foreign’ rule.

Paradoxically, it was the colonial power that contributed to the definition of the Algerians as a collective, through the common juridical status imposed upon them, which differentiated them from the French nation of citizens. Or, as Sartre put it, ‘colonial society cannot assimilate them without destroying itself; it will therefore be necessary for them to identify as a unified collective against it. Those who are excluded will assert their exclusion in the name of their nationhood, for it is colonialism itself that creates the patriotism of the colonized’ (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 29).

This objective categorisation did not, of itself, lead to the development of a nationalist movement. Nor did the subjective awareness and rejection of their condition by the colonised necessarily lead to nationalism. It could equally remain stalled at the level of individual revolt or collective reformism. The awakening of nationalist consciousness entailed, in addition, the recognition of their fundamental collective difference and the affirmation of the freedom of this collective to constitute itself into a national subject with the power to make decisions in all aspects of their political, economic, social and cultural existence, i.e. with political sovereignty. The national liberation movement is born along with the realisation that this can only be achieved by overturning the existing power relations and creating a new state.

A key thinker to emerge at this moment of history was the young Frantz Fanon, who had left his home in Martinique to fight with the Free French and then to study in France, becoming a psychiatrist and moving to a post in Algeria (Macey 2001). Fanon was to become a key theorist of the national liberation struggle, combining his experience of racism as an Afro-Caribbean and his professional experience of the psychological effects of colonialism with the experience derived from his commitment to the nationalist struggle in Algeria, for which he resigned his post at a psychiatric hospital in Blida. Fanon became not only the theorist of the Algerian Revolution in particular, but also of national liberation struggles worldwide. When he died of leukaemia in 1961 at the young age of thirty-six, he had written several key works, beginning with his analysis of the psychological damage done by racism and responses to it, with his own distinctive mix of personal and professional experience and insights, in *Peau noire, masques blancs* in 1952. His involvement with the FLN was reflected in his writings on the Algerian Revolution, particularly *L'An V de la Révolution algérienne*, published in 1959. His final work, *Les Damnés de la terre*, was completed only a few months before his death in 1961 and achieved worldwide resonance at the time, particularly amongst those engaged in liberation struggles.

There has, however, also been considerable confusion around his work. On the one hand, it was Fanon's interpretation of the Algerian liberation struggle that provided the prism through which many of those on the Left saw that struggle. It did not always correspond to the realities of the Revolution. Similarly, many came to an understanding of Fanon's work through the prism of Sartre's interpretation of it. Again, care is needed to disentangle what Fanon actually said from Sartre's gloss upon it.

There is a thread linking Fanon to some of the ideas put forward by his fellow Martiniquan, Aimé Césaire, and the other proponents of Negritude, who had spent their formative years as members of the French Communist Party. Like them, he pinpoints the issue of race, he highlights the importance of culture. However, he synthesizes his views on race, culture and the nation into a radically different perspective, which challenges all attempts to box him into mechanistic categories and all forms of reductionism of his thought to simplistic notions. With his predecessors, Fanon shared an overarching universalist perspective. However, whereas theirs had been inspired by the prospect of the victory of the universal working class and the realisation of socialism across the globe, with Negritude a stage, or a 'moment', in the dialectical march of progress, Fanon put the dialectic into a new historical perspective, in which it is all about the forms of struggle of an entire people against the colonial power, in which the constitution of nationalism and the national consciousness was a necessary step in the process of taking control of their own destiny. Necessary though it was, nationalism was, in Fanon's view, merely a stage, not an end in itself and the process of liberation itself paramount. His own experience of racism, and that of others, as well as the lessons he learned from the bitter colonial oppression and the implacable nationalist struggle in Algeria, combined to destroy any faith in the possibility of solidarity on the part of the international proletariat, or in the redemptive power of the working class per se, at least as presently constituted. His universal goal was thus not so much that of the

worldwide proletarian revolution, but the creation of a new type of human being, a 'new man'.

Fanon's analysis of Negritude is a complex one. On the one hand, he sees it as a product of the history of racial oppression, and accepts that, in its total 'unconditional affirmation of African culture' (Fanon (1961)/1987: 156) it is an inevitable gut reaction to the blanket racism of the white colonialists. He does not, however, subscribe to its logic and warns that, necessary though it has been, from a historical point of view, this 'racialised' view of culture, in which 'African' culture is promoted, rather than 'national' culture, will ultimately lead the supporters of Negritude into a dead end.²

At the same time, he refuses to accept that Negritude is merely a moment, a negative stage, in the overarching dialectic. Blackness is not something that should continue to be defined totally in relation to the whites (Fanon (1952)/1975: 88–89). Moreover, he takes issue with the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the servant, which, for him, is not applicable to the relation between the slave master and the black slave, where there is no reciprocity, where the master is profoundly indifferent to the recognition of the slave, only wanting his labour (Fanon (1952)/1975: 175, note 9), and where, ultimately, the slave, to achieve his liberation, must also become indifferent to the master. Where, in its classic Hegelian form, the dialectic is premised on a relation between two conscious minds, Fanon insists that, in the case of the relation between the white master and the black colonised/slave, the new racial dimension changes everything. In the eyes of the master, the black slave is never a thinking, conscious being; it is only his body that is seen. Just as the master could not care less about being recognised by the slave, so the slave in his turn will reciprocate this indifference. It will not be a question of seeking his recognition, or even of reversing the master–slave relation by replacing him as master. What the colonised/slave wants is to make the master disappear, to take over his farm and eject him from the land.

This rejection of the European model or paradigm applies not just to the Hegelian dialectic, but also to Freud. The Oedipus complex, Fanon says, is not universally valid. It does not exist in the black man (Fanon (1952)/1975: 123). As such, it is a construct of European social and cultural conditions and not a constituent component of a human essence.

Fanon's starting point was the alienated individual. Racism and the dehumanisation that was a key effect of colonialism had combined to produce this alienation, depriving the colonised of his/her humanity and transforming them into pure body, animal or thing. He had described this phenomenon in one of his first writings, an essay, 'The North African syndrome', first published in *Esprit* in 1952. These were 'creatures starving for humanity' (Fanon (1959)/1970: 13), 'emptied of substance', reified or 'thingified', by the coloniser 'calling him systematically Mohammed' (Fanon (1959)/1970: 24).

It was by engaging in revolutionary violence that these alienated colonised subjects would recover their humanity and become whole human beings. Although the problem of alienation was experienced at the individual level, the cure would

only be effective as part of a collective struggle. Indeed, Fanon saw these most alienated, these most wretched and exploited elements of society, the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat, mainly the landless peasants who had been forced off the land or drifted to the towns, as the main agency for change. The process of defeating colonialism and the process of healing their own damaged psyches were integral to each other. Violent revolutionary action would not only transform the colonial landscape; it would also enable them to achieve their own transition from the animal to the human state.

This was not a process that was limited to the Algerian nationalist struggle for freedom. In Fanon's view, this particular national liberation struggle was part of the wider struggle and had a vital role to play as the spearhead of the African revolution. It was not an end in itself, but a moment in a dialectic of universal liberation, which ultimately transcended politics with the emergence of a new, higher type of human being. It was not enough to work towards becoming a man. This man would be a new man, who would be a better man. Not only would this new man be cured from the alienation from which he had suffered, not only would the tensions between body and soul be reconciled, but he would also have moved to a new stage of humanity, on to a morally superior plane, in which the betterment of all aspects of the human condition would be the prime consideration. Or, as Fanon put it:

More precisely, it would seem that all the problems which man faces on the subject of man can be reduced to this one question: 'Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?' The question could also be formulated in this way: 'Have I at all times demanded and brought out the man that is in me?' (Fanon (1959)/1970: 13)

Fanon, of course, was not alone in his revolutionary humanism. His perspective is well in tune with the humanist historicism of Sartre, in which the influence of Nietzsche was notable,³ as well as the ideas of the early Marx and the early Lukács. There is no doubt that Sartre and Fanon had an important reciprocal influence upon each other. At the same time, there was a critical edge to their appreciation of each other's thinking. Notably, Fanon disagreed with Sartre on the relativism implicit in the view of Negritude as a moment in a dialectic, which would be superseded by a synthesis in a society without races (Fanon (1952)/1975: 107–8). This is to rob the black man of his freedom and black consciousness is more than negativity: it is fully what it is.⁴ However, Fanon was fully in tune with Sartre on the question of the progress of humanity from the 'subhuman' stage of history to that of total human beings, in which man would finally be realised (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 36–38). As we have seen in Chapter 4, Sartre defended Fanon's position on the redemptive power of violence.

Other key figures in the national liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s had very similar perspectives. Che Guevara, in particular, dwelt on the notion of the 'new man'. For him, it was closely tied with the building of communism. As he wrote

in 'Socialism and Man in Cuba' in 1965, 'to build communism it is necessary, simultaneous with the new material foundations, to build the new man' (Guevara 1987: 250). The creation of the 'new man' was the further development of Lenin's argument regarding the necessity of a cultural revolution if socialism was to succeed. For Che Guevara, it entailed all aspects of human existence, not just the transformation of the political and economic structures. It implied a complete rupture with the past, to create 'a new world where everything decrepit, everything old, everything that represents the society whose foundations have just been destroyed will have definitely disappeared' (Guevara 1987: 185). This would require deliberate voluntaristic action on the part of each individual. This is what he said in a speech, 'Duty of Revolutionary Medical Workers', in 1960:

almost everything we thought and felt in that past epoch should be filed away, and that a new type of human being should be created. And if each one of us is his own architect of that new human type, then creating that new type of human being – who will be the representative of the new Cuba – will be much easier. (Guevara 1987: 125–26)

Setting out his vision of 'What a Young Communist should be' in 1962, the parallels with Fanon's basic humanism are striking: 'every Young Communist must be essentially human and be so human that he draws closer to humanity's best qualities, that he distils the best of what man is through work, study, through ongoing solidarity with the people and with all the peoples of the world' (Guevara 1987: 184). In both cases, it remains a fundamentally universal vision of what humanism was all about, entailing a belief in the progress of humanity towards the formation of a new genus: 'Man as a wolf, the society of wolves, is being replaced by another genus that no longer has the desperate urge to rob his fellow man, since the exploitation of man by man has disappeared' (Guevara 1987: 367).⁵

However, for all that Fanon saw nationalism as a stage and not an end in itself, it was still part of his fundamental originality that during the time of the nationalist struggle it was to be the total priority, governing all aspects of social existence, including culture and the psyche. His emphasis on the importance of culture, as well as the impact on the individual's mental state of oppression and the struggle against it, marks a new departure from previous Marxist-inspired theories of imperialism and national liberation.

Moreover, the nationalist cause was not, in his view, subservient to the class struggle; he saw no special, a priori, leading role for the working class at national or international level. At the same time, unlike other nationalists who had refused to follow the socialist route to liberation through international proletarian solidarity, he did not represent the interests of the national bourgeoisie either. On the contrary, Fanon spoke for the most dispossessed and oppressed sections of society, emphasizing the revolutionary potential and needs of the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat, indeed, those who could truly be considered the 'wretched of the earth'. These were the people whom he saw leading the struggle, not the vanguard of the aristocracy of the working class.

The new priorities that he highlighted resonated with many of the ‘wretched of the earth’ or those speaking on their behalf across the globe. Not least of these was his emphasis on the intrinsic importance of violence in the liberation process. No longer seen as a means to an end, albeit a legitimate one, violence was more than a utilitarian tool in the struggle. Indeed, it was elevated to an essential process, through which the enslaved and the oppressed would achieve their liberation; it was given the status of a purifying agent, needed to cleanse the oppressed from the humiliation and defilement of colonial oppression. There was nothing inherently new in this belief in the redemptive power of violence. It formed part of the ideological mystique of the French Revolution. Georges Sorel had argued for a similar belief in the reinvigorating, creative power of violent action as a weapon against bourgeois decadence and repression (Sorel (1908)/1999), and a mystique of violence, often linked with religious ideology, had been part of the rationalisation of war, crusades and rebellions from time immemorial. It could also be used as an argument in support of some of the most questionable causes, with which Fanon would certainly have disagreed, including some of the violence taking place under the cloak of religious fundamentalism and the ‘war on terror’.

His influence was immense, though mainly outside the francophone world. Indeed, his impact was probably greatest on the black populations of the metropolitan heartlands themselves. In spite of Fanon’s own reservations, or rather ambivalence, about using blackness as a defining category in the struggle, under the slogan of Negritude, black consciousness or black power, he was certainly an inspiration to the Black Power movement in the USA, offshoots of which, such as the Black Panther Party, refused the non-violent methods adopted by the civil rights movement during the 1950s and early 1960s, to claim the need for violence in the affirmation of black power. Stokely Carmichael claimed Fanon as one of his ‘patron saints’ and Eldridge Cleaver noted that ‘every brother on a rooftop could quote Fanon’. Despite differences of analysis and approach, which were acknowledged – not least, the significance of race as a mobilising category – the basic message taken from Fanon was threefold: his insights into the damage done to the psyche by racism; his insistence on the intrinsic value of violent struggle; and his belief in the necessity of organising the lumpenproletariat as the agency of change and the potential strength these ‘lumpen’ elements could muster if they were united.

There was no doubting the extent of the suffering and dispossession of this so-called lumpenproletariat in Algeria, which consisted mainly of those who had been driven from the land into unemployment in the towns and cities. As we have already discussed in the Introduction, the issue of land, its usurpation and reclamation, was a key issue in the struggles for national liberation.

The Reclaiming of Space

The clearest, indeed one might say the prime, objective of the national liberation struggles was the reclamation of the national territory. The anticolonial struggle was articulated first and foremost through the demand for the return of the nation’s land

to the possession and control of the colonised from whom it had been appropriated. It was this objective that was prioritised over all others.

Although the land issue was the key issue in all the French colonies, it assumed the clearest expression in the case of Algeria. This was due to the fact that Algeria had not simply been invaded and occupied by a foreign power, but had ended up actually incorporated as an integral part of the French territory itself and had furthermore been colonised by a massive migration of European settlers, predominantly, but not exclusively, of French origin. The land question in Algeria was therefore to assume an even greater importance and carry an even greater emotional weight than it did elsewhere. As such, it plays an important role in the figures of the nationalist discourse, including the literature that was written during and after the war of liberation, and raises a number of problematic issues.

One of these related to the definition of what was to be counted as the national territory. In a sense, this was a common problem for many, if not most, of the territories colonised by European powers, the borders of which had often been drawn, and redrawn arbitrarily or artificially, depending on administrative convenience, the state of relations with neighbouring territories and the agreements made with rival imperial powers, particularly at the Berlin Conference of 1885, the Niger Convention of 1898 and the Entente Cordiale of 1904, often with scant regard for the ethnic composition of the peoples living in those territories (Suret-Canale 1988). Thus colonies were redefined, renamed or regrouped as part of broader entities, such as AOF (Afrique occidentale française) or AEF (Afrique équatoriale française), throughout the course of French colonisation.

A nation is not, of course, simply constituted by territory, administered by a 'national' state body. There are also the people inhabiting that territory, as well as the more elusive elements that give the nation its identity and the state its legitimacy. Thus, while the land issue was relatively straightforward, these other areas have given rise to severe ideological discord and indeed violent conflict. They will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Notes

1. 'Un mouvement manifestement à contre-courant du mouvement de l'histoire', quoted at MDS website, at <http://assoc.wanadoo.fr/mds-immigration/site.htm>.
2. 'Cette obligation historique dans laquelle se sont trouvés les hommes de culture africains de racialiser leurs revendications, de parler davantage de culture africaine que de culture nationale va les conduire à un cul-de-sac' (Fanon (1961)/1987: 157).
3. See Roberts 1993: 82, on Nietzsche's influence on thinking about the Algerian Revolution.
4. 'Toujours en termes de conscience, la conscience noire est immanente à elle-même. Je ne suis pas une potentialité de quelque chose, je suis pleinement ce que je suis. Je n'ai pas à rechercher l'universel. En mon sein nulle probabilité ne prend place. Ma conscience nègre ne se donne pas comme manque. Elle est. Elle est adhérente à elle-même' (Fanon (1952)/1975: 109).

5. This was written in 1964, just before what was known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was about to be unleashed in China, putting a new slant on the whole notion of cultural revolution and the 'new man'.
6. 'Un mouvement manifestement à contre-courant du mouvement de l'histoire', quoted at MDS website, at <http://assoc.wanadoo.fr/mds-immigration/site.htm>.
7. 'Cette obligation historique dans laquelle se sont trouvés les hommes de culture africains de racialiser leurs revendications, de parler davantage de culture africaine que de culture nationale va les conduire à un cul-de-sac' (Fanon (1961)/1987: 157).
8. See Roberts 1993: 82, on Nietzsche's influence on thinking about the Algerian Revolution.
9. 'Toujours en termes de conscience, la conscience noire est immanente à elle-même. Je ne suis pas une potentialité de quelque chose, je suis pleinement ce que je suis. Je n'ai pas à rechercher l'universel. En mon sein nulle probabilité ne prend place. Ma conscience nègre ne se donne pas comme manque. Elle est. Elle est adhérente à elle-même' (Fanon (1952)/1975: 109).
10. This was written in 1964, just before what was known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was about to be unleashed in China, putting a new slant on the whole notion of cultural revolution and the 'new man'.