GET THE POINT
BY: FRITZ POINTER

The Pitfalls of Nationalism and Sovereignty

I wondered. How could I synthesize ideas and ideals of a philosopher from Virginia (USA), Dr. Glen Martin, a White man, and a psychiatrist from Martinique, Dr. Frantz Fanon a Black man? Both Doctors, both prolific, both brilliant and both deeply concerned about our world and the pernicious dogma of nationalism and sovereignty; that is, the idea that the state or nation is the *highest legal authority.* Where, these thinkers wonder, does that leave humanity in a world demanding global solutions to global problems involving war, hunger, immigration, healthcare and climate change.

What stimulated my current enthusiasm for this subject is a recent article by Dr. Martin in CDWG or Coalition for Democratic World Government News & Views entitled "The Curse of National Sovereignty." As I began reading, "national sovereignty is an illusion and a curse," suddenly I was whisked back to the 1960s Oakland; to our Black Student Study Group, a Panther Party incubator, with Dr. Mudavanha (Dr. David Patterson), and our text, for the moment, Dr. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and the chapter of the moment, "The Pitfalls Of National Consciousness" renamed in the latest 2004 edition, "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" come vividly to mind.

Fanon, with a global consciousness, in this chapter, is primarily looking at Africa, Continental Africa, Post-Colonial Africa and the meaning of National Sovereignty during the beginning years of Independence, starting with Ghana in 1957. Martin is looking at the world, including Africa, the ineffective United Nations, and the meaning of National Sovereignty today, in 2020.

First published in the French language by Francois Maspero, under the title *Les damnes de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*) *in* 1961 Fanon, a Black M.D. from Martinique, wrote, for all eternity to read, a critique of post-colonial leadership in Africa what, if any White man had written would be called a racist. For example, Fanon writes that: "the unpreparedness of the elite, the lack of practical ties between them and the masses, their apathy and yes, their cowardice at the crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations" (97). He continues:

> Instead of being the coordinated crystallization of the people's innermost aspirations, instead of being the most tangible, immediate product of popular mobilization, national consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe – a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity. (97)

Ironically, this is a national consciousness an identity predicated on and imposed by European colonial authority. An identity, and consciousness shaped and promulgated by the 19th century "Scramble for Africa." By the 1880s, Industrialized countries, led by France and Britain, began to invade the African continent looking for raw materials. It was in 1884, at the Berlin Conference, organized by Otto von Bismarck, that the Western European countries carved up the African continent into the "states" or "countries" we see today. In fact, the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury was to say of this period, "We have been engaged in drawing lines on maps where no (white) man's foot has ever trod;

we've been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where we were."

One absurd example of this is the British controlled Gambia. Completely surrounded by the French Colony of Senegal, the French offered to purchase the Gambia from Britain, but the British wanted to keep the Gambia River and would not sale. The result is the smallest country in Africa (pop. 2 million a UN member) that is 300 miles long and never more than 30 miles wide. What the Africans thought of this colonial carve-up was never asked. And, today these are the arbitrary, random state formations and identities for which people will swear allegiance and will even die.

By 1914 only two countries remained outside European possession – Liberia in the west and Ethiopia in the east. Although Britain and France had taken the Lion's Share – from Egypt to South Africa, from Algeria to Senegal, even tiny Portugal was able to carve out two colonies – Angola in the west and Mozambique (an island) off the east coast. Germany took Southwest Africa and on the east coast Tanganyika; the vast Congo Basin fell to King Leopold of Belgium; Italy and Spain completed the enclosure. The identity and consciousness, and thereby the fate, of the continent was utterly changed.

Today, there are 56 African countries, 54 in the United Nations, each claiming sovereignty as an independent nation. These, as well as another 140 sovereign nations that make-up the United Nations, are a primary focus of Dr. Glen Martin. For instance, Dr. Martin observes:

> If the highest authority is accorded to the governments of various territories on the Earth, and the planet is composed of nearly 200 such sovereign territories, then the fragmented result can only be

> a war system, a domination system of the strong over the weak, an exploitation system of the wealthy over the poor, and a system that inevitably results in the threat of nuclear holocaust and the destruction of our planetary environment. National sovereignty is the core illusion that is leading our entire planet to destruction. (9)

"The national bourgeoisie" those, even today, loudest in their appeals for national consciousness and unity and sovereignty, Fanon writes, "which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime, is an underdeveloped bourgeoisie. Its economic clout is practically zero, and in any case, no way commensurate with that of its metropolitan counterpart which it intends replacing" (98). This national bourgeoisie "is not geared to production, invention, creation or work." Rather, all its energy is channeled into 'networking' and 'scheming'. They have, Fanon says, "the psychology of a businessman, not that of a captain of industry" (98). This should not be that surprising, since the plunder and greed of the colonizers and the embargo system they installed hardly left them any choice.

Dr. Glen Martin, always with an eye on the ineffective United Nation's Charter, illuminates additional side-effects of the myth of national sovereignty, when he writes:

> Under the system of militarized sovereign nation-states, believe it or not, the poor and weaker nations [like those in Africa – my note] *also love the dogma of sovereignty*. This is because they have the illusion that this fantasy idea can protect them from the power-politics and exploitation that dominate the world. The utterly flawed Charter of the United Nations, based on the illusion of national sovereignty, speaks of "the self-determination of peoples." It then

> institutionalizes a system in which the five big winners in World War Two (all of whom have a history as major imperial colonizers, exploiters, and dominators) control everything with their veto power on the Security Council. (10)

The five big dominators of the world (China, Russia, Britain, France and the USA the Permanent Five or P-5) all love sovereignty because it allows them to divide and conquer the weak. The system of sovereign nation-states is the perfect system of "divide and conquer." Martin reminds us that because the world is already divided, it is easy for big imperial powers to conquer. No matter, the people of weaker nations mindlessly continue to cling to the illusion of sovereignty (11).

In Africa, claims of national sovereignty became, in the words of Fanon, "ultranationalism, chauvinism, and racism" (103). Competition for employment, mainly from Africans of other African nations breeds conflict. In the Ivory Coast, outright race riots were directed against the Dahomeans, in Ghana it's the people from Niger; in Senegal, the Sudanese and in South Africa the Somalis and Nigerians.

For instance, in the recent (2016) book by Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*: *Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics,* Chapter 6 "From National Emancipation to National Chauvinism in South Africa, 1973-2013, is poignantly germane to our discussion here, as Neocosmos notes that: "The defeat of popular politics in South Africa from the late 1980s onwards, much as Fanon (1990) had observed in immediate postcolonial Africa, has enabled the growth of a narrow xenophobic, nationalism"(163). Then, disturbingly and disappointingly adds:

> Simultaneously, an increase in nativist ideologies and the systematic "othering" of Africa and Africans has gradually replaced a human rights discourse by a communitarian one. Following precisely the trajectory outlined by Fanon, xenophobic pogroms broke out in May 2008, which left 63 dead, as those deemed to be foreign Africans were attacked by mobs of poor people clearly instigated by local traders, politicians and powerful local leaders, who saw the victims as restricting their access to jobs, housing and business opportunities…mobs chanting "freedom songs" were filmed attacking people deemed to be aliens or foreigners and burning some alive. As Fanon would have said, from a struggle for non-racialism we have arrived at the vilest apartheid-type forms of "ethnic cleansing". (164)

This is the behavior of the so-called "Born Frees" the name given to those born after the fall of apartheid. Their attitude, having been there twice myself, is one that clings to the illusion of sovereignty: "We did this…We Black South Africans did this…We Zulus did this…Maybe a little help from the Xhosas…This is our, Black South Africans' freedom and it is not for the benefit Somalis, Nigerians, Ghanaians, African Americans or what-have-you." And, this brings us back to Glen Martin, who, to say the least, is disappointed that small, weaker nations mindlessly continue to cling to the illusion of sovereignty. He reveals that:

> Every one of the six times that I visited Cuba during the lethal US economic blockade, the people of Cuba did not want to hear about uniting humanity under democratic (world) law that ended the neo-colonial domination and exploitation system. They simply kept

> repeating to me, as if hypnotized, "we are a sovereign nation. The US has no right to do this to us. We are a sovereign nation. They must respect our sovereignty" (11).

We see the difficulty here, the challenge: How do we unite humanity when countries can't unite internally, or externally with their neighbors? Let's end with this from Dr. Glen Martin: "The smaller or weaker nations of the world need to give up their illusion that the dogma of 'sovereignty' will somehow protect them. The big nations love this dogma just as much as they do because a fragmented, lawless world system allows them to do whatever they want. The illusion of sovereignty gives us power politics rather than the politics of democratic justice" (13).

The world must Federate under a World Constitution. As it is, the United Nations Charter insures that the smaller, weaker nations will never have equality or real freedom: destined to be in debt to the IMF and World Bank and pawns for the Permanent Five (P-5) United Nations veto nations, as long as the Charter remains the same. For instance, Nuclear disarmament is the United Nations General Assembly's oldest aspiration. Its first resolution, adopted on January 24, 1946, urged the "elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction." But, the P-5 the very countries responsible for endless war said "No." Most recently, the GA asked for a ceasefire during the Corona virus pandemic, again, the P-5 said "No."

People all over the world are ready for World Government – a constitutional democratic world government, under which national and local governments retain jurisdiction over strictly internal affairs. And, will hold

accountable with the power to arrest leaders of countries for disturbing the peace and starting war, after war, after war.

There is a globally composed Constitution, created by scholars, researchers, lawyers, engineers, economists, actors, ambassadors, poets, computer scientists, philosophers and psychiatrists, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Bahais, Sikhs, Buddhists, agnostics and atheists, Africans, Asians, Europeans, South Americans, and North Americans - edited by Dr. Glen Martin that suggests thoughtful alternatives and viable additions to a fatally flawed and obsolete UN Charter that must be fixed or replaced.

The Earth Constitution joins all of humanity together under the rule of democratically legislated world laws that take away militarism, power politics, domination and exploitation. The *Constitution* makes these corruptions nearly impossible because it removes the system of sovereign nations that permits and fosters such lawless corruption. It protects all persons and nations equally. It unites humanity under the principle of unity in diversity. It recognizes and is based upon the only true sovereignty – **the sovereignty of the united people of Earth.**