

**Fanonian practices in South Africa**  
*From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*

*Nigel C. Gibson*

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# Abbreviations

Abahlali	Abahlali baseMjondolo
ANC	African National Congress
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
CCF	Concerned Citizens Forum
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
BPC	Black People's Convention
CLP	Church Land Programme
COPE	Congress of the People
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GPS	global positioning system
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SASO	South African Students Organisation
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
US	United States

## Foreword

Richard Pithouse initially told us about Frantz Fanon when we were dealing with arrests after our first road blockade. He said Fanon had written that every generation has to discover its mission and either fulfil it or betray it. Fanon discovered what we have discovered in our generation: if you are serious about victory, about succeeding to humanise the world, even a little bit, then your struggle must be a living politics. It must be owned and shaped in thought and in action by ordinary men and women. If every *gogo* (grandmother) does not understand your politics then you are on the road to another top-down system. You also run the risk of being on your own in the face of repression.

Every struggle must begin at the point where the people who have decided to rebel find themselves, with the resources that they have, on the basis of the experiences that they have had, in the face of the limits and dangers they encounter and with the understanding that they have. Because the world is always in motion, every struggle has to begin on its own. But when a struggle moves and grows you discover new friends and also new ancestors in struggle. We began our struggle knowing very well about Nelson Mandela, about Steve Biko, about *Inkosi* Bhambatha, about the women of Cato Manor, about the trade unions and the United Democratic Front (UDF). We have felt very close to some of these ancestors of our struggle. Many of our comrades were in the trade unions or the UDF; some are the children of the women of Cato Manor; a grandson of Bhambatha is one of our respected older members; and we have felt a strong connection to Biko through Bishop Rubin Phillip.

But we did not know about Paulo Freire or Frantz Fanon when we began our struggle. This we learnt on the way. We have also met many

new friends. Nigel Gibson is one of these friends. He has participated in our discussions, although often from far away, and he has stood with us outside the Sydenham police station.

We have often said that struggle is a school. The first point of learning is the thinking that people do about their situation, their struggle and how their struggle is received. But there is also a learning that comes from the solidarity that a struggle experiences once it is in motion.

We have learnt to draw a clear distinction between those forms of leftism that accept that everyone can think and which are willing to journey with the poor, and those forms of leftism that think only middle-class activists, usually academics or NGO people, can think and which demand that the poor obey them. We have called this second type of left the regressive left. They may say things differently to the state when it comes to the World Bank or to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy but when it comes to how they relate to us we see no difference in how they behave and how the state behaves. The tendency to treat our insistence on the autonomy of our movement as criminal is the same. The tendency to co-opt individuals and slander movements is the same. The desire to ruin any movement that they cannot rule is the same.

Fanon believed that everyone could think. He believed that the role of the university-trained intellectual was to be inside the struggles of the people and to be inside the discussions inside the struggles of the people. There is no doubt that Fanon would have recognised the shack intellectuals in our movement. He would have discussed and debated with us as equals. Fanon believed that democracy was the rule of the people and not the rule of experts. He did not think that democracy was just about voting every five years. He saw it as a daily practice of the people. He was a philosopher who wanted to be inside the movements that developed and expressed and enforced the will of the people. Clearly we can claim him as one of many ancestors of our own struggle.

People come into our movement from many different political traditions and social experiences. Some come from the African National Congress (ANC) and some come from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) or the Minority Front (MF). To bring all these people into our living politics, into Abahlalisms, is only possible if we do two things. Firstly, we have to start from the ordinary lives of people and to move from there. Everyone

can recognise the logic that if people don't have water they need water. Secondly, we have to continually discuss the bigger meaning of our struggle. This was relatively easy to do in the early days of the movement. After we faced serious repression it became more difficult. When comrades are in jail, sleeping in strange places with only water in their stomachs and some bread for their children, fearing for their lives and the safety of their homes, it becomes difficult to discuss the meaning of our politics.

Fanon discussed philosophy in the middle of the Algerian War. This is an inspiration. The lesson is that we have to keep thinking and discussing even in the middle of a crisis. The cost of failing to meet this challenge is too high. When we respond to repression, that response should not only include ensuring the safety of our members, support and justice for people in prison, maintaining the structures of the organisation and mobilising solidarity – it should also include a continual discussion of Abahlalisms.

Our daily political practice is our humble attempt to continue the struggle to fulfil the striving for freedom and justice that people like Biko and Fanon wrote about. Biko and Fanon both believed in individual freedom and collective liberation. One of the deep problems in our society is that liberation has been privatised. From the bottom of society to the top, there are people who think and even say that liberation is a question of getting rich.

The power of our organising comes when we reject this individualist understanding of liberation and accept collective responsibility for society, from the level of families, to neighbourhoods, cities and the entire society. A progressive, democratic and just society in which everyone can participate in decision making and in which the land and wealth are shared cannot be built by individual endeavour.

A person cannot be complete in isolation from other people or without just and equal relations to other people in one's surroundings. Some people believe they can blunt their humanity with the things they buy but this is an illusion. As a rich man drives out of his gated community he knows in his heart that he is not a better man than the security guard at the gate. People are scared to accept the reality of equality because it is incompatible with the privatisation of liberation.

Once it is accepted that a person can only be a complete person in relation to others and that all others are human and must therefore count,

it becomes clear that all people's rights must be protected and that they must have the opportunity to enjoy life. This requires action, real action in the world.

It is an illusion to think that we can distance ourselves from the collectivities that have made us. It is the power of the party political system and money that builds the gated walls of the rich. It is the same walls that divide the rich and the poor. Party politics, ethnic politics and borders also divide us. These walls do not only divide us physically, they are also there to teach us that liberation has been privatised and that success is getting yourself and your family on the right side of the walls. It is these walls which breed individualism and make it difficult for activists to organise collectively. Therefore, our most urgent task, the mission that our generation shares with older generations, is to emphasise the fact that a person is a person wherever they find themselves. This is regardless of their origin, skin colour, gender, religion, creed, age and socio-economic status. A real movement with real members engaged in a real struggle has to negotiate all the time and sometimes compromises must be made. But these are tactical compromises. When we discuss philosophy in our university we realise the value of the distinction between tactics and principles. A principle can never be compromised and we must never compromise on the principle that all people are equal, that everyone must count.

When organising in Abahlali we do not encourage individual membership. In order to encourage the culture of collectivity, Abahlali reminds all its members of the importance of their families and neighbourhoods. So when one takes membership of the movement, one takes a responsibility to encourage others to join the movement. Apart from building a mass movement, the reality is that it is always one's family and one's neighbours in one's own settlement that arrive first in difficult times of evictions, floods, shack fires, crime, police raids, police brutality, arrests and death. We have a duty to look after one another. We encourage everyone to take that duty seriously and at the same time we make it clear that our leaders do not always have the answers and that our struggle is not in our offices. Our struggle, like our strength, is in our united communities. But without a culture of collectivity this power will never be realised.



We always emphasise to our members that Abahlali will not struggle for them but will only struggle with them. There is nothing for the community without committed individuals and families and there is nothing for individuals and families without united and strong communities. This form of activism leaves, from the onset, a lot of responsibility to a particular settlement. This form of struggling means that sometimes the movement may be strong while a particular settlement is weak. But it also means that the strength of the movement is not with the leadership. It is in the communities and its fate is held in the hands of ordinary members. Whatever strength the movement has comes from this way of organising.

When invitations are received for the movement to elect delegates to represent Abahlali elsewhere, it is the general meeting that decides whether or not it is in the best interest of the movement to accept that invitation. If it is agreed that a delegate should be sent, it is the meeting that decides who is to be delegated. This helps to do away with the problem of having the same faces represent the movement all the time and it aids many people to learn new skills. It helps to promote collectivism. We are aware of the danger of sending the same few individuals to represent the movement all the time. These include the risk of co-optation, individuals detaching from the rest of the group as they become popular and the possibility of corruption. This culture of collectivity helps to build a responsible society – a society where none of us will enjoy life until everyone else is free.

It is practical to struggle locally to make a real difference globally and to build real movements. The local must always be the road to the global. When we meet globally we should meet as elected, mandated and rotated representatives of strong local struggles.

Our struggle continues.

We are grateful to Nigel Gibson for bringing the work of famous intellectuals into conversation with the work of the shack intellectuals.

*S'bu Zikode*  
*Abahlali baseMjondolo*

## Preface and acknowledgements

*What I wanted to say is that death is always close by, and what's important is not to know if you can avoid it, but to know that you have done the most possible to realize your ideas. What shocks me here, in this bed as I grow weaker, is not that I'm dying, but that I'm dying in Washington of leukemia considering that I could have died in battle with the enemy three months ago when I knew I had this disease. We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all, slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty. I want you to know that even at this moment, when the doctors have given up hope, I still think . . . of the Algerian people, of the people of the Third World. And if I have held on this long, it's because of them.*

— Frantz Fanon, Letter to Roger Tayeb, November 1961

While acknowledging the importance of Frantz Fanon in the history of liberation movements, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa* focuses on his dialectic of liberation, grounded in the idea of social transformation towards a radically humanist society. Post-apartheid South Africa is the focus, and its history of struggle the essential context, but the idea of *Fanonian Practices* is not limited to South Africa.

Fifty years after his death, Fanon is a contested figure. The Fanon found in these pages is neither the cosmopolitan theorist of postcolonial and cultural studies, nor the focoist theorist of guerrilla war or 'revolutionary violence'. The latter was, of course, important to Fanon's theory of anti-colonial revolution, but it has also been terribly misunderstood. The aim here is not to recuperate the historical Fanon but to

recreate Fanon's philosophy of liberation in a new situation. That is exactly what Steve Biko did in the early 1970s when he found in Fanon's philosophy the ground for Black Consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Fanon is being discussed again in South Africa, and I believe that his philosophy can, once more, ground a new emancipatory movement. I find in Fanon not only a valuable critique of post-apartheid South Africa, but also a critique of, and a practical guide to, engaging the new movements that are emerging from below.

The idea of 'practice' in *Fanonian Practices* is important. Like Marx, Fanon emphasised 'praxis', positing the idea of 'enlightened' practice. But by grounding Fanon's practice in a philosophy of liberation, I am considering Fanon not only as a theorist of action, but also the notion of practice as a product of philosophy. In the vortex of mass movements against colonialism, Fanon argued that it was important to develop new concepts. These concepts, he believed, would emerge not from secluded contemplations on philosophy, but through reflections on, and engagements with, 'real' movements of those excluded, marginalised and disenfranchised masses, namely the damned of the earth, struggling for social change. In other words, new concepts emerge by shifting the very ground upon which reason is constructed. The Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci similarly expressed this idea of the militant's philosophic praxis, though in a different register, in his *Prison Notebooks*:

[The philosophy of praxis] is consciousness full of contradictions, in which the philosopher himself [or herself] understood both individually and as an entire social group, not only grasps the contradictions, but posits himself [or herself] as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore action (Gramsci 1971: 405).

Like Gramsci, Fanon believed that there was an intimate connection between knowledge and action. Without the 'knowledge of the practice of action' produced by 'living inside history', he argues, there is nothing but a fancy-dress parade (1968: 147). In other words, all the struggles – all the sacrifices that are made, the pain endured, all the beatings, disappearances and tragedies – can be a waste of time if the struggle simply results in another form of domination, the transfer of political power

from the colonial authorities to a nationalist party, and the exclusion from politics of the truly historical protagonists, the very damned of the earth in whose name the struggle was fought. To complete the unfinished liberation, Fanon insists that we have to look elsewhere.

*Fanonian Practices* also looks to shifting perspectives about the importance of liberatory ideas in struggles for liberation. Ideas are not the exclusive property of the intelligentsia, the party, the expert, or any elite group. Any Fanonian practice must be rooted in strict adherence to the axiom that everyone can and does think. As Ashraf Cassiem from the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign put it, 'we are poor, not stupid' (quoted in Figlan et al. 2009: 69).

Fanon's critique of the pitfalls of national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth*, particularly his warning that the greatest threat facing Africa's liberation is the absence of a liberatory ideology, is important to my critique of post-apartheid South Africa. A liberatory ideology cannot be applied from without. It is obviously not the case that the common people simply need to be given the word as they kneel in the classroom or the church. Instead a liberatory ideology emerges out of what might be considered a creative communing, with invisible threads linking the often subjugated histories and thinking of freedom movements. Understood dialectically, Fanon's concept of liberation also emerges in dialogues from within the movement, for the movement. In other words, by ideology, Fanon is not only speaking of a means to critique other ideas, but conceiving the power of liberatory ideology to produce changes in material reality. At the same time, liberatory movements always look for self-clarification. I do not mean that movements look to be taken over by a political party, or non-governmental organisation (NGO) or vanguard of some sort; rather I mean that the movements themselves consciously look for meaning for their actions as well as for ideas about their strategic direction. To do this, these movements bring all their resources into play (Fanon 1967b), devouring ideas of liberation, wherever they come from, in order to help explain and give new meaning to their situation in the struggle.

The first step for a people who have been constantly told that what they think is absolutely worthless is to think about their worth. Fanon's notion of a new humanism emerges in and from a dialogue with the damned of the earth, that is to say, from the underworld, the spaces of

struggle against daily 'living death' (see 1967b: 12) that are particular to a colonised people. In this sense, and in the context of an almost life and death situation, Fanon's humanism stands in utter contrast and in utter opposition to humanitarianism. Indeed, in the postcolony, humanitarianism, in Fanon's terms, is simply a neocolonial ideology promoting a competitive niche for NGOs and financial or corporate institutions (see Fanon 1968: 67).

Fanon's dialectic emerges out of individual and social crises.<sup>2</sup> Refusing the conflation of the particular with the concrete, Fanon was not that concerned about how universal ideas of freedom particularised themselves. Indeed, he argued that the anti-colonial struggle was 'not a treatise on the universal' but an 'original idea propounded as an absolute' (1968: 41). Liberation, in other words, was an absolute necessity, synonymous with the struggle against a living death.<sup>3</sup>

Since Fanon lived in a period of revolution – the epoch of national liberation from colonialism – his concerns were quite different to ours, and the point of *Fanonian Practices* is to think through Fanon's dialectic, to both test and try to recreate it, in a new context, namely post-apartheid South Africa. For example, Fanon's description of movements for independence that transgress the 'prohibited' spaces of colonial rule speaks to us in myriad registers. As the control of space has become increasingly essential to neoliberal globalisation, I connect the transgressions of space to the need to rethink the space of politics and the politics of space. What becomes an issue in the later chapters of this book is how the politics of space remains urgent in post-apartheid South Africa.

For Fanon, the newly independent society can only be authentically built through the active decision making of the 'damned of the earth'. This principle is crucial to *Fanonian Practices*, but in a sense, this principle of active decision making cannot be realised until mass movements of those previously excluded, dehumanised and damned hear themselves speak and think. Thus, moving against these movements, and attempting to silence and, as Fanon (1968: 183) puts it, order them back 'to the caves', always becomes the task of the postcolonial nationalist party, often, these days, with the support of civil society.

Born during the high period of neoliberal globalisation, the post-apartheid government silenced more radical alternatives by trading on its credentials as the 'party of liberation'. Successfully outmanoeuvring its

left critics, the trajectory in South Africa has been a succession of neoliberal restructurings. Indeed, the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in the 1990s made it very difficult to imagine, let alone think through, alternatives – at least this was the argument made by African National Congress (ANC) insiders and its left critics at the time. But I argue that this was the result not of a ‘pessimism of the intellect’, to use Gramsci’s phrase, but, as Fanon puts it (1968: 148), of ‘intellectual laziness’ and the lack of concrete links between radical intellectuals and the masses of people. Moreover, the decoupling of ideas of social and public good from the idea of what constitutes the post-apartheid society was initially masked by the celebrations – the fancy-dress parades and performances of achieving freedom – and characterised by an ethical shift among party militants and the emergent Black middle class, who, having fought apartheid, wanted a pay-off. Overt manifestations of individual greed and the justification of profound inequalities that would have been frowned upon in the late 1980s have become acceptable. The social acceptance of public displays of greed and power underscores the success of an ideology that claimed that a South Africa emerging from apartheid had no other choice than to institute a neoliberal model. With ‘development’ (including Black Economic Empowerment) seen as being dependent on capital investment, everything had to be done to stop a feared flight of White capital and all resources were channelled into supporting and protecting the growth of financial and business sectors – the same sectors that had been the beneficiaries of apartheid rule. In other words, the political elite had a choice, and the price of the ANC’s choice has been the increasingly stark reality for many of the poor who simply can no longer afford the most basic necessities, namely water, electricity and a roof over their heads.

Nevertheless, each rollout of neoliberal restructuring has been resisted and, despite all attempts to ‘normalise’ the country, South Africa remains a politicised nation, with endless so-called service-delivery revolts becoming increasingly political. The countrywide revolts of 2004–5 marked a new stage of insurgency. These *social* revolts were products of the broken promises of liberation, but they were misunderstood in terms of neoliberal discourse as service-delivery revolts, marking the gulf between civil society’s intelligentsia and media pundits and the emergent thinking in South Africa’s shack settlements. This period saw the birth of the shack dwellers’ movement in Durban, Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali). Indeed,

Abahlali's original insistence that the policy makers 'speak to us not about us' was not a request for service delivery, but for the democratisation of development. Though some civil-society intellectuals consider the demand for popular participation in development in the context of a shift in World Bank policy towards the poor,<sup>4</sup> Abahlali stood out because of its democratic practices with its insistence on discussion and reporting back to fully inclusive meetings. Rather than be the subject of research, the shack dwellers' organisation challenged committed intellectuals to think the almost unimaginable: that a new politics of the poor could emerge from a movement of shack dwellers. Such a demand for a shift in imagination is a demand that is not reducible to standpoint epistemology or geographic location, but is also about the challenge, in a Fanonian sense, to rethink and reground a philosophy of liberation in a dialogue with the thinking of such a movement.

Critics might respond by asking, since I don't live in South Africa, let alone in a shack settlement, what right I have to write this. Indeed, what does this White secular Jew who grew up outside London in the 1970s have to say? Why would such a person develop a deep regard for Fanon's philosophy and a dedication to South African liberation? South Africa's liberation struggle was of historic importance, but from a Fanonian standpoint what has happened in its aftermath is equally important. And while *Fanonian Practices* is about praxis, it is, at the same time, a theoretical work that engages philosophical issues that I believe have been generated by Fanon's *continued* engagement with South Africa. Fanon insists that we find solidarity with every contribution to the 'victory of the dignity of the spirit', every act against the subjugation of human beings (1967a: 226). For example, the politics of space has become more absolute in these neoliberal times, where urbanisation has been decoupled from formal labour and employment, resulting in an increasing divide between rich and poor, expressed spatially through gated communities and shack settlements.

If the majority of the world's population lives in cities, a growing number of people who live in the cities in 'most of the world', as Partha Chatterjee (2004) puts it, live in 'informal settlements'. But as the popular samba '*Eu Sou Favela*' (I am Favela) goes, the favela 'was never the refuge of the marginal' (quoted in Perlman 2005: 1). Shack dwellers are not exclusively a passive and fragmented population. Urban movements of

the poor mobilising for the ‘right to the city’ have developed across the globe (see Sugranyes and Mathivet 2010). Policing of the urban poor has simultaneously become more and more militarised, based on attempts to establish a sort of neocolonial cordon sanitaire of walls, gates and enclaves to separate and isolate the poor from elite and bourgeois spaces. The right to the city has emerged as a key demand linking struggles in different parts of the world. On this point, by ‘right to the city’, I do not mean access or service delivery, or simply a claim to rights in the cities.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I consider the right to the city in terms of freedom in the Lefebvrian sense of freedom of movement as an affirmation of life (1992: 201). Thus, Henri Lefebvre proclaims that ‘the right to the city is a cry and a demand’ (1996: 158) for the transformation of the urban and for a new urban humanism. This transformation is not simply a possibility or a dream but a necessity. By urban movements, I mean organisations that seek by self-reflexive means to acknowledge their own foundation and their struggles as an affirmation of life. As Abahlali (2010a) articulates it: ‘There is really no such thing as a “right” that can be given to you by a government or NGO . . . The only way to succeed in making the right to the city a living reality for everyone instead of a slogan, which repressive governments can hide behind, is to democratise our cities from below.’ Abahlali is thus part of the struggle for the right to the city in this transformational sense, but it also has its own specificity. Informed by the long struggle against apartheid, and especially by the urban movements in the 1980s, the struggle for the right to the city in South Africa can also be understood as part of the continuing struggle for liberation.

Of course, in saying all this, my point is not to find an immediate affinity between post-apartheid South Africa and Fanon’s description of the pitfalls of national consciousness, though Fanon’s prescience is always astounding. Certainly, one should always read Fanon with the eyes of today, since it is that illumination that will help indicate what is living and what is dead in Fanon’s thought. But in speaking about Fanon’s relevance, the question seems less about what can be ‘saved’ in Fanon, than about what can be saved in Africa that a revolutionary theoretician like Fanon can possibly speak to. Perhaps the issue is not about finding the moment of relevance in Fanon but asking how Fanon, the revolutionary, would think and act in this period of retrogression? As this book



made its way into print, I came across an article in the *Pretoria News* titled 'Shacks outside luxury estate burned down' (Hosken 2010) that tells a simple and, sadly, almost daily story of retrogression in South Africa. The reporter remarks that shack dwellers are good enough to clean the 'madam's' multimillion rand home, but too dangerous (economically and socially) to live outside the walls of the luxury estate. Labelled 'criminal' and 'illegal', the shack dwellers were removed and, with the aid of the police, the shacks were destroyed. Commenting on the increasing repressive and authoritarian messages emanating from government, Niren Tolsi (2009b) asks, 'Are we freer today than we were 10 years ago?' Certainly he might answer in the negative. Yet, by highlighting the pitfalls and indeed the betrayals of post-apartheid South Africa, I do not consider South Africa's liberation doomed – far from it. To me, movements like Abahlali offer great promise and prove not only the optimism of the will, but the optimism of the intellect. With Fanon, they assert 'that man is a yes. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity.' But with Fanon, they also say no, 'No to scorn of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom' (1967a: 222).

Fanon proclaimed at the end of *The Wretched* that 'each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it' (1968: 206). This pronouncement is most certainly the challenge to our generation which must finally fulfil the mission of human liberation. Fanon died at the age of 36. That is young even in the context of the relatively short lifespans of other theorists of revolution and social change. Lenin was 54, Cabral was 49, Luxemburg was 48, Che was 39; only Biko, at 31, was younger. Fanon died before the end of the Algerian war of liberation, and importantly, as *The Wretched* brilliantly shows, he was already aware and critical of the direction of postcolonial Africa. Thus, while one recognises that Fanon cannot provide the answers to today's issues, the point of *Fanonian Practices* is to continually attempt to develop and re-engage Fanon's 'untidy dialectic' with new realities.

A book takes a long time. Even when the author thinks it is almost complete, it takes another year. I wrote this book without institutional support, though with plenty of support from friends and colleagues. It started as a series of articles, generated after my first trip to southern and South Africa in 1999. The philosopher Raymond Geuss, who I was fortunate to have as a dissertation adviser, once said (in a course on the

young Marx at Columbia University) that his book on Habermas had taken ten years to write. He calculated that since it was around 70 pages, he had averaged seven pages a year. Of course this figure was derived after the fact, and no doubt many pages were chucked in the bin, but at the time I was shocked. By then the only thing I had published was a review essay about language, culture and politics in South Africa. That was in 1988 when civil war was raging in the country, and the debates were about what form socialism would take and how it would be instituted. Now it is over twenty years since Mandela was released from jail, and I appreciate Geuss's calculation, since it has taken me almost as long to write this book.

*Fanonian Practices* has a progressive character, which is both historical and logical. It begins with Steve Biko in the 1970s and ends with the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, in 2009. Chapters 2 and 3 were first written before the shack dwellers' movement emerged. They reflect my attempt to develop a Fanonian critique of South Africa's transition from apartheid and the search for new beginnings at a particular moment.

Chapter 1 considers, with eyes of today, Biko's Fanonian practice, namely the development of a philosophy of liberation, Black Consciousness, and especially Biko's critique of 'White liberalism', in light of the neoliberal present. Biko's statement that 'South Africa could succeed in putting across to the world a pretty convincing, integrated picture, with still 70 per cent of the population being underdogs', while a small Black middle class played a buffer role, is remarkably prescient (quoted in Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson 2008: 41-2). Today South Africa's White elite enjoy a freedom and a feel-good factor that they could have never imagined before, while the majority of the country's population is pauperised or living close to poverty levels.

Chapter 2 considers how this situation came about through the perspective of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity in Chapter 2 of *The Wretched* is employed to critically reconsider the high point of the anti-apartheid struggles – the community and workers' struggles of the mid-1980s. Gramsci's notions of hegemony and 'passive revolution' are used to analyse the post-apartheid transition that appears to have been a defeat for progressive agendas. The focus on the pitfalls of South Africa's liberation

highlights not only the economic reality of contemporary South Africa, but also the political decisions that have underscored its economic (and increasingly political) authoritarianism. It is not only that politics and economics are saturated with one another, but in Fanon's sense, these reified terms can be turned upside down and taken over once 'the people' realise that they have been betrayed.

Chapter 3 begins with Fanon's remark that, at a certain moment, the people realise that they have been betrayed. Since Fanon argues that this treason is not only national but social, Marx's critique of the limits of civil society and political rights provides the basis to consider Black political and economic empowerment. It is argued that, while civil society can act as watchdog, it is the new grassroots *social* movements that posit a rigorous challenge to post-apartheid politics, threatening the interests of political and economic elites by calling them to account for the broken promises of national liberation.

While Chapters 2 and 3 engage a Fanonian critique of post-apartheid South Africa, with Chapter 2 concentrating on the self-limiting ideology of transition and Chapter 3 considering the logic of what Fanon calls 'social treason', Chapters 4 and 5 develop this critique in the context of emergent grassroots movements among the poorest of the poor in the context of the degeneration of the idea of liberation and the rising tide of xenophobia and chauvinism. Of these new movements, the central focus is the development of Abahlali baseMjondolo, which is the largest and most sustained grassroots movement of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa. This self-organised shack dwellers' organisation, which emerged in Durban in 2005 and now works in various smaller towns in KwaZulu-Natal and in the Western Cape, has become part of a national Poor People's Alliance.<sup>6</sup> *Fanonian Practices* could not have been conceived without the emergence of Abahlali.

For those who believe in academic neutrality, this book might seem a little too partisan, a little too close to its subject. For the activist who simply wants a programme of action, it might be too theoretical. I have not planned to disappoint everyone at the outset, but there are also distinct disadvantages to writing about an ongoing movement and its living politics in uncertain situations. A work that attempts to engage in Fanonian practice is, by its nature, going to suffer from incompleteness. It is, in other words, not a research project but a work in search of praxis.

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I carry a lifelong debt to Raya Dunayevskaya, who taught me so much, but I am afraid she would insist that I hadn't learnt enough from our debate in Detroit in 1981 on spontaneity and organisation. My understanding of a living philosophy in Fanon, and in Abahlali, is mediated by my understanding of Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism. Where Fanon had, for example, concluded *The Wretched of the Earth* with a call to work out new concepts and set about developing a new humanism, Dunayevskaya fleshed this out for me by arguing that 'to discern this mass search for a total philosophy, it is necessary only to shed the stubbornness of all philosophies - the concept of "the backwardness of the masses" - then listen to their thoughts [as they struggle for freedom] . . . Far from being intellectual abdication, this is the beginning of a new stage of cognition' (1966: 79, original emphasis).

I first got to know Lou Turner while moving kitchen appliances in Detroit over 25 years ago, as part of Raya's move from Detroit to Chicago. That occasion was the start of an ongoing discussion about Fanon and liberation. *Fanonian Practices* is saturated with my understanding of Marxist-Humanism and is an attempt to do what Raya asked us to do: practise dialectics.

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## INTRODUCTION

# Amandla is still awethu<sup>1</sup>

## *Fanonian practices in post-apartheid South Africa*

*Closing the road to the national bourgeoisie is, certainly, the means whereby the vicissitudes of new-found independence may be avoided, and with them the decline of morals, the installing of corruption within the country, economic regression, and the immediate disaster of an anti-democratic regime depending on force and intimidation.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

*[I]t is not only how and under what circumstances 'the wretched of the earth' enter and make history, but what the dialectic of liberation reveals when the material conditions appear to militate against the subjective impulses who, 'without any period of transition', are impelled to embody history and make a new beginning.*

— Lou Turner, 'On the Difference Between the Hegelian and Fanonian Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage'

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN ADVENTURES OF THE FANONIAN DIALECTIC?

Perhaps the most important recreation of Fanon's philosophy of liberation on the African continent was by Steve Biko, whose emphasis on the liberation of the 'mind' of the oppressed became essential to the new stage of revolt against apartheid in the 1970s. For Biko, Black Consciousness constituted a movement away from colonised objectification towards Black subjectivity (mind). Rather than simply a force against apartheid, this new space for subjectivity contested political spaces that refused any

compromise with, or reform of, the status quo. The sophistication of Biko's conception of subjectivity, and the new conception of politics that it gave rise to, recapitulates Fanon's insistence that Africa's liberation depends not on 'objective forces' but on the objectivity of the African mind and the will of its people (see Hallward 2009). This conception indicates how, in post-apartheid South Africa, it is not enough to blame the betrayal of the idea of liberation on 'objective' forces, such as the global economy or the Washington Consensus – indeed, for Fanon it was precisely this line of thinking that doomed nationalist movements to be vanquished from the start (1968: 63). If Biko's brilliance was to shift the ground of thinking away from Western, namely White, measures of 'progress' and 'development', towards the liberation of the mind of the oppressed, it becomes clear that the central issue in the 'transition' from apartheid was not the question of the most useful economic paradigm, for example, neo-liberalism versus state planning, but rather the managerial determination to discipline and control the organised mass movements. In other words, whether framed by neo-Keynesian or neoliberal policies, post-apartheid politics was reduced to an elite project of capturing the state and the means of governance, in contrast to creating an expansive and inclusive democracy based in the activity of the mass movements. The fetishism of that project and the pull of the world market thus characterised the tremendous gap between the elite-driven, wheeling and dealing politics of transition, and the goal of the masses. Moreover, since the African National Congress (ANC) was always a rigidly centralist and hierarchical organisation that privileged a militarist structure, the seamless shift at the end of the cold war (from a state-centered neo-Keynesian development state to a neoliberal paradigm enforced by the state) did not fundamentally affect its notion of governance, but simply institutionalised it. The post-cold war Washington Consensus (and its authoritarian economism that proclaimed neoliberal capitalism the 'end of history' to which there was no alternative) was bolstered by a homespun authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism – a dangerous combination that had always plagued the anti-apartheid movement. And, as Fanon had predicted, during the transition from apartheid, critical voices within the ANC (as well as those of others outside the organisation) were outmanoeuvred, co-opted, told to keep quiet or expelled into the political wilderness.<sup>2</sup>



This virtual silencing for the ‘sake of unity’ continued, even as the consequences of a home-brewed, neoliberal structural adjustment became plain to see. The intellectual elites, including those in opposition parties such as the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO), and in movements such as the civic organisations, mostly fell into line or fell silent. Many to the left of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), who had courageously fought apartheid, were finally unwilling to break with, or even question, the dominant ‘development’ paradigms (see Nash 1999). Without a significant opposition, the ‘transition from apartheid’ became an elite enterprise following the script systematised in US-government-backed, political-science studies of transitions, which defined the strictures of the debate in terms of an ‘elite pact’ overseeing a neoliberal economy and a democratic election, in exchange for the demobilisation of the mass movement. There was, of course, a class element to this as well. The failure to fundamentally critique a politics that sought to access state power had disastrous consequences. Rather than opening up new spaces for emancipatory politics, the avenues developed by the movements of the late 1980s were closed off and suppressed. Reproducing social hierarchies and exclusions, the spaces for opposition politics were reduced to reactions to government policies, often limited to discussions of ‘getting service delivery right’.

### *A contemporary return to Fanon*

While Fanon’s philosophy of liberation emerges from a specific geographical space, the form of his work is ‘rooted in the temporal’ (1967a: 14, 104). ‘Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time’ (1967a: 14–15). Currently, we are stuck in a neocolonial/postcolonial time, while the present seems far away from Fanonian invention. Of course, so much has changed since Fanon’s day that it is fashionable to remark that Fanon is no longer relevant.<sup>3</sup> But even though, under the whip of counter-revolution, emancipatory politics is not always visible or audible, contemporary South African politics continues to be refracted through articulations of national liberation, and the sense of betrayal and broken promises of the emancipatory project is clearly expressed by emergent grassroots social movements. The question that undergirds this book is not only that of Fanon’s continued relevance

(with the goal of being able to distinguish a radically political Fanon from the Fanon of academic 'postcolonialism' [Gibson 1999a: 100; Sekyi-Otu 2003: 2]), but crucially how Fanon, the revolutionary, would think and act in this period of retrogression. After all, in South Africa, apartheid, that bulwark of colonial terrorism, has officially ended; we can date that 'ending' to April 1994, when the ANC won the first fully franchised election. We could even create a timeline which would include the date of Mandela's release from Victor Verster Prison on 11 February 1990, the repeal of the pass laws in 1986, and so on. We could review South Africa's new Constitution with its guarantees of rights and freedoms. We could look at successful governmental elections, and at South Africa's apparently vibrant economy, and ask: is Fanon's philosophy of liberation still relevant to contemporary realities?

To address the sceptic, one might note that Africa's place (or non-place, or 'non-being') in the modern, globalised world has remained remarkably consistent since the period of decolonisation. Indeed, Africa's 'non-being' (in terms of capitalist investment and development) has simply been reinforced by globalisation and the policies that were meant to open Africa up to its benefits. Neoliberal structural adjustment simply widened inequalities and increased pauperisation,<sup>4</sup> and Africa has become naturalised as a basket case. After years of International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank 'good governance' contingencies, the continent still suffers from ruthless and sometimes huckstering ruling elites. Moreover, since real decolonisation was defined by Fanon as a political, economic and psychological liberation – what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) calls 'decolonizing the mind' – postcolonial Africa remains very much a product of the failure of decolonisation.

And these failures are not only material but also epistemological (Fanon 1967a: 224; Fanon 1968: 209). Indeed, as Fanon puts it in *Black Skin, White Masks*, there is no conception of life other than as an ongoing battle against exploitation, misery and hunger, and it is through the dialectical movement of the struggles of the damned of the earth<sup>5</sup> that new humanisms and their theorisations in new concepts can emerge. Without reconceptualisation and a new way of life, the struggle will rely on the memories of past battles and old formulas, and fall back into what Hegel called an 'unhappy unconsciousness' (1977: 126) that will

trap Africa in a neocolonial/postcolonial binary between Afro-pessimism (the permanent crisis reflected in perennial images of suffering humanity and 'ethnic conflict') on one pole and Afro-optimism (the rhetoric of free markets and postmodern bootstrap micro-financing opportunities) on the other. So the question here is not only about Fanon's relevance, but about how we can stop repeating neocolonial/postcolonial history. Can we begin by applying Fanon's critical analysis to apartheid South Africa, the last decolonisation in Africa and the most extreme, or at least the most infamous, expression of racism, colonialism and oppression – and where the rhetoric of anti-colonialism found its most clearly Manichaean form in the anti-apartheid struggle?

The question of *how* Fanon can possibly speak to an Africa that is mired in neoliberal structural adjustment, both in rhetoric and in reality, is central both to this book and to Fanonian practices in general. After all, post-apartheid South Africa, with its bipolarity – on the one hand, representing itself to the world as a successful, free and open democracy, a rainbow nation, where everyone can prosper from freewheeling capitalist markets (Afro-optimist), while, on the other hand, being represented by images of poverty and xenophobic violence,<sup>6</sup> reinforcing the world's view of it as a permanently conflicted and suffering 'tribal' nation (Afro-pessimist) – is a test case of Fanon's continued relevance and his plea to create another world. To test the test case, in other words, to address this question of Fanon's relevance today, I employ Fanon's critique of the pitfalls and 'misadventures of national consciousness' to evaluate and critique post-apartheid South African reality. Viewing Fanon's philosophy of liberation as actional and engaged, rather than detached and autonomous, this philosophy is then used to amplify the voices of the new movements among the damned of the earth, and to challenge committed intellectuals (both inside and outside the movements) to search for, listen to and develop new concepts. Against the material and philosophic gridlock that sees South Africa in either Afro-optimistic or Afro-pessimistic terms, Fanonian practices offer a third position, 'not in the service of a higher unity', but of a radical negation of their pre-suppositions.

Ultimately, a Fanonian perspective insists that we view the sweetness of the South African transition from apartheid as bitter, realised at the

moment when ‘the people find out the ubiquitous fact that exploitation can wear a Black face’ (Fanon 1968: 145) and that a Black, too, can be a Boer (*amabhunu amanyama*). A central element of Fanonian practice is having one’s ears open to the voices and the thinking that come from unexpected spaces, namely, the new movements from below. These new movements often transgress the boundaries of postcolonial order, ‘shifting the geography of reason’,<sup>7</sup> expressed in the rationality of rebellion (see Fanon 1968: 146), to the language of ideas of freedom and dignity expressed by the marginalised and ‘damned’ of the world.<sup>8</sup> Because openness to new forms of revolt has often been absent in the discourse of the left, rearranging the geography of reason by moving it from the ‘enlightened’ metropole to the ‘underside’ of the revolt also necessitates a revolution in listening. By the late 1990s, new revolts and new social movements had begun to articulate the sense of betrayal felt by many poor people who had been increasingly marginalised, pauperised, dismissed and disappointed by post-apartheid society. Though these movements petered out, a new generation of ‘movements beyond movements’ arose after 2004 (Hart 2008: 680) expressing popular discontent.<sup>9</sup> They did not necessarily speak the language of the left, nor were their actions ‘reasonable’ to all (though one might question: by what measure of ‘reason?’), but they demanded to be heard. Challenging the ANC national government, along with local governments, whether run by the ANC or other governing parties such as the Democratic Alliance,<sup>10</sup> these new movements, which express the frustrations of millions of ordinary people, have begun in myriad ways to question the ‘incomplete’ liberation in post-apartheid South Africa.

The revolution in listening advocated here is premised on the understanding of what Fanon (1967c) calls a radical mutation in consciousness that takes place when a grassroots movement politically asserts itself. To be faithful to the movement’s self-activity means to take a theoretical position vis-à-vis agency. The revolution in thinking necessitates that one break with the idea that what the movement needs is a self-appointed leader/spokesperson, or ‘public intellectual’ to speak for it. Furthermore, ‘honest intellectuals’ (Fanon 1968) do not work inside a movement empty-headed, but are aware of their own thinking. While critical of elitism in these ways, Fanon (1968: 48) also warns against the

committed intellectual becoming ‘the uncritical mouthpiece of the masses . . . a kind of yes-man who nods assent at every word coming from the people’. Instead he argues that it is the people who want analysis and things explained: they ‘are glad to understand a line of argument and they like to see where they are going’. Taking the ‘voices’ of the movement seriously, and taking thinking seriously, is thus best articulated in a philosophical frame which recognises, as Hegel once put it when writing about the dialectic, ‘the *seriousness*, the suffering, the *patience*, and the labour of the *negative*’ (1977: 10, my emphasis).

#### DIALECTICS IN THE TIME OF SERVICE DELIVERY

*The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Humans must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of their thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is purely a scholastic question.*

— Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’

*Marx, the discoverer of a totally new continent in thought – Historical Materialism – grounded his philosophy of liberation in the praxis of the proletariat as well as in Hegel’s dialectic.*

— Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution*

#### *Practising dialectics*

To speak about Fanonian practices in post-apartheid South Africa, one first needs to think about the question of method from two, not necessarily opposite, perspectives: first, as an engagement with Fanon’s critique of decolonisation in the contemporary South African context; and second, from the standpoint of emergent movements that challenge philosophy. At the same time, since philosophy – not simply practical philosophy but a ‘quest for universality’ (Dunayevskaya 1973/1982: 263) and an elemental philosophy of liberation – is always present in the strivings of the movements of the damned of the earth, a philosophic moment makes itself heard when the exchange of ideas becomes grounded in both the strivings for freedom and lived experience from ‘below’, and when, as

Marx put it, philosophy grips the masses and becomes ‘a material force’ (1844d/1975: 251). These dialogues – often hidden underground and subjugated – make up what could also be called the praxis of philosophy.

Since his death, the practice of Fanon’s philosophy of liberation has taken many forms. For example, one could consider the resonances of James Cone’s (1969, 1970) Black theology of liberation in the United States or Paulo Freire’s (1970) pedagogy of liberation in Latin America.<sup>11</sup> Each drew significantly on Fanon as a liberation theorist.<sup>12</sup> But on the African continent, as mentioned, Steve Biko was perhaps the most significant Fanonian practitioner,<sup>13</sup> developing Black Consciousness as a philosophy of liberation (see Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson 2008).

The same engagement with ideas had been seen in Fanon’s working out of the dialectic, which drew from critical lived experience and critical engagement with philosophers, such as Hegel, Marx, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (see Gibson 2002; Gordon 1995b; Sekyi-Otu 1996;).<sup>14</sup> By shifting the ‘geography of reason’ (Gordon 2005a; Maldonado-Torres 2008; Mignolo 2000), Fanon moved its ground towards the marginal, the marginalised, the refugees, the non-citizens, the undocumented and illegal – the damned of the earth – finding new sources for truth and reality, namely for the emergence of new subjectivities, which through their praxis create a new language – ‘brother, sister, friend’ (Fanon 1968: 47) – and a new collectivity to challenge the reified objectivity of European colonial rule (see Fanon 1967a: 224; Fanon 1968: 36–7). In other words, new forces and new passions, as Marx put it, would emerge from those considered irrational and beyond the pale of reason. Under the oppressive weight and dominant objective power and force of colonialism, Fanon argued for a ‘subjective attitude in organized contradiction with reality’ (1967b: 53); the term ‘subjectivity’ here is understood not as an emanation of pure will but as an organised self-consciousness, in other words, a praxis emerging from the lived experience of the colonised in their struggles against colonial objectivity. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon notably adds that the starving ‘natives’ don’t need to discover the truth but *are* the truth, since they experience the *truth* of the colonial system – its violence and dehumanisation – and understand the truth of the anti-colonial revolt as one of bread and dignity. Yet this identity of truth and experience has not yet fully moved to self-acting subjectivity. Rather than

simply a *for-itself* 'subject position', subjectivity here is understood as an actional and conscious subject. Fanon's challenge – and the challenge he set himself as a revolutionary and as a thinker – was to map out and unravel how this subject *position* can become a self-determining, actional subjectivity that can absorb and change not only itself, but also the objective material world into a free, inclusive, democratic space (Fanon 1968: 58). As Raya Dunayevskaya, quoting Fanon, puts it: 'The African struggle for freedom was "not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute". There is no doubt, of course, that once action superseded the subjectivity of purpose . . . totally new dimensions [emerge]' (Dunayevskaya 1973/1982: 215).

After all, for Fanon, effective decolonisation is not the result of an 'objective dialectic' (1967b: 170), but the objectivity of a living subject. It is from the thought and action of live human beings that new dimensions emerge. Thus, grounded in the lived experience of the damned of the earth, Fanon's dialectic of liberation can be said to flow from the 'underside of modernity' (see Dussel 1996), posing a *new* humanist challenge to the status quo of hegemonic, Western, imperialist humanism. Indeed, it is a *new* humanism that begins from the humanity and solidarity of the damned, who have been emptied of humanity and excluded from the human community (Fanon 1968).

Of course, this movement from substance (the cannon fodder of resistance: the poor, the lumpenproletariat, the masses) to subject (reasoning protagonists) cannot be brought into being nor understood outside of the 'humanly objective' situation (as Gramsci puts it, defining 'humanly objective' as historically subjective [1971: 445]).<sup>15</sup> This movement is dialectical but there needs to be a moment or an event when the sufferings, indeed the hidden resistance, of the oppressed become manifest through a real poor people's movement that becomes historical when their subjectivity changes the objective situation.<sup>16</sup> One thing I have learnt is that such a moment is not a product of intellectual will or of a charismatic leader; it requires organisation, not of the vanguard type, but a practice of self-organisation intimately connected to the organisation of thought in the most open and democratic sense, proving that the opening up of space for this thinking is the precondition from which new subjectivities can and do emerge.

By dialectic,<sup>17</sup> I mean the confrontation and working out of contradictions, not through synthesis, but through absolute negativity.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Fanon's contribution to practising dialectics is twofold. First, by 'moving the centre' (Wa Thiong'o 1993), he grounds his philosophy of liberation in the lived revolt and creativity of the damned of the earth, and second, from this standpoint, he maps out the internal contradictions of national liberation as it unfolds.<sup>19</sup> For Fanon, the transformation of national liberation into its opposite, namely into an oppressive, corrupt, chauvinistic, patronage-based and neocolonial system, was not inevitable but a dialectical development<sup>20</sup> that simultaneously necessitated a critique of *objective* tendencies and an openness to new situations and new movements among the marginalised and oppressed. In short, Fanon's philosophy of liberation demands practice, and such practice is best understood in terms of the political/philosophic. By political/philosophic, I do not mean a political philosophy, nor am I thinking of philosophy as ethics, because, for Fanon, 'ethics' remains impossible in a society immune to ethics (1968: 43-7).<sup>21</sup> Rather, by political/philosophic, I mean philosophy that demands radical and thoughtful political action and gives content to ideals of human freedom.<sup>22</sup> As Fanon himself put it in his letter of resignation from Algeria's Blida psychiatric hospital in 1956, 'hope is no longer an open door to the future but the illogical maintenance of a subjective attitude in organized contradiction with reality'. He continues with the logical imperative that 'a society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced' (1967b: 53). Thus, for Fanon, the decision to join the struggle against oppression is a logical and a subjective attitude that is in agreement with reality. For him, the need to change the world is a reality; it is a 'requirement of reason' (1967b: 54) that agrees with a reality that demands the creation of a social structure that serves human needs.<sup>23</sup> *The Wretched* resonates with a whole history of revolution – of turning the world upside down – from peasant revolts to slave rebellions – in short, the constant revolt of the masses, the marginalised, excluded and ignored (the poor, damned and oppressed). It also resonates with theoreticians of revolution, radical humanists and 'Marxist heretics',<sup>24</sup> who have bucked dominant paradigms to hear the voices of the damned of the earth, who are *reasonably* demanding the necessary reconstruction of society.



One noteworthy point here: Fanon's emphasis on agency and action – on becoming human in the very activity of liberation – does not mean that he dismissed philosophic thinking. In fact, while practical action was essential, Fanon also underscored the necessary challenge of a new humanism grounded in the spaces opened up by the epoch of anti-colonial struggles, while remaining cognisant that the possibility of a new beginning could be stamped out and that the space for dialogue could be closed off, not only by the colonial powers but by the anti-colonial movement itself. Under pressure to do something and frustrated by the messiness of popular democracy, there is a search to transcend the seemingly endless contradictions of national liberation through an appeal to an external unifier such as 'the nation', 'the state', 'the party', 'development' or 'unity'. The point – that the damned of the earth become agents of change through the struggle itself – is often lost on those commentators who, bombarded by Fanon's descriptions and proscriptions of violence in Chapter 1 of *The Wretched* (indeed, he uses the word more than 70 times), believe that Fanon's philosophy of liberation and Fanonian practices can essentially be reduced to violence. They see violence as Fanon's original contribution – 'violence' defined here as the mediation between nation and party – rather than recognising the uniqueness of his critique of national consciousness which examines the problematic of the nation and the party by 'redefining nationalism along the lines of how working people understood it' (Depelchin 2005: 5).<sup>25</sup> As *A Dying Colonialism* (*L'an V de la révolution algérienne*), written in the context of the Algerian revolution and first published in 1959, confirms, for Fanon, the 'original idea' (1968: 41) is in fact the radical mutation in people's consciousness that results from the revolutionary struggle. And while *A Dying Colonialism* also warns of the exhaustion, indeed brutality, that can result from unreasoning and mindless activism, and the cycle of violence and counter-violence it can perpetuate (see Fanon 1967c: 24–5), it argues that such a situation would end either in self-destruction, or in a reliance on an external force that will destroy the possibility of self-actualisation. For Fanon, activity that shuns reflection and critical thought cannot lead to liberation. Indeed, it invites myopic elitist organisation (political or military) that advocates more activity, a few slogans and unwavering trust in the 'leader'; it promotes intellectual passivity, where the pressure for a united front can lead to a

silencing of discussion and an exclusion of opposing points of view. Such oppressive situations can force anti-colonial movements to respond in a reactive way and impede the movement's success and 'defeat intellectual elaboration' (1968: 199). Fanon is careful to argue that successful action against colonialism (and neocolonialism) depends on developing thoughtful practices and a praxis in which the damned are called upon to think. Successful action, in short, depends on a return to the idea and practice of 'becoming human'.

Fanon's emphasis on praxis, which remained consistent from *Black Skin* to *The Wretched*, was thus both rational and a critique of rationality. And the practice of his method was, at one and the same time, a practice and a challenge to thought.<sup>26</sup> After all, understanding is critical to practice, and thought itself has to be alive to new impulses for liberation, to 'rationalise popular action', to attribute it to reason and, by so doing, hear the theoretical questions embedded in the people's discussions (Fanon 1968: 149, 192).<sup>27</sup> Arising out of such an internal and intersubjective relationship, Fanon's dialectic is thus 'untidy', being both absolute and open-ended, and not reducible to strategy. Indeed, it is a liberatory process, both concrete and transcendent, bringing invention to existence, while reaching towards the creation of a new society.

#### THE POLITICS OF SPACE

Since colonialism, especially settler colonialism, is about the expropriation of space, space is central to Fanon's thought. In the colonies, space is immediately political and contested. Addressing the politics of space, Fanon challenged the newly independent nations to deal with the legacies of colonialism by redistributing land and decentralising political power horizontally. This move seems counter-intuitive in the context of Fanon's warnings about the fragmentation of the newly independent nation through regionalism, chauvinism and xenophobia, but the point is that the degeneration of national liberation arose, in part, from the depoliticisation and demobilisation of the mass movement, and the reduction of the nationalist project to the race to expropriate the seats of power, leaving the privileged spaces of colonial administration and expropriation intact and concentrated in the urban areas. Fanon's critique is also an important challenge to the centralistic and hierarchical culture

of nationalist parties and their hangers-on, which look to take over without fundamentally deconstructing colonial power. Decentralisation is, therefore, not simply an administrative or technical issue; it is a social issue attached to the goal of deepening national consciousness into humanism and connected with the work of involving masses of people in the day-to-day running of their lives. Given this context, radical intellectuals must eschew political power and concentrate all their philosophical work on convincing the formerly excluded, but newly politicised, people that the future belongs to them, and that they cannot rely on imaginary or iconic leaders, prophets or anyone else (Fanon 1968).

Struggles in the Black communities of South Africa were central to the movements against apartheid – from the defiance campaigns of the 1950s, and the shack dwellers’ struggles such as those at Cato Manor in 1959, to the Sharpeville revolt of 1960 and the Durban strikes of the early 1970s; from the Soweto rebellion of 1976 to the township insurrections of the 1980s. The Black trade union movements, born in the 1970s, played a significant role, especially in terms of worker education and developing a culture of workplace democracy (see Friedman 1987). Becoming part of a united front in the 1980s,<sup>28</sup> these movements – community and trade union – proved to be a tremendous force against apartheid. But the co-option of community and trade union leaders in the early 1990s, plus the neoliberalisation of post-apartheid South Africa (the two words ‘neoliberal’ and ‘post-apartheid’ are sometimes considered synonymous), have created bureaucratisation, fragmentation and corruption, as community structures shift increasingly towards patronage-based systems, and socially active unions evolve into business unions. Union membership has declined and unemployment has risen, with ‘new jobs’ generally being ‘flexible’, part-time and ‘informal’ (see Buhlungu 2010). The spaces for grassroots and rank-and-file politics that had opened up in the 1980s closed down in the 1990s. Two basic models of co-option have been applied in post-apartheid South Africa, one governmental and the other non-governmental. A prime example of an organisation that submitted to the first model of co-option was the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), which became a top-down ANC structure. An example of the second model is the development of new organisations under the control of pro-systemic NGOs, such as the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI).<sup>29</sup>

Although post-apartheid South Africa has shifted the racial boundaries of space, the location where one lives still plays an important role in determining identity, class (see Ballard 2004, 2005) and political voice. As post-apartheid cities have changed, the poor have been increasingly marginalised or removed by ‘development’. Feeling abused by their elected leaders and fed up with the endless broken promises, new struggles have emerged over urban space by those with only negative political identities, stigmatised as marginal, criminal and ‘lost’. These conditions were captured in Chapter 5 of *Black Skin*, where Fanon described the lived experience of the Black<sup>30</sup> as an experience of being ‘hemmed in’. In *The Wretched*, Fanon argues that colonialism is totalitarian, with the ‘native’ experiencing domination internally and externally. In fact, there is no occupation of the country, he argues, without the occupation of the people, and thus there is no liberation of the country without the liberation of all the people. Colonialism is a total experience. Built on spatial exclusion and repression, the ‘native’ is restricted and constantly reminded not to move. In this context, liberation consists of the breaking down of these internal and external barriers. In *Black Skin*, Fanon posits Black consciousness as a basis for a new identity that can explode these restrictions and prohibitions of (post)coloniality by actively (and not simply reactively) taking on the other’s idea of oneself and negating it. He responded to Sartre that this movement of negation was at the heart of the dialectic of liberation: ‘The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something; I am wholly what I am’ (Fanon 1967a: 135).

The reason I mention this here is not simply because of its resonance with Biko’s Black Consciousness but because of a resonance with ‘the fact of shackness’, that is to say, as an expression of the shack dwellers’ movement’s self-consciousness (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this volume). Some might take issue with the analogy, since Chapter 5 of *Black Skin* concludes with a cry of frustration and alienation, but the analogy I am making is not simply with Fanon’s descriptions of objectification and reification; rather, I am linking the fact of shackness to the spirit of Fanon’s dialectic – that is, a radical alterity as the basis for

a new humanism. In other words, the dialectical movement is a rejection of the 'master's gaze' by creating practices of solidarity that collectively 'take on' the hegemonic notion of the lived experience of the damned of the earth as *being a lack* of humanly lived experience. The poor might be represented as lazy and good for nothing – a 'reptilian swarm', as Fanon put it – but they don't conform to that stereotype. Life is a struggle but the struggle is a school. Thus, the shack dwellers' movement realises that while it is 'out of order' (see Figlan et al., 2009) with hegemonic reasoning, this realisation necessitates a rethinking of the ground and geography on which reason emerges.

Explicitly connecting colonialism with White 'civilisation', Fanon argues that 'every ontology is made unattainable in a colonised and civilised society' (1967a: 110). For 'civilised' post-apartheid South Africa, the shack dwellers and the poor represent the antithesis of civilisation, and thus a shack dwellers' movement, by its existence, poses a challenge to the limited reality of South Africa's 'liberation'. To reiterate, by the lived experience of shackness, I mean that experience of non-being (reflected on and questioned and also grounded in practical and lived experience, and thus understood socially) is a starting point full of contradictions. Rather than an uncritical identification with shack life, or an über-critical external critique of anti-social elements in the settlements – both of which are intellectualised approaches – Fanon's dialectic of experience begins from the standpoint that consciousness, full of contradictions, is 'lived' through. The shack dwellers' struggle is an important example of Fanon's dialectic. Like Sartre's critique of Negritude, some on the left regard revolts (such as those of the shack dwellers) with *a priori* and synthetic ideas about how the struggle was local, place-specific and minor, and had to take on a certain form to fit into the larger anti-globalisation political movement against neoliberalism and privatisation.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, a dialectical approach moves from the concrete and gives content to the universal (namely, human freedom) as it emerges from the particular. The point, Fanon argues, is not to weigh down that concrete moment with a history 'already waiting', or with a meaning already given (1967a: 134–5), but to allow it to develop in the concrete.

Speaking about the birth of the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, S'bu Zikode, its elected president, had 'no idea that a

movement would be formed' and did not know what form it would take. Rather than a pre-approved plan, there is reflection, decision and action at each step:

Most people think that this was planned – that a group of people sat down and decided to establish a movement. You know, how the NGOs work . . . But all we knew was that we had decided to make the break. To accept that we were on our own and to insist that the people could not be ladders anymore; that the new politics had to be led by poor people and to be for poor people; that nothing could be decided for us without us. The road blockade was the start. We didn't know what would come next. After the blockade we discussed things and then we decided on a second step. That's how it went, that's how it grew. We learnt as we went. It is still like that now. We discuss things until we have decided on the next step and then we take it (Zikode 2009b: 13).

In the same vein, Fanon's disagreement with Sartre was based on Sartre erecting an *a priori* scaffolding on the dialectic of experience, arguing that Black consciousness was only a 'minor' (particular) stage in the development of a 'universal' (namely proletarian) consciousness. Thus Sartre the existentialist, Fanon continued, had intellectualised Black lived experience, failing to recognise that in a racist society the Black experiences suffering differently from the White (1967a); the Black is literally, in a claustrophobic sense, constricted by the body, which Blacks are made constantly aware of. There is nothing ontological about this difference; rather it is a social construction and it leads Fanon to argue that the experience of the body in space is crucial to its sense of freedom and liberation, which is why he concludes *Black Skin* with the prayer, 'O my body, make of me always a man who questions'. In other words, for the Black in a racist society, there is no mind/body dualism because, reduced to a bodily surface, the Black cannot be imagined to have a mind. Because the other's conception of the Black as not fully human is reproduced socially and culturally, this 'inferiority' is also internalised. Though it is also from this place of embodiment that Fanon demands recognition from the other and proposes 'the open door of every consciousness' (1967a: 232), this ethics – 'the world of the You', a world where the

enslavement of ‘man by man’ will cease forever – can only come through radical action and radical critique. Liberation embodied – that is to say experienced physically and mentally – creates what Fanon (1967c) calls a ‘radical mutation’ in consciousness.

In *Black Skin*, Fanon asks: What does the Black want? The answer can’t be separated from putting an end to oppression and exploitation. The Black wants to be human, he argues, and since colonialism is a system of dehumanisation, it makes humanisation, indeed humanism, impossible. Engaging Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, Fanon (1967a) argues that, at first, the dialectic is blocked off, and the problem is that the Black desires or at least aspires to be like the White. So the Black, Fanon says, turns towards the White master. But the master is not interested in recognition from the slave; he simply wants work. Then, at a certain moment, when it is beneficial to him, the master grants the Black slave freedom. Such an undertaking ends in failure because the consciousness of the slave remains slavish. This is the condition of neocolonialism, its project to produce ‘a [Black] slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master’ (1967a: 219). This is also the project of White ‘liberalism’ and White paternalism that Biko railed against. After all, in the postcolonial context, the White liberal refrain is to say to the former Black slave, ‘Brother, there is no difference between us’ (Fanon 1967a: 221). But there is a difference, insists Fanon and, as I hope this book will show, it is, in fact, a difference that is crucial to understanding Fanon’s dialectic and forging Fanonian practices, and thus, the quest for an authentic reciprocity necessitates a radical turn.

In Hegel’s dialectic, the struggle for recognition involves risking one’s life in a quest for recognition but since, for Fanon, there is no recognition from the White other, there is only a ‘bodily struggle with death, a death on this side of death, a death in life’ (1967b: 13). Since life under colonialism is a ‘living death’, every day is in fact a risk steeped in inessentiality (1967a: 219), which is why Fanon wants a radical alterity, an ‘alterity of rupture of conflict and battle’ (1967a: 222). Similarly, when Biko proclaims, ‘Black man, you are on your own’, he means ‘You are either alive and proud or you are dead’ (Biko 1978: 172). Thus the death of the slave requires not only external change, but also an internal revolution, the death of the internalised master.<sup>32</sup>

Returning to the analogy with the shack dwellers' movement, one could ask, what does the movement want? To have a house, to be safe? Certainly. But the organised shack dwellers also demand dignity and recognition. What is the movement's goal? Democratically self-organised and autonomous communities. In other words, in spaces where the police do not protect you but criminalise you, and where a rapid-response security system is an instrument deployed against you, there is only the safety that is created by developing the community. And developing the community is equal to its radical democratisation, meaning that it is always open to the questioning and innovation of the poorest of the poor. The organised shack dwellers don't simply want *things*, they want to be recognised as human equals. They are fighting for freedom and justice and the right to the city, a struggle that fundamentally challenges the production of space. In other words, they are challenging the post-apartheid 'global' city, which remains characterised by the bourgeois values of constant accumulation, and is still inscribed with what Fanon calls White values, namely 'white liberty and white justice' (1967a: 221). This bourgeois society, he adds, 'is a closed society where it's not good to be alive, where the air is rotten and ideas and people putrefying. And I believe that a man who takes a stand against this *living death* is in a way a revolutionary' (1967a: 224).

Fanon remarks in *The Wretched* that despite the dehumanisation project of colonial rule, the native has not fully imbibed the colonising 'kool-aid'. Outside and underneath the totalitarian system the 'native' is, in one way or another, constantly transgressing the spatial boundaries. The history of South Africa bears Fanon out. In fact, colonial rule – that is, the history of colonialism from its beginnings to apartheid – was developed, in part, as a counter-measure to revolt, resistance and daily contraventions of spatial boundaries. Segregation and the Group Areas Act – tribal homelands, Bantustans and urban removals – were all continually contested, and all were White reactions to anti-colonial revolt and continuing transgressions of colonial spatial order. Of course, post-apartheid South Africa has made apartheid's policies illegal and has reorganised the political geography of the nation, but it has not fundamentally restructured the nation. As Richard Ballard (2005: 7–8) argues, 'the change from segregation to assimilation is not necessarily a weakening of the White social agenda but a shrewd move that ensures the sustainability of White social control'.



One obvious example is the post-apartheid property market, which has been central to the development of a class-based project of individual ownership, whether in gated communities or older residential areas. The property market is merely a representation of a larger economic process, where, as Ballard points out (2004: 69–70), racially coded fears about falling prices are fixated on the proximity of shack settlements (the presence of which are always a threat), and ‘fortified enclaves’ provide almost ‘total security’ from real and imagined threats (see Caldeira 1996: 311). White fears increased during the early 1990s when masses of Black people were on the move, building shacks in the cities. Before the ANC took power, walls were raised in the urban residential areas, with all sorts of burglar-proofing systems, from burglar bars to private security, installed. Fearful of the poor, these heavily surveillanced spaces nonetheless continued to use the labour of people living in shack settlements (as domestic workers, gardeners and security guards). Regardless of actual behaviour, shack dwellers are always characterised as ‘bad’, dangerous and criminal by their upper- and middle-class neighbours. It is not surprising, therefore, that where the poor live, and where they wish to live, has become a fault line in the vision of post-apartheid liberation. On the one hand, there are the post-apartheid city managers and cosmopolitan urban planners with their ideas of ordered and secure modern ‘urbanscapes’ (which find their apogee in citadelisation and gated communities); on the other hand, there is the creation of truly democratic cities, articulated from below and based on the needs of all. One vision excludes the poor; the other is inclusionary, demanding, in Fanon’s terms, ‘total liberation’ (1967b: 45).

Every South African city’s vision of becoming a ‘world-class city’ corresponds to notions of the ‘global city’, as a fully networked financial centre,<sup>33</sup> as places that hold spectacular events with spaces designed for tourists, thus mixing ‘Africa’s premier sporting capitals’ with a little bit of Europe. This is an elite vision, of course, that links to a mainly neo-imperial idea of a global city and obscures vital elements and needs on the ground by creating a vision of the city as hierarchically composed, with the leading sectors – finance, communication and tourism – at the top, and the benefits from these sectors ‘trickling down’ to all. It is an expression of neoliberal South Africa, in the sense that the vision justifies,

for internal consumption, the financial, tourist and globalised business sectors as the city's *raison d'être*. It is a vision that represents a fundamental ethical shift away from the Freedom Charter's notion of the public good. The 'world-class city' is a strategy that cannot, and does not, support or accommodate the poor – especially those who live in shack settlements, close to middle-class residences, and are considered a threat to security, health and hygiene (Ballard 2004: 59–64).<sup>34</sup> Where the real-estate market fails to reinforce class lines and exclusions, the state intervenes, often with illegal removals and intimidations, couched in the rhetoric of 'development'. Because this kind of 'development' spells the destruction of poor people's communities, the shack dwellers' movement argues, in a Fanonian way, for real human alternatives, namely a humanist development based in life, with the belief that such alternatives can be created (Figlan et al. 2009).

Thus the 'fact of shackness' begins from the perspective of this common struggle founded on a consciousness of post-apartheid's broken promises. It means that shack dwellers must become agents of their own liberation, and struggle against what has so far been an incomplete liberation, a liberation only for the privileged. In other words, the struggle is fought every day under conditions of crisis; that is to say, in Fanonian terms, the poor in contemporary South Africa are defined, excluded and criminalised by the new masters as other – dirty, uneducated, violent, criminal, mindless, reactive, not fully human and outside of civil society. They are the morally 'corrosive element' to 'bourgeois' civilisation, elements that the world would be better off without (Ballard 2005: 64–5; Fanon 1968: 41; Maldonado-Torres 2008: 218).<sup>35</sup> In this Manichaean situation, Fanon challenges us to think from 'the underside', from the perspective of the damned of the earth, who are living their lives in a daily state of emergency, and who surely have the right to lives.<sup>36</sup>

Outside of 'civil society', indeed 'barred' from civil society (unless subordinated to an NGO which represents them in civil society), the organised shack dwellers have forced themselves into political society. By initially coming together and acting on their own, they have put post-apartheid society on trial, challenging its *raison d'être*: its morals and values. By creating their own organisation they have also created a self-consciousness that has shattered any 'impulsive position', insisting, in

Fanon's terms, that they are not dependent on anyone else but 'immanent' in themselves (1967a: 135). Insisting also, that they are not a potentiality of something but *are*, the shack dwellers' movement has articulated a living politics that challenges the ascriptive idea of South African citizenship. Refusing a politics of indigeneity, they implicitly question the notion of 'who is South African?' pushing instead for a politics of recognition.<sup>37</sup> This was central to their response to the 'xenophobic violence' that occurred in May 2008 and spread across urban areas, resulting in over 60 deaths and thousands of Africans being driven from their homes. For Fanon, chauvinism – national, regional and tribal – is a great threat to liberation, the dead end at the heart of the nationalist project. It is quite simply the result of not deepening national consciousness through involving the masses of a nation in their own governance (1968: 204).

In South Africa, the rise of xenophobic violence has been a political project nurtured by the demobilisation and suppression of avenues for participatory democracy, as well as anti-poor policies produced by the transition from apartheid to neoliberal post-apartheid. Although the poor suffer most from the violence, they are also the victims of these policies, and of course are also blamed for the violence. Indeed, the post-apartheid elites, including government and business leaders as well as the modernist and urban elites of 'civil society', condemn the violence, but they do little concretely to stop it. They decry the violence, calling it primordial and tribal, blaming it on a culture of poverty, or at best understand it as a result of the lack of service delivery. It was from within the organised shack settlements, namely those affiliated with Abahlali baseMjondolo, that the most significant responses were produced. Abahlali took immediate action and mobilised to make sure that attacks did not occur in any settlement that was affiliated with it. It insisted, in a widely distributed press release, that 'Our struggle and every real struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off. An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they may find themselves.' Their political/philosophic conception drew on notions of an African commons in which all human beings are recognised as human and land is held in common. But it also recognised that the actions of the poor were not always progressive. A

new humanism (or what Abdul Alkimat [2009] calls a 'revolutionary *ubuntu*') could not be taken for granted but had to be created through the struggle for social transformation.

In the context of the movements against colonialism, Fanon saw enormous value in some of the indigenous participatory formations. He argued that far from being 'archaic', they could be transformed and energised by mass movements against colonialism and, in contrast to the Western parliamentary system favoured by the nationalist elites and their former masters, could become spaces for local and grassroots democratic and participatory politics. Given this interest in indigenous democratic forms, as well as his embracing of the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force and his idea of the 'new man and new woman' emerging from the struggle, Fanon was dismissed by some Marxists of his day as a populist mythologiser and labelled an impossible romantic and idealist (Memmi 1973; see also Lee 2009). Similarly, others have argued that his emphasis on 'subjectivity' when applied to the post-apartheid movements creates a 'quasi-mystical' and uncritical attitude towards the poor (see Dwyer 2006: 91). But this is a caricature of Fanon. For he was painfully aware of how movements that don't develop a humanist perspective, that are not genuinely democratic, can degenerate into brutality.<sup>38</sup> This is key to Fanonian practice – his approach was dialectical. To remain true to its principles, critical engagements with movements have to be developed internally, that is to say, with them, rather than applied externally to them.

For example, since 'land invasions' are 'illegal' in South Africa, shack settlements were often formed outside the gaze of the state, giving the settlements a degree of autonomy and space for self-organisation. But what becomes clear is that autonomy without full democratisation – that is, the inclusion of all in decision making – leads to new hierarchies. The founding of a settlement, for example, can be the result of solidarity, but it is the struggle to democratise the settlement from the ground up that marks a new politics. In other words, there can be no sustained 'movement', no collective action, where there is no ongoing participatory democracy and the explicit right to articulate differences. Additionally, we should remember that the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, counts its members in the thousands, not hundreds of

thousands, and has membership in only a small proportion of shack settlements in the country.<sup>39</sup> But whether the movement is an example of what they themselves call a 'living communism' (see Chapter 5), or whether it can be seen as some kind of reactivation of the Paris Commune (Kovel 2007), is not simply an academic speculation. From the point of view of the struggle to create a movement, its motion and its thinking (which, as John Holloway puts it, creates 'relations of comradeship, of solidarity, of love, relations which prefigure the sort of society we are struggling for' [2002: 143]), the directly democratic and localist shack dwellers' organisation might not be what Fanon called 'the future heaven', but with its participatory democratic, decentralised and inclusive form, it encourages an alternative politics. It is the basis of the future in the present that creates new ground for thought. At the very least, it is a challenge to theoreticians to engage with it and rethink philosophies of liberation to help create a cognitive leap. What is significant about this organisation is that it is based in daily struggle, and its brilliance lies in its grassroots democracy and 'living politics' that is its 'own working existence'.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it is not simply a question of whether Abahlali's reasonable and practical demands can be met within the South African political order. The point is that, by refusing party politics and NGO politics and by challenging the elite's conception of the post-apartheid city, they upset the political and spatial order, which is crucial to finishing the unfinished liberation.

### *Fanonian visions of the city*

'What is an African architecture?' asks the distinguished architect José Forjaz (2007). The traditional hut, the shiny malls and skyscrapers of the cosmopolitan citadel, or the shacks made from reused scrap? From a purely quantitative yardstick, it is the latter. But, he adds, what should an African architecture be? He answers:

The first objective of African architecture should be . . . to contribute decisively to the improvement of life and habituation . . . The new African city must be designed for its specific social dimensions of space, structured from a new vision that takes into consideration, for instance, the importance of agricultural production within the city's territory, the spatial integration of

all the city's functions and the reduced interest of a CBD [Central Business District] concept, taken from the irrelevant paradigms of the American or European city (Forjaz 2007: 5).

In other words, the African city should be produced socially by the people who live in it. Forjaz's vision takes us back to Fanon's conceptualisation of space in the phenomenology of everyday life expressed in the experience of being confined in *Black Skin* and to the spatial segregation of colonial urban planning described in *The Wretched*: 'The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall apartheid in South Africa' (1968: 37).

For Fanon, central to the layout of the apartheid city was the immobilisation of the 'native city' (1968: 52). Thus, decolonisation must equal not only the remobilisation of urban life, but also its recreation in the reappropriation and reconfiguration of space. This realisation of the urban as a human space was also central to Henri Lefebvre's vision. In contrast to the popular idea of 'the right to the city' being based on bourgeois property rights, Lefebvre (1996) argues that it is those who have been victims of segregation and expelled from the city who become the agents of a new urban humanism based on human needs. For Lefebvre, the strength of the Paris Commune (of 1871) was expressed in the return of workers who had been pushed out of the city by Haussmann's planning. Haussmann's goal was not to open Paris for the 'beauty of views' but to comb it with machine guns (Lefebvre 1996: 76).<sup>41</sup> The Commune, what Lefebvre called 'revolutionary urbanism', embodied everything Lefebvre loved about cities, remarks Andy Merrifield (2002: 85), with its streets occupied and the Communards demanding freedom and self-determination. Similarly, Fanon argued that the colonial city is not built for the beauty of its views, but laid out in the same way that a general would plan an occupation (1967c: 52). The beginning of the end of the colonial city is thus marked when the colonised subvert the violence employed to police the dividing line between the 'conqueror's city' and the 'native city' by surging into forbidden quarters, transgressing the boundaries and subverting the lines of force. Thus, both Fanon and

Lefebvre insist that the right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or a return to historical cities, but as Lefebvre puts it, 'It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life' (1996: 158).

Fanon understood that liberation remains incomplete when the colonial or apartheid city is not reorganised but simply taken over. This is one of the pitfalls of a national liberation, where nationalist elites, seeking economic and social advancement, not only rush for vacated political positions, but also adopt the colonial mentality, leaving the lines of force intact and reproducing urban spaces where the logic and power of money and the political state, not human needs, are sacrosanct and valued. For Fanon, this is the reality of the neocolonial city. For Lefebvre, this is the condition of all 'world-class cities'.<sup>42</sup> Though Lefebvre's focus is the European city, his conception of modern or 'world-class' cities as naturalised or fetishised spaces is particularly suggestive as a critique of postcolonial cities (see Lefebvre 1992). This space, which Lefebvre calls a real or concrete abstract space, is a space of reification (which Marx describes as commodity fetishism) whereby the logic and power of financial capital, along with the political state (including banks, business centres, modes of transport, etc.), not human needs, are the sacrosanct and unquestioned values to which there is no alternative. In a sense, Lefebvre's idea of fetishised space illuminates Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie. One of the pitfalls of national liberation, as I have mentioned, is that the colonial city is not reorganised but taken over, and this includes taking over colonial attitudes towards the 'native quarters'. To mask the fact that the city is, in fact, not really open to all, and that the idea of the liberated nation (founded in the struggle for freedom) is stagnating, the nationalist bourgeoisie reassures itself by erecting 'grandiose buildings in the capital'; instead of encouraging the building of sustainable communities, it lays out 'money on what are called prestige expenses' (Fanon 1968: 165).

Today, in South Africa, we could point to the fetish of grandiose buildings and the prestige expenditures associated with the 2010 World Cup, alongside a citadelisation and securitisation of the cities and the 'elimination of the slums' as expressions of the contemporary commodification of space where the lines of force are quite clear. Post-apartheid

South African cities are thus haunted by social-spatial exclusion, yet Fanon's call to 'decentralise' and 'abandon' the city is not a call to return to some kind of rural paradise. His critique of the neocolonial city is not anti-urban. His point is to stop mimicking and copying bourgeois notions of progress by recreating neocolonial urban spaces and thus reinscribing their colonial lines of force. It is in the context of control, separation and exclusion, borne of bourgeois fears about order and security, that Fanon argues that those who live in the shanty towns and shack settlements, in the ghettos and 'native quarters' – in short those hemmed in by lines of force – play an important role in leading the urban revolutionary movement. And their role is not only as force but also in the rationality of their revolt. When Fanon calls for the deepening of national consciousness via a consciousness of social and political needs (1968), he is calling for a concept of humanism that demands a shifting of the geography and the very ground of reason itself.

At the conclusion of 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders', perhaps the most under-read chapter of *The Wretched*,<sup>43</sup> Fanon remarks:

Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of the personality . . . Independence is not a word which can be used as an exorcism, but is an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all material means which make possible the radical transformation of society (1968: 310).

The passage presages the more famous last words of the book where he calls on his comrades to leave those spaces where they talk of humanism but kill the human being wherever they are found; to leave those spaces where the dialectic has turned into a motionless equilibrium, and instead work out new concepts and develop a new humanism grounded in the here and now. It is in this sense of speaking to comrades that we find expressions of Fanon's 'living' dialectic. First, the concept of total liberation as a product of the process of social liberation; and second, true liberation as the liberation from all forms of alienation, and as the returning to human beings all of their creative powers. From this material basis, the radical transformation of society is a necessity.



The material basis of social transformation also includes the liberation of the body. For example, in his essays reflecting on women's actions in the battle of Algiers, Fanon argues that the transformation of the colonised self-consciousness of the body is intimately tied to the transformation of colonial urban space.<sup>44</sup> As Stefan Kipfer (2007: 713) puts it, 'Fanon describes the war of movement of national liberation as a *claim to the city* and as a practice of *reappropriating – and thus transforming – colonial space.*' For Fanon, the transformation of colonial space is multiscalar, taking place on an individual, household, local and national scale.<sup>45</sup> The failure of this multiscalar transformation bespeaks the failure of the liberation project.

Thus, it is not surprising, from a Fanonian point of view, that the new movements that have arisen in post-apartheid society would link the problem of liberation to issues of space and the right to the city. For example, by insisting on their right to the city, the organised shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, has, in a small way, attempted to reappropriate colonial space. And as a self-consciously democratic movement, Abahlali has connected 'reappropriation' to the need to transform politics. The shack dwellers' movement thus concretises the importance of Lefebvre's idea (2009: 174) that there is a politics of space because space is political. In post-apartheid South Africa, space is, as Stuart Elden (2007: 822) puts it, 'the ultimate locus and medium of struggle'.

Fanon's call to develop a new humanism begins from the spaces where the 'damned of the earth' live and work and includes them in the 'enlightening and fruitful work' of building, mapping out and restructuring the nation (1968: 204). Since a philosophy of liberation expresses the merging of the dialectics of revolt and its reason, it is through critical engagement that Fanon's philosophy of liberation becomes practical, ushering in a 'new language and new humanity [that] . . . owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power' (1968: 36). In South Africa the 'illegitimate' – those 'out of order' with the prevailing order, such as the organised shack dwellers – have challenged the legitimacy of 'supernatural', political power. They have refused to remain in their place and insist on the importance of thinking a politics that does not begin from the art of the possible. This 'living politics', in a sense turning over

a new page of history, may appear to be utopian thinking (Turner 1978)<sup>46</sup> but it is also absolutely necessary and practical. From it new spaces open up for Fanonian practices.

#### THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

*You preach to me constantly the gospel of 'saving' and 'abstinence'. Good! I will, like a sensible saving owner, husband my sole wealth, labor-power, and abstain from all foolish waste of it.*

— Karl Marx, *Capital*

Influenced by Gramsci and the framework of subaltern studies, which marked a fault line in Indian nationalist politics between an elite politics and an 'unorganised subaltern domain', Partha Chatterjee (2004: 39) makes a distinction between civil society as the liberal bourgeois sphere and political society as state authority. In postcolonial India, he argues, everyone is formally an equal rights-bearing member of civil society, but in reality,

most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of state. But it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be *looked after and controlled* by various government agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain political relationship with the state. But this relationship does not always conform to what is envisaged in the constitutional depiction of the relation between the state and members of civil society (2004: 38, my emphasis).

This analysis could be easily applied to post-apartheid South Africa, where the realm of civil society is in fact a small one, one that is 'quintessentially *bourgeois*', and despite the rhetoric of international finance organisations,

aid organisations and those NGOs that promote the poor becoming 'stakeholders', only a minority of South Africans can be considered bourgeois or even petit-bourgeois. However, to reiterate, freedoms have been won and civil society is quite a different space than it was under apartheid. There are opportunities for free expression, there are vibrant cultural scenes and so forth, but this free associative space of civic life and equality, wholly transformed from apartheid civil society, is not a freely associated space. Civil society is decreasingly a space for the vibrant political dialogue that could have evolved from the 1990s and increasingly a restricted, commercialised and politically policed space where, alongside ANC patronage, the freedoms of the market and the rights of property take precedence as protected rights. Outside of these spaces, the poor are 'looked after' in a paternalistic and patrimonial sense, namely *controlled* by various government agencies (from welfare to public safety), including local politicians, who are often not accountable to the poor and whose practices (removal, arrest and discrimination against the poor) are frequently aided by private forces, even while corrupt and undemocratic patronage politics are often illegal in terms of the Constitution. In other words, given the legacy of the struggle against apartheid, South Africans are guaranteed constitutional rights but many South Africans are only tenuously rights-bearing citizens. Rights formulated in the South African Constitution – namely the right to water, electricity, sanitation – have been refigured into the neoliberal discourse of 'access' and thus based on 'cost recovery' rather than need. In Durban, for example, the promise of electrification of the shack settlements has been reneged on, and the fact that the majority of the people are denied rights or have their rights violated is generally tolerated on a daily basis by 'civil society'.

At the same time, it should be noted that insofar as those people who are in reality marginal to civil society are organised, they often articulate their struggle both in terms of the goals of national liberation and in the language of constitutional and human rights that were won in the struggle against apartheid. Their struggles become articulated in political terms, with the state, local and central government being the focus. On the other hand, government agencies, as Chatterjee (2004: 66) argues, have to 'descend from [the] high ground to the terrain of the political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well

being'. This means that remaining in absolute control becomes problematic, and there are indeed moments of contestation: 'when there is a successful mobilization of political society to secure the benefits of governmental programs . . . there is an actual expansion of the freedom of people, enabled by political society, that would not have been ordinarily possible within civil society' (Chatterjee 2004: 66).

However, civil society, and the liberal democratic order upon which it is based, does not offer an expansion of freedom, whatever the rhetoric to the contrary. Indeed, the expansion of rights to the poor is often considered counter to the development of (neoliberal capitalist) modernity and thus to civil society, but it is the pressure of mass movements on political society that can guarantee an expansion of freedom. In fact, when this pressure takes place, the left wing in civil society, through its access to the media, can help effect social change. Nevertheless, it is at these very moments that the political left often hems in the new movements, confining them in old categories. As we shall see, new movements can begin to question the discourse of 'well-being', patronage and 'service delivery', showing these up as discourses of control, even as the liberal and left NGOs continue to reduce the meaning of these movements to a question of 'access' to services and thereby to the state. Furthermore, reducing the meaning of spontaneous grassroots protests to an issue of 'service delivery' further narrows discussion towards questions of the provider's efficiency and management of services; thus criticism focuses on corruption and favouritism and consequently on improving efficiency rather than challenging structural problems.

In the context of neoliberalism and World Bank structural adjustment, the postcolonial state is, of course, also brokered by the global economy. Yet, alongside its commitment to neoliberal policies – indeed integrated with this – South Africa has a significant welfare programme, much of the basic structure of which was inherited from apartheid. These programmes intimately connect 'looking after' the poor with controlling their movement. In the late 1990s, argues Moeletsi Mbeki (2009a: 84, 87), the ANC government 'ratcheted up public spending on welfare . . . to buy the vote of the poor . . . with at least a quarter of the population receiving social grants'. Though appallingly inadequate, public welfare spending has been a key government response to the demands of the

emergent social movements of the early 2000s. The response was in fact twofold: a polemical attack on activists and supporters as ‘ultra-leftists’ and an increase in spending on the Child Support Grant.<sup>47</sup> Although we are used to viewing neoliberalism as synonymous with privatisation, ‘free markets’ and the dismantling of the welfare state, the justifications for the rollout of welfare grants have also become neoliberal. That is to say, in the context of the deindustrialisation and marketisation of the post-apartheid South African economy, those in the ‘second economy’ (the uneducated, unskilled and ‘unrequired by society’, as Thabo Mbeki put it [quoted in Hart 2008: 685]) should not strive for formal employment but seek ways to build up their human capital and make their mark in the informal economy. Each poor person, argues James Ferguson (2007), is explicitly conceptualised as a micro-enterprise and thus encouraged to find an entrepreneurial niche in the informal economy.

Distributed through World Bank-supported programmes and local governments, NGOs have become essential to promoting the ideology of entrepreneurial risk taking – a bootstrap mercantile capitalism based on micro-savings and micro-entrepreneurship – in the informal economy as the basis for ‘indigenous’ development.<sup>48</sup> Alongside ‘development NGOs’ (organised around the World Bank) there are ‘human-rights NGOs’ (organised around the UN), and ‘left NGOs’ (organised around the World and African Social Forums).<sup>49</sup> Human-rights NGOs often create a systemic popular disempowerment through a language of individual ‘equal rights’, which, as Harry Englund puts it, ‘silences debates on social and economic rights’. What is promoted as ‘empowerment’ becomes disempowerment, argues Englund: ‘An impression of robust democratic processes [is] thereby created, not least for the benefit of foreign donors, but structural inequalities [are] hidden behind the notion that “poverty alleviation” [is] basically a technical issue’ (2006: 10). The same can be said of proclamations of ‘development’ that stigmatise any political struggle against ‘modernisation’ and ‘progress’ as backward. Holmen (2010: 93) adds that even though NGOs ‘speak loudly about empowerment, they do not always do what they say when their clients are empowered to find their own solutions’.

Across the African continent there are also more progressive NGOs, which do play a role in representing the poor. The problem is that these

NGOs have also become part of the politics of containment. They are, as Marx puts it, 'the highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism that does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity' (Marx 1845b/1975: 423). That is to say, they seek to become intermediaries by reducing real, sensuous, grassroots movements to programmatic and narrowly material and technocratic demands. Left-leaning NGOs in Africa are generally hierarchical, urban-based, Northern-focused operations, accountable to their donors and to developing activities in terms of their benefactors' missions rather than being responsible to the people they supposedly represent. They tend to be pragmatic and issue-oriented, promoting professionalisation over critical theory and social change. These NGOs can play a double role: by advocating for social change and open discussion they help to stymie (while giving the appearance of encouraging) democratic debate. And despite their advocacy of empowerment, many indigenous NGOs, notes Hans Holmen (2010: 91), don't have any grassroots contacts and many of the protests they lead are made-for-media events, attended by few and peopled by the organisers' tiny circles (Hallward 2007). Thus the practices of these NGOs tend to undermine the incipient participatory democracy that characterises grassroots organisations (noted in Mngxitama 2006: 66) and ultimately play a role in legitimising the state, however unwittingly. By pacifying grassroots militancy through what Arundhati Roy (2004b: 36) calls the 'NGOisation of resistance', they tend to turn people into 'dependent victims'. By focusing on the uncontroversial evils of neoliberalism, they help legitimise the postcolonial state (which is quite happy to 'talk left' and to rant and rave about the injustices of the global system and how it benefits the global North), while grassroots movements, which tend not to speak the language of anti-globalisation NGOs, are harassed, beaten and intimidated (Fanon 1968).

As Hallward (2007), Rancière (2007) and Robinson (1996) have argued, elite, neo-imperial proclamations of democracy belie the hatred of mass movements and participatory democracy. Elite democracy, or more correctly oligarchy, systematically undermines and destroys any attempts by working people and the damned of the earth to establish forms of politics that are accountable and in their interests. Anti-corporate, critical of the World Bank, non-profit, environmentally friendly,

community-based, feminist and pro-democracy – these may be the adjectives used in the sales pitch to donors – but, in reality, to be truly democratic and accountable to the poor, NGOs must shift the geography of reason and cease to operate like NGOs. This point is not lost on some NGOs. For example, Oduor Ong’wen, director of the Nairobi-based EcoNews Africa and chair of the National Council of NGOs of Kenya (a country that currently has more Christian missions than were present during the high colonial period), remarks, ‘I would compare the role we in civil society, the NGOs, play, to the role the churches played . . . just as missionaries were agents of colonization, so the majority of NGOs are midwifing recolonization’ (Ong’wen 2001). In short, it is the NGOs, not military interventions, that play a significant role in shoring up neocolonial globalisation. In a series published in the Tanzanian newspaper *The African* on the World Social Forum, Chachage Seithy L. Chachage brilliantly sums up the role of NGOs in contemporary history:

What role have NGOs been playing in history? They have acted as ‘safety valve,’ by channeling the popular discontent along constitutional, peaceful and harmless ways . . . They have sought to divide the exploited and oppressed into sections and identities . . . in the process, obliterating and obfuscating class divisions nationally and internationally . . . They further instill . . . the belief that it is possible to humanize the existing system; and this is being done by outwardly taking an anti-state stance . . . Thus while the IFIs [international financial institutions] and international capital strip off the role of state in regulating the economy . . . the NGOs agitate for self-help, community development, entrepreneurship, etc. . . . absolving [the state] from all social responsibilities toward the people . . . [With] the massive funds at their disposal . . . NGOs have been able to fund . . . conferences, four-wheel drive vehicles and even establish institutes for research and policy analysis. Many radicals have found themselves in such institutes as policy formulators and advisors or lobbyists and advocates . . . In the final analysis, NGOs play the same role that missionaries and the royal geographical societies play during the prelude to colonization and the period of colonialism (quoted by Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006: 145).

Thus it is that Fanon argues we must break with the standpoint of the 'master' and become instead 'slaves of a cause' (quoted in Geismar 1971: 185), and almost like Amílcar Cabral's call on nationalist intellectuals to commit class suicide, Mngxitama (2006: 66) insists that NGOs must cease to exist in the NGO form. They must break with their focus on the donors and 'development' mindset and rethink who they are accountable to. Even the most radical NGO is not immune to the belief that it is they, not mass movements, who have the right answers and can create political space. In Fanon's terms they erect a framework around the people, who they expect to 'follow an *a priori* schedule' (Fanon 1968: 113). This often means subsuming the movement under quite a different political project. Just as Fanon argued that during the anti-colonial period, 'organisers' are usually parachuted in (1968: 113) and make no attempt to engage the people in their context, today NGOs 'seek to deploy donor funding to separate off and co-opt a couple of leaders to create an illusion of mass support' (Pithouse 2006e: 28). This is not to say that progressive NGOs cannot aid popular democratic movements, but they must do so in a manner that makes solidarity with movements rather than the standpoint of their donors their key priority. Without this shift, NGOs' blunt political resistance 'defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right . . . turn[ing] people into victims' (Roy 2004b: 43). As Roy observes, 'the greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs' (2004b: 44). At a very basic level, the problem is often money and the relationships that it distorts and establishes.

On the African continent, structural adjustment policies have helped shift 'responsibility' for social programmes, with NGOs and missionaries playing an increasingly important comprador role (see Hearn 2007),<sup>50</sup> not to mention the attendant neoliberal shifting of blame on to the poor for their poverty and an attendant ideology of self-help entrepreneurialism as the cure-all for their problems. Though not enforced by the World Bank and IMF, the same processes have taken place in South Africa. The shortcoming of the (neo)liberal approach (in its Keynesian or neoliberal guise) is that it fails to historicise suffering and simply reinforces the idea of 'these people' as sufferers, and thus naturalises and objectifies them. They remain the numbers, the vital statistics of NGO and government reports. Rather than challenging this positivism, the language of 'service



delivery' only reinforces it by bracketing off the multiple determinations of inequality and by reducing politics to the issue of service delivery. Historically, the demand for bread has always been accompanied by the demand for land and freedom, namely the ability to make the bread. Of course, one cannot live without bread, but reducing poor people's struggles to demands for 'service delivery' strips them of agency, reducing the poor to that barren life where they are 'taken care of' and controlled and simply reinscribed as mouths to be filled.

Whereas neoliberalism promotes the idea that freedom is found in the choice of what to consume, of what to wear (from hats to medical treatment to politics and identity), the reality for 'the majority of the world's people' (to use Chatterjee's [2004] phrase) is that they receive 'goods' only by the grace of government's 'good will' or, more often, that of the NGOs. It is a situation of radical human inequality that repeats Fanon's conception of the colonial dynamic, in which the 'master . . . advocates a religion of love and generosity' (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 151) and expects the slave to turn the other cheek – with NGOs occupying the position of privileged providers (Kant's 'men of good will'), while the poor are viewed either as recipients of micro-finance or as 'suffering humanity'. What remains constant from the post-war Keynesian 'development state' to the post-development neoliberal state is the notion of the *backwardness*, the unpredictability and idiocy of the masses, where development's 'best practices' continue to be technocratic and ideological. Thus, even if there is an idea of 'empowering the poor' it takes three basic forms. First, the form supported by the World Bank and the NGOs loosely allied with it, namely encouraging micro-loans and encouraging self-entrepreneurship through financing programmes and saving schemes. Second, a more pragmatic empowerment (often part of an NGO's mission), based on training people to understand policy and how to engage with it. And third, an essentially left perspective that encourages a critique of neoliberalism through political education. The first and second are, of course, the dominant approaches, supposedly concerned with empowerment but, in practice, focus on advocacy rather than building relationships with the grassroots; they are based on cost and have little to do with empowerment (Holmen 2010). Thus 'capacity building' is not measured by an articulation by the community of its own needs, but by auditing

firms with elaborate spreadsheets. Since poor communities have no agency, they can't possibly understand what is in their own interests and thus they are viewed as problems to be solved, the 'outcomes' of which can be 'assessed' by proper management (Holmen 2010: 215).

Even when 'empowering' some poor people to engage with government policy, NGOs remain an elite project, which does not encourage democratic representation but patronage. And while the community may be consulted, or more likely advised, this is often seen as a burden on the project. For example, progress in addressing the post-apartheid housing 'crisis' is often counted by the number of houses delivered. Even if this number is below what is needed (which it is), and even if it is a well-built house (which it most certainly isn't), and large enough to accommodate a family (which it certainly isn't), and built in an area close to amenities and jobs (again no), the fact is that a house is seen as a major step forward for the 'beneficiary' of housing, while at times it might be a calamity for the poor. The word 'beneficiary' elides this ambiguity since housing delivery is represented as an unalloyed good, and those who are delivered houses have no choice in the matter. They have no say because they are not seen as 'stakeholders'. The poor are not stakeholders because they do not count; they are quite simply a subjugated mass that can only be represented. Thus they count only as vote banks at election times, but even then they are counted numerically as substance, and not taken into account as political subjects (which is why when they organise, the poor are considered 'out of order').<sup>51</sup> Thus the term 'stakeholders' – bandied about by the World Bank and many NGOs – becomes synonymous not only with those taken into account, but with those who have a stake in the services. In addition, from the perspective of the corporate and city government offices, the problem is always that the poor do not look after and take care of what is provided. From their viewpoint, the poor should become responsible for their own poverty, which would entail a change from a culture of resistance to a culture of acquiescence. In other words, the poor create problems as recipients of delivery and need to be taught that they can't expect something for nothing, and they need to take care of what they get. Thus, to be taken into account one must become a stakeholder, but this development discourse of 'ownership' severely curtails what can be spoken about. The source of poverty is shifted towards

cultural practices and on to the backs of the poor. The logic is that the poor should not simply be given services, but should have a stake in toilets, water, garbage collection, and so on, and police those who 'steal' electricity and water through illegal connections. Yet, hundreds of people using one toilet, for example, is a problem of planning. From the planner's point of view, however, the problem is how to change the cultural attitudes. Immediately after the end of apartheid, the poor were criticised for maintaining the 'culture of non-payment' that had developed during the late apartheid period, when people were encouraged to boycott apartheid structures and run their own communities. This, it was argued, had to stop.<sup>52</sup> The poor would have to pay for services that were often, ironically, more expensive than during apartheid, and the logical absurdity should not be lost: the poor who could afford to pay are made poorer, while the poorest of the poor who couldn't pay would be cut off from basic services such as water and electricity.<sup>53</sup> Another strategy to 'help' the poor pay is to encourage saving plans. But the dominant attitude among the elites that remains, and is often repeated (Fanon 1968: 62), is that the poor are lazy and moreover destructive. They break things.<sup>54</sup>

In *The Wretched*, Fanon argues that it is this threat of destruction that the nationalist party uses in its negotiations with the colonialists during the anti-colonial period. But after 'freedom' is won, controlling the masses remains a problem. For example, in the midst of countrywide rebellions in 2009, the communications department of the city of Cape Town announced that millions of rand were being lost in repairs to informal settlements due to theft and vandalism. The problem was portrayed as one of 'moral degeneracy', and the alderman threatened that if poor communities failed 'to improve matters, we may be forced to suspend service-delivery programmes until communities take responsibility to protect these facilities' (City of Cape Town 2009). Clearly the stakeholder analysis here assumes that services would work much better (and be more efficient) if the poor worked to pay for them and had a stake in them. But the truth of the matter is much more stark. For example, on the East Rand, a High Court ordered that seven new taps be installed immediately, but the municipality installed only two flimsy plastic standpipes. The court order also required that garbage be collected; this resulted in the municipality providing garbage bins but not emptying them.<sup>55</sup>

As a new wave of protest and revolt rocked the country just months after Jacob Zuma's election victory in 2009, voices critical of the rhetoric of 'service delivery' began to be heard in the popular press. *Business Day* ran a series of articles (by Richard Pithouse, Xolela Mangcu and Steven Friedman) warning that to reduce the revolt to 'service delivery' was misleading and anti-democratic. It wasn't that service delivery was too slow; it was that forced evictions were too fast! Moreover, there is a great difference between service delivery and public service, argues Friedman (2009), who, echoing Fanon, contends that public service should be in the service of the public: 'Public service starts from the recognition that, in a democracy, the government's job is not to "deliver" to citizens. It is, rather, to listen to them, to do what the majority asks, if that is possible, and, where it is not, to work with citizens to ensure that what is done is as close to what they want as it can be.'

Marx also made this point in his 1843/1844 essay 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction' where he identified the proletariat as the class that would realise the human freedom and liberation that the bourgeoisie had spoken of in its declarations; while the bourgeoisie only managed to further alienate the human from humanity, Marx argued that the proletariat was 'a class with *radical chains*'. The proletariat, he continued, was a 'class of civil society which is not of civil society': it has a universal character 'because of its universal suffering' and it 'lays claim to no *particular right* because the wrong it suffers is not a *particular wrong* but *wrong in general*' (Marx 1844d/1975: 256, emphasis in original). This class, argues Marx, could not be emancipated from this wrong but had to emancipate itself. In the same vein, Mark Butler and David Ntseng (activists with the Church Land Programme, a South African NGO) argue that emancipation is not something that can be delivered. Searching for a 'better praxis', they insist that the business-as-usual practice of more service delivery has to be dismissed. 'Civil society organisations', they argue, 'often land up playing a key role in de-politicising struggles by jumping in with capacity building and education' (Butler and Ntseng 2008). The turn to legal institutions to redress discrimination is, of course, double edged because it threatens to undermine liberatory projects through recourse to legal procedures and professional discourse. Yet to summarily dismiss the legal channel is not the solution. The attempt to

access rights guaranteed by the Constitution is essential if these attempts, and the professionals that work on them, follow Fanon's advice and remain subordinate to the will of the grassroots movements, and remain aware that 'rights talk' has its own individualising and profession-alising logic that promotes the depoliticisation of the movement (see Robins 2008).<sup>56</sup> The search for a 'better praxis' has led Butler and Ntseng (2008) to believe:

We only find a certain kind of human freedom and solidarity in and through our connection with politics defined as the disruption of the order of the existent by those who are excluded – and in working with the processes that flow from, and that remain in fidelity to, these moments. The clear implication is that, to define our own praxis on the basis of a stakeholder analysis would be to inevitably inscribe our praxis as part of the existing order – precisely the dead-end that we needed to break with.

Drawing on Fanon, Butler and Ntseng thus insist that a liberatory praxis has to disrupt the very terms 'stakeholders' and 'service delivery'. Likewise, for Fanon, liberatory ideology is a practical matter. It fulfils the task of criticising other ideologies and also gives meaning to events. Its philosophic goal of liberation is moreover based on the principle of encouraging and assisting the damned of the earth, those excluded and unaccounted for, in their self-understanding and self-realisation.

Politics begins, writes the French philosopher Alain Badiou (1985: 75), 'when one decides not to represent victims . . . but to be faithful to those events during which victims politically assert themselves'. To be sure, 'politics' does not depend on 'outsiders'; 'victims' can themselves be faithful to these events. And it certainly would be a mistake to assert that thinking and reflecting is not 'organically' carried out in poor communities. The issue is: what can and should the radical who is committed to praxis do? As argued earlier, too often the idea of Fanonian practice as an expression of Fanon's philosophy has been reduced to acts of violence. Indeed, in the context of the struggle against colonial oppression and its violence, Fanon argues in *The Wretched* that an act of counter-violence is a kind of collective catharsis.<sup>57</sup> Yet, he adds that violence is not and never will be a political programme, and he warns that violence

can lead to brutality and the destruction of a radical movement. Thus, it is absurd to insist that Fanon calls on radical activists and intellectuals to engage in acts of solidarity through violence.<sup>58</sup> Instead, his call is a demand for committed groups and individuals to break with the idea that the damned need to be represented or to be given leadership, including the leadership of the gun (see 1968: 184). (On this point it is important to note how Biko emphasises the interrelatedness of solidarity and consciousness in his recreation of Fanonian practice in South Africa.)

So let us now shift the focus to Fanon's insistence that to be radical one must develop a working relationship with 'victims' of oppression, particularly at moments when, as Badiou puts it, they 'politically assert themselves'. For Fanon, the process whereby colonised people come to understand that 'everything depends on them' is based on a principle of critical engagement that involves a process of enlightenment, where they realise their own intelligence. The two processes are mutually connected. And on this point, one must recognise that it is not the so-called laziness of the people, but the 'laziness' of the intellectuals, that reduces thinking to either a 'common opportunism' (unthinkingly lauding every action of the movement) or to a few radical-sounding slogans when 'shades of meaning' are needed. Rather than talk of service delivery, what is required, Fanon suggests, is a real working relationship, a relationship that encourages the development of the intelligence of those who have too long been told that they have none. 'Everything can be explained to the people', he insists, 'on the single condition that you really want them to understand'; the problem is the reformer's disconnection from the people, believing that things are better done 'without letting the people interfere'. For what the reformer and the conservative (and all too often the radical, especially after experiencing isolation during periods of reaction and quiescence) often agree on is that 'the people upset the [policy] game by their mere presence' and must at all costs be kept out (Fanon 1968: 189). Thus, for Fanon, the great challenge to those who want to engage in a liberatory praxis is to find new ways to listen to those who continue to be silenced and dehumanised but who are now gaining their voices, and to become 'faithful' to those events of self-determination when they occur. It is through this process that the educators, as Marx puts it, are educated (1845b/1975: 422). Thus Fanonian practices involve a fundamental

questioning and rethinking of every aspect of political practice, beginning 'everything all over again' (Fanon 1968: 99) by shifting the ground of reason. For those from the universities and academic environments (whose research is often connected in indirect ways to NGO funding), it requires a break with the idea that they are the privileged theorists, and a recognition that while their work is not to cheer from the sidelines, being serious and critical listeners and interlocutors is the key starting point. Political education must ultimately be profoundly democratic, encouraging meetings and discussion where the people are 'able to speak, express themselves, and put forward new ideas' (Fanon 1968: 195).

One element of Fanonian practice to keep in mind is a politics of critique that simultaneously puts forward a notion of education and a notion of self-emancipation that together express a philosophy of liberation:

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the magic hands of the people (Fanon 1968: 197).

Of course, this can sound like a stakeholder argument, the key difference being that everyone is accountable to everyone at all times, throughout the whole process. Another element of Fanonian practice is to break from the idea that there is an *a priori* privileged site of ideas and thus also with its imperial bonds and attitudes. Indeed, Fanon implies that the intellectual is not necessarily the bearer of the intellect since the *practice of action* is the source of a new way of knowing. It is through reflection on such action that unexpected details and new meanings are discovered, and it is through this self-reflected knowledge that the colonised become freed from the colonial condition and conditioning (see Gibson 2003: 200). What militants who break with the dominant paradigm, Fanon

argues, 'begin to understand on making contact with the landless and poor is that these people had never ceased to think of the problem of liberation' (Fanon 1968: 127). This is where this book begins: with the problem of unfinished liberation.



# 1

## Biko's Fanonian practices

*Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude.*

— Steve Biko, 'The Definition of Black Consciousness'

*Philosophy of liberation is a theoretical knowledge (Wissen) articulated historically and concretely by the praxis of liberation of the oppressed . . . Far from agreeing that 'all philosophy is a criticism of language,' it affirms that philosophy is a criticism of oppression and a clarification of the praxis of liberation . . . The oppressed as 'origin' and 'space' that gives rise to a critico-liberating philosophical discourse indicates that it is a practical, ethical discourse.*

— Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*

Grounded in the South African experience, in discussions with Blacks about their everyday lives and in attitudes formed from those lived experiences, and sharpened by an engagement with Africana philosophers such as Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko recreated the kind of praxis that Fanon suggested in the conclusion to his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968); namely, that the working out of new concepts comes from a dialogue with common people.<sup>1</sup> A primary focus of this chapter is on the creative and contradictory processes by which Fanon's philosophy of liberation was articulated in Biko's conception of Black Consciousness in South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

FANON IN SOUTH AFRICA: BLACK LIBERATION AND THE CRITIQUE  
OF WHITE LIBERALISM

*Liberals – few as they are – should not be determining the modus operandi of those blacks who oppose the system, but also leading it, in spite of their involvement in the system.*

— Steve Biko, 'Black Consciousness and  
the Quest for a New Humanity'

*Accept life together or nothing at all.*

— Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*

Fanon remained vital to liberation struggles on the African continent after his death in 1961: a 1967 French edition of *The Wretched* carried a picture of Congolese rebels still fighting years after Lumumba's murder; in the Portuguese colonies, Amílcar Cabral remained one of Fanon's most important interlocutors; and in Mozambique, Yoweri Museveni, who would later become the president of Uganda, wrote about Fanon's applicability to 'liberated Mozambique' (Museveni 1971). But in South Africa, where the apartheid regime banned anything that smacked of Marxism, Fanon arrived via the Black Power movement building in the United States. His work was picked up by young Black students schooled in apartheid's 'bush colleges' and hungry for a philosophy of liberation to call their own. Founded in 1969, the South African Students Organisation (SASO) heralded the beginnings of the new Black Consciousness movement, which found an affinity with Fanon's philosophy, not across the Limpopo, but almost subterraneously through the writings of emergent American Black theologians, specifically those of James Cone, who was critical of mainstream Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The importance of Black theology as a medium for Fanon's entry into South Africa, and the quite different objective circumstances it was engaged in, muted the usual primacy given to Fanon's so-called theory of violence by many Western academic and US-based Black Power theorists. What was emphasised were Fanon's conceptions of self-consciousness, struggle and also the ideas of liberation put forward by figures such as Cone – all of which had a direct connection to Blacks' experience in South Africa. As Biko put it, 'the most potent

weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Biko 1978: 68).

Like Cone (1970), Biko recognised that Christianity was an effective tool for mental enslavement, and he did not think Christian pacifism made sense 'to an oppressed and destitute people' (More 2004: 214). But while Christianity in Africa was considered part of the oppressive system and colonising process, Black theology in the United States, with its focus on the liberation of Black people from tyranny and servitude and on Jesus as a political rabble-rouser of the poor and a 'fighting God' (Biko 1978: 94), seemed to Biko a positive contribution. Rooted in the language of the slave revolts led by Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner in the early nineteenth century, Black theology in the US also emphasised the significance of churches as spaces for radical abolitionism and Black political autonomy. But it was Cone's critique of White liberals that particularly resonated with Biko, and Biko's first articulations of Black Consciousness were a sharp critique of White liberalism - a suggestive and prescient stance given that contemporary South Africa has embraced not only neoliberal economic policies but also neoliberal ideas of possessive individualism mediated through the capitalist marketplace.

Biko engaged Cone directly in an essay titled 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity',<sup>4</sup> speaking of a vision of a true humanity that drew strength from solidarity. This contrasted starkly with talk of 'integration' still popular among liberal Whites. Indeed, in his essay, Biko holds that the liberal discussion of integration forgets that it is people and human relationships that are at stake, not the liberal's instrumentalist concern with the administration of things. This 'forgetting', according to Biko, far from an aberration, is also a symptom of reification derived from the exploitative values that liberalism is based on. And as if intimating a critique of post-apartheid society, he argues that the liberal's idea of integration

is an integration in which black will compete with black, using each other as rungs up a stepladder leading them to *white values*. It is an integration in which the black man will have to prove himself in terms of these values before meriting acceptance and

ultimate assimilation, and in which the poor will grow poorer and the rich richer in a country where the poor have always been black (Biko 1978: 91, my emphasis).

Returning to this point, Biko's 1970 essay 'Black Souls in White Skins?' further argues that the kind of integration that White liberals talk about is 'artificial' and would only perpetuate the 'in-built complexes of superiority and inferiority' that 'continue to manifest themselves even in the "non-racial" set-up' (Biko 1978: 20). Echoing Cone, and indeed Fanon, Biko then asks, 'Does this mean that I am against integration?' He answers:

If by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and codes of behaviour set up and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it . . . If on the other hand, by integration you mean there shall be free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people, then I am with you (Biko 1978: 24).

In other words, for Biko, mutual recognition can only come from a rejection of the other's definition. Insofar as 'liberal' is understood in terms of a discourse of mutual reciprocity and dignity, of equals facing each other in an equal situation, Biko would have no problem. But to be a 'true' liberal in this sense, the situation has to change in a two ways: in its structure *and* in its values. Lewis Gordon (2002: x) makes this point in his foreword to Biko's *I Write What I Like*:

Liberalism offers a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is 'conservative' liberalism, where the goal is to be colorblind. The problem with this kind of liberalism is that it changes no structures. Thus, this liberalism expects us to be colorblind in a world of white normativity, a world where whites hold most of the key cards in the deck. Another kind of liberalism focuses on bringing blacks 'up' to whites. The problem with this strategy is that it makes whites the standard. Blacks would thus fail here on

two counts. First, they would fail simply by not being white. Second, why must it be the case that what whites have achieved constitute the highest standards that humanity can achieve?

Indeed, in 'Black Souls in White Skins?', Biko argues that, rather than acknowledging their ability to think for themselves, White liberals and leftists treat Blacks as if they were perpetual 'under-sixteens' always looking towards Whites for recognition. In other words, in terms of the dialectic of recognition, the White liberal's perspective is a master's perspective. Biko further maintains that the Black's 'inferiority complex' is a 'result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration and derision', and to expect mutual respect between Whites and Blacks would be like 'expecting the slave to work with the slave-master's son to remove all the conditions leading to the former's enslavement' (Biko 1978: 35). For Biko, it is only by removing *all* the conditions of oppression that one can begin to speak about mutual respect and a non-racial society. In this, Biko directly echoes Fanon, who, in his critique of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in *Black Skin, White Masks*, made it clear that freedom could not be given but must be consciously wrested by subjective action (see 1967a: 220–1). For Biko, the issue is circular, for it is solidarity that will overcome the fragmentation and division which breeds suspicion and fear (and therefore division and fragmentation). And for Biko, as for Fanon, solidarity is based on action against the oppressor: an 'alterity of rupture, of conflict, of battle' (Fanon 1967a: 222).

Fanon's engagement with Hegel provides a crucial perspective on White liberalism not because Hegel was a liberal, but because the presupposition of Hegel's master/slave dialectic assumes two equal self-consciousnesses, with each willing to risk life in order to achieve recognition (Hegel 1967; Fanon 1967a). By adding colour to the equation, Fanon wonders what happens when the recognition is blocked off from one side. 'Ultimately', Fanon states, 'I deprive him even of this being-for-itself' (1967a: 217). Fanon argues that the White master and the Black slave differ from the master and slave described by Hegel: 'for Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work' (1967a: 220 n.8). In *The Wretched*, the colonial master's laughter is perhaps too

shrill. How can the master want recognition from 'the native' who is not human?

I do not want to dwell on the question of the colonial White master's consciousness (see Gibson 2003); rather I am interested in the liberal White master's projections (and their influence on the Black), the idea that the master's son can work with the slave to remove all the conditions of slavery, as Biko puts it. Fanon, Cone and Biko all believe that such a perspective is based on the White liberal's narcissism, namely that the White liberal recognises the slave as human only in as far as the slave is an extension of the White liberal's humanity. As Fanon puts it, the announcement was made that slavery no longer exists on French soil and the White liberal master proclaims to the Black, 'I have given you your freedom, now you are free'. But, says Fanon, the Black 'knows nothing of the cost of freedom, for he has not fought for it. From time to time he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters' (1967a: 221).

In other words, the White liberal invites the former Black slave to sit at the table and tells him, 'Brother there is no difference between us' (1967a: 221) because, from the perspective of White liberalism and its narrow ideas of equality – namely White liberty and justice – there is in fact no difference. In a situation where the legacies of colonialism – economic, social, cultural and psychological – are bracketed off, we can find only the limited liberation of 'enfranchised slaves'. Thus for Biko, like Fanon, it was not crude colonial and apartheid racism but White liberalism that became a great threat to liberation, since liberation would be mapped out on its contours with Blacks having to prove themselves in terms of its values.

Thus in contrast to the liberal argument that Black consciousness is a closed world, Biko's conceptualisation expresses the dialectic of liberation he found in Fanon's philosophy. Quoting Fanon, Biko writes, 'the consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication . . . National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension' (Biko 1978: 72). For Biko, this international or Black solidarity not only transcends national borders, but is important because he believes Black solidarity against Black fragmentation and White liberal oppression is necessary for liberation.

This notion of dialectic is important to Biko's understanding of the struggle in South Africa within the 'Black world' of the post-war period. For example, Biko (1978: 66–7) quotes Césaire's letter of resignation from the Communist Party on the specificity of the Black's place in the post-war world – which 'is not to be confused with anyone else's'<sup>5</sup> – and connects it to his own understanding of South African political history, especially vis-à-vis White liberalism and leftism. For Biko, the South Africa of the mid-1950s was a place where Black consciousness was germinating among

young black men who were beginning to 'grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness' and who were eager to define who they were . . . Disgruntled with the direction imposed on the African National Congress . . . [they were] beginning to realise the need to go it alone and to *evolve a philosophy based on, and directed by, blacks* (Biko 1978: 67, my emphasis).

Then, after the banning of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the ANC in the early 1960s, Black political expression was silenced. In such a situation the evolution of a philosophy based on self-determination appeared difficult. Yet for Biko it did not seem altogether impossible. He believed that if Blacks realised that they were truly *on their own* – that is, if they created their own space to think about action, rather than being beholden to White liberal values – genuine liberation arising out of self-activity could develop. Black Consciousness would then, in response to the old multiracial or non-racial approach,<sup>6</sup> represent a new direction and new articulation that drew not from colonial categories and legacies, but from cultures of resistance in the present.

Thus for Biko, Black consciousness, as an attitude of mind, was an important challenge to young educated Blacks wooed by anti-apartheid White liberals. Eschewing the old non-racial approach, Black Consciousness's claim to authenticity and self-determination would have to come endogenously. But this did not mean that it could not look to anything outside of itself for its self-development; rather, Biko saw self-determination as a prerequisite to mutual reciprocity. This concept of being on your own can also be traced to Fanon's discussion of Black

consciousness in *Black Skin* (1967a). Indeed, Biko's colleague, Barney Pityana,<sup>7</sup> quotes the following from Fanon as a crucial articulation of Black Consciousness:

The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, Black Consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something; I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Black Consciousness does not hold itself as a lack.<sup>8</sup> It IS. It is its own follower.<sup>9</sup>

Pityana then goes on to add, 'This is what we Blacks are after: TO BE. We believe that we are quite efficient in handling our BENESS and for this reason we are self-sufficient.'<sup>10</sup> In short, Pityana's articulation of Black Consciousness has an individualist existential moment of self-examination and personhood, but the quest 'TO BE' was, for him as for Cone, connected to becoming actional social beings.<sup>11</sup> This is not unlike Biko's formulation, which, following Fanon, links psychological liberation to a 'sociodiagnostic' (1967a: 11), grounding an investigation of individual alienation in its socio-economic and political contexts and individual liberation in the social situation. In other words, they all saw and built on Fanon's concern with the social individual and the idea that individual liberation had to be intersubjective.<sup>12</sup>

For Biko, a complete break with apartheid demanded the understanding that White liberals were not only apartheid's indirect beneficiaries but also its accomplices in reinforcing the idea that Blacks were not capable of becoming self-determining human beings. Consequently, Black Consciousness's internal revolution – its becoming – required the subject's total commitment. Black Consciousness was a political movement, the philosophy of which was not simply strategic, but a demand for total liberation.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean, however, that Biko rejected strategy; instead Biko's vision, like Fanon's, was a total critique, a rejection of White values, and an assertion that the quest for a new humanity required fundamental change.



## RADICAL MUTATIONS: CULTURE AND REVOLUTION

*Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

To be sure, the historical contexts for Fanon writing *The Wretched of the Earth* and Biko developing Black Consciousness are quite dissimilar; the situation in South Africa in 1969 was very different from that of revolutionary Algeria in 1959. Biko argues, for example, that by 1960, 'all black resistance was killed, and the stage was left open to whites of liberal opinion to make representation for blacks' (2008: 21). In other words, the 1960s in South Africa was less a decade of turbulence than of quiescence. Nevertheless it is clear that Biko found the issues Fanon developed in *The Wretched* resonant and compelling. For example, in a chapter titled 'Some African Cultural Concepts', Biko, like Fanon, views African cultures not as precolonial relics but rather as ways of life that have very nearly been battered out of shape by settler colonialism (Biko 1978: 41). In fact, he says, even talking about African culture is a difficult thing to do because the African is not supposed to have an understanding of his or her own culture. Thus Biko, like Fanon, is critical of educated Blacks who, mimicking White liberals, take an elitist attitude towards African culture, failing to understand elements of resistance in these cultures (Biko 1978: 69–70). Biko's call for a reconnection to the people's elemental resistance is, like Fanon's, a critical piece of the dialectic of national consciousness. So while Biko accepted the Fanonian notion of cultural resistance as mutating, he also registered Fanon's critique of the native intellectual, especially because Black Consciousness first emerged among Black students.<sup>14</sup> And, like Fanon, Biko argued that a critical consciousness must encourage a self-critical attitude towards elitism. In this vein, he argued that in order for SASO to make the transition from being a student organisation to becoming a national organisation, the Black People's Convention (BPC) had to stress 'the relation of the intellectuals with the *real needs* of the black community' (Biko quoted in

Woods 1978: 97). By emphasising a need for national politics grounded in the ‘real needs’ – that is, the *experience* – of common people, Biko developed a notion of solidarity that rejected apartheid’s ‘tribal cocoons . . . called “homelands” which he saw as nothing else but sophisticated concentration camps where black people are allowed to “suffer peacefully”’ (Biko 1978: 86).

At the same time, he was also following Fanon’s conception of a dialectic of national consciousness, which insisted not only that radical intellectuals reject the racist regime and its construction of ‘tribal’ politics, but that they also, somewhat paradoxically, use what they learned in the apartheid schools and colleges against the regime itself. This, of course, meant that, far from a simple critique of ‘Bantu Education’, ‘tribal homelands’ and any collaboration with apartheid, intellectuals had to rethink concepts of collectivity and what it meant to ‘return to the source’ (Cabral 1974). For such a return required a mental liberation from all the inferiority complexes that had been produced by years of living in apartheid South Africa. And, particularly for Biko, it meant liberation grounded in African cultural concepts of collectivity and sharing, which put the human being at the centre. Like Latin American liberation theologians and US-based Black theologians such as Cone, Biko rejected the Christian homily that the poor are always among us.<sup>15</sup> In fact when it came to African communalism, Biko remarked that the Christian-Marxist dialogue in Latin America had influenced ‘Black communalism’ since the kind of poverty and destitution that one sees in Africa are not endemic to Africa, but are a product of colonialism and apartheid. Thus he maintained that ‘poverty was a foreign concept’ in precolonial Africa (Biko 1978: 43).<sup>16</sup>

So while Biko emphasised the specificity of the African situation, he also understood the international urban scope of the modern Black consciousness movement<sup>17</sup> that was developing among the youth in Africa.<sup>18</sup> Young Blacks, Biko argued, were finding inspiration from the soulful<sup>19</sup> and defiant message of James Brown’s anthem ‘Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud’. And he identified this song as part of ‘our modern culture; a culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity’ (Biko 1978: 46). Indeed, Cone had also applauded James Brown’s ‘Say it Loud’ as a source of Black theology, adding, ‘it is the Christian way of

saying, "to hell with your stinking White society and its middle-class ideas about the world. It has nothing to do with the liberating deeds of God" (Cone 1973: 25; see also Cone 1970). So, going back to Biko's demand for African cultural concepts for self-becoming, how did the 'Soul Power' of the African-American singer James Brown, singing from the heart of the capitalist monster, the United States (Fanon 1968), with its narrowly instrumental individualist ideology, jibe with his conception of Black communalism?

Biko did not address the possible ambiguities, rivalries and incipient class divisions in the Black world. But, like Fanon, his rejection of White liberal (and colonial) culture was based not on a belief in cultural and/or racial essences, but on an embracing of the traditions of popular resistance to apartheid and colonialism. Though acutely aware of its fragmentation, by emphasising the threads of solidarity in the Black community, Biko (1978: 95-6) claimed that 'the basic tenets of our culture have largely succeeded in withstanding the process of bastardisation' - an important enunciative and political act in the face of apartheid's apparently absolute dominance.

Biko emerged as a theorist in the context of a Black revolution in the United States, which had worldwide ramifications. Thus, for Biko, the reference to James Brown is not external to African cultural concepts, but an expression of an 'all-engulfing rhythm' that 'immediately caught on and set millions of bodies in gyration throughout the world' (Biko 1978: 46). Anyone familiar with Fanon's *Black Skin* will be immediately wary of such a claim of 'rhythm' since it echoes Leopold Senghor's essentialist claims about the Black's emotion, sensitivity, intuition and rhythmic attitude (Fanon 1967a).<sup>20</sup> Yet, if we briefly hold this in abeyance, we see that 1969 is neither 1948<sup>21</sup> nor 1949, when Negritude was essentially a literary movement connected to the burgeoning anti-colonial movements. Rather, in 1969, Black consciousness was a worldwide mass and revolutionary phenomenon, and 'Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud' took on a revolutionary significance.<sup>22</sup> Listening to Brown's anthem in this context, Biko seems to have been describing what must have felt like the rhythm of a mass movement in the immediacy of Black revolt. After all, Biko showed no interest in making claims about a Black essence, and attempted only to develop authentic links (in an existential, not essential, sense) for

an autonomous and revolutionary humanist politics that he called 'situational-experiencing' (Biko 1978: 43). For him, the future of South Africa is Black in the sense of struggle, rather than a timeless, static essence. And Black solidarity meant rejecting the apartheid division along essentialist 'tribal' lines and developing a genuine humanism, which would draw on and reshape African cultural values in contradistinction to 'White values'. Thus Black 'becoming' is the Black masses making themselves and making history; it is a process of Black re-entry into their own history and the creation of an alternative history that had been buried and dismissed by colonialism and apartheid.<sup>23</sup> In short, in Biko's conception, self-determination is an 'endogenous' process rooted in a critique of liberalism and elitism, not an embrace of an *ahistorical* cultural or racial essentialism.

Biko's concept of authentic culture is based on Fanon's concept of 'national culture'. Paraphrasing Fanon's statement in 'On National Culture' (see 1968: 210), Biko writes (again without naming Fanon): 'as one black writer says, "colonialism is never satisfied with having the native in its grip but, by some strange logic, it must turn to his past and disfigure and distort it"'. One major, though subtle, shade of difference between Fanon's and Biko's conception of culture can be seen in their respective attitudes to 'native' culture under colonialism. Though Fanon appreciates how the 'native's' culture continues to resist colonialism, 'On National Culture' seems to follow a different trajectory – one that emphasises how this clandestine culture of resistance is 'condemned to extinction' (1968: 237). Inert and already destroyed, indigenous culture can only be rejuvenated, indeed transformed, by the 'struggle'. Fanon sums up the dialectic (1968: 210): 'The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former values and shapes; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form nor the content of the people's culture.'

And indeed, for Fanon, this development is crucial to the definition of a new humanism.

When Fanon speaks of culture he maintains that it is opposed to custom. Culture is living and changing, while custom is reified, formal and rigid.<sup>24</sup> And it is culture, not custom, Fanon argues, that the damned of the earth hang on to even under the most extreme conditions.

Contested and clandestine, and however broken down and smashed by poverty, this culture remains an original source of resistance that keeps the spirit of struggle alive. During the anti-colonial struggle, Fanon argues, these cultures are often transformed. After all, national culture is also a struggle against the reification of tradition and custom (as well as the narrow nationalism of xenophobia, regionalism and chauvinism), and while Fanon appreciated the recovery of the history of African cultures, he also seemed to suggest that such a discovery did not change the objective situation. For Fanon, national culture is a fighting culture, one that must become radically democratic and open (see Gibson 2003: 127–56), as it draws upon the long resistance to colonial occupation and transforms it in its struggle for national liberation.

On the other hand, Biko's idea of African cultural concepts was concerned with their ability to express a critique of the alienating character of capitalism that is based, as Biko argued, on dehumanisation (see Oliphant 2008). In other words, Biko's concern, not unlike Fanon's, was first and foremost with the need to reconnect to a national culture and thereby resist the reification of culture that was produced by apartheid – the inert, static and outworn *custom* that served as the outer shell on which ethnic entrepreneurs and chauvinists, as well as homeland leaders, apartheid academics and colonial apologists, based their patronage and power. The centrality of the so-called homelands to apartheid's hegemony made it clear to Biko just what the recovery of the people's culture and their history was about – namely, the real and subjugated histories of anti-colonial struggle. Indeed, for Biko, it is revolutionary, anti-colonial struggle that relates 'the past to the present and demonstrates an historical evolution of the black'. Thus, when Biko spoke about paying attention to 'our history' (Biko 1978: 95), it had nothing to do with 'custom' – the reified traditions and manners – that had been fashioned according to the needs of the colonial state. At the same time, his idea of history did not jibe either with the tactics of Bantustan leaders like Mangosotho Buthelezi, the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), who claimed to be fighting the regime from the inside. As Biko put it, 'we are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosa, Vendas or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black' (Biko 1978: 97). Of course, Bantustans played an important material and ideological role for White South African

hegemony, but the mass of people in rural areas did not accept Bantustan rule because it was fundamentally repressive and at odds with the everyday lived experience and aspirations of the people. As Biko put it, the Bantustans were contrary to 'the basic tenets of our culture' (Biko 1978: 96). Thus, for Biko, apartheid fabrication of the tribal homeland is an imposition that is utterly in contradiction with the real needs of the mass of the people. And African cultural values, which centre on appreciating 'man for himself', are not only crucial to the 'quest for a true humanity' but are also in direct contrast to White liberal culture:

Ours is a true man-centered society whose sacred tradition is sharing. We must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of Anglo-Boer culture. We must seek to restore to the black man the great importance we used to give human relations . . . to reduce the triumph of technology over man and the materialistic element that is slowly creeping into our society (Biko 1978: 96).

Rather than simply a 'multi-ethnic' or 'multiracial' nation, the Black Consciousness slogan 'One Azania, One Nation' echoed Fanon's double warning that if social consciousness is reached without a strong national consciousness, it could 'paradoxically' disintegrate into regionalism, tribalism and ethnic xenophobia. At the same time, Fanon was concerned that if the 'one nation' was not made explicit and 'enriched' into a 'consciousness of social and political needs, in other words humanism, it leads up a blind alley' (1968: 204). Thus, for Biko, appreciating the nation-building attempts of Shaka, Moshoeshe and Hintsa did not mean accepting 'Bantustan theory', grounded in colonial concepts of race and tribe. What was important was to be reminded of what Africans had achieved and what could be created in 'a quest for a new humanity'. For Biko, the process of nation building had to be part of the contemporary dialogue that strove for the freedom of the formerly excluded and dehumanised mass of people who were now being encouraged to hear themselves speak and be part of creating a new nation.

## FEAR AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF BLACK RESISTANCE

*Ground for a revolution is always fertile in the presence of absolute destitution.*

— Steve Biko, 'We Blacks'

*When I turn on my radio, when I hear that someone in jail slipped off a piece of soap, fell and died I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead, he is likely to be found in Pretoria.*

— Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*

Biko's critique of White liberals and his challenge to the Black's 'inferiority complex' (Biko 1978: 45) was not the main issue in the townships, where, as Biko argues, Blacks have no respect for White people. Instead, White superiority is based on a 'naked cruelty' (Biko 1978: 76). Thus, political paralysis is not created by a complex; it is not a hallucination; it is a social fact created by force and the fear of reprisal that 'erodes the soul of black people' (Biko 1978: 76). Fanon himself insists in *Black Skin* (see 1967a: 104) that one must return to 'the real' in order to get to the source of the problem. This turn to the real leads us to Fanon's notion of hegemony<sup>25</sup> based on pure force (or what could also be called 'dominance without hegemony' [Guha 1998]). Hemmed in and controlled by the colonial system, the 'native' endures a 'living death' in an atmosphere of violence (Fanon 1967b: 13). Struggling for sheer survival, Fanon contends that this violent atmosphere, deprived of an appropriate outlet against its real source, results in an 'aggressiveness turned against his own people'. Apartheid is simply the logical conclusion of a rule that is meant to teach the 'native [to] learn to stay in his place and not go beyond certain limits' (Fanon 1968: 52). Echoing Fanon's discussion of life under colonialism, Biko argues:

Township life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live to adulthood. There we see a situation of absolute want, in which black will kill black to be able to survive. This is the basis of vandalism, murder, rape, and plunder that goes on while the real sources of evil - White society - are sun-tanning on exclusive beaches or relaxing in their bourgeois homes (Biko 1978: 75).

In other words, the system of oppression is not nuanced; White domination is maintained by fear and force, and Blacks in the townships understand this. While this understanding alone does not undermine the reality of the force on which fear is constructed, and does not put an end to violence in the Black community, it does allow another point of view. And Biko once again takes up Fanon's position, understanding that colonial society is a Manichaean reality, a world split in two, where the 'natives', because they are bowed but not broken, are kept in check only by force. Because such a Manichaean society forces all Blacks together, the apartheid system is, as Biko says, 'the best economic system for revolution' (Biko 2008: 42). It is the 'great leveller' because it blocks the development of a Black middle class in the urban areas. This is a fascinating point, especially since the transition from apartheid has been equated with the development of a Black middle class as a bulwark against fundamental change. Biko argues that living in the same-sized, four-room houses and taking the bus or train to work aids the emergence of solidarity across incipient class lines among people with quite different backgrounds. 'It's a perfect system for common identification', he adds, because 'the evils of it are so pointed and so clear, and therefore make teaching of alternative methods, more meaningful methods, more indigenous methods even, much easier' (Biko 2008: 45).

Arising from a new generation of young Blacks, Black Consciousness was, in a sense, a product of this levelling, which rescribed 'non-White' and with it 'Indian' and 'Coloured' as 'Black', and promoted Black Consciousness as a transformative social action. Black Consciousness is, in this sense, a fairly straightforward philosophy of solidarity that reflects what the people already know, even if they have not systematically thought about or articulated it. Thus Biko's focus is on the work needed to break the hold of fear that has been so crucial to apartheid rule, which has violently 'fragmented' Black solidarity and turned itself against itself. Biko's objective remains similar to Fanon's: what Blacks need is to stand up as a group, and Black Consciousness's role is to rechannel the 'native's' 'pent-up' aggression towards the real source of violence.<sup>26</sup> On this score, Biko heeds Fanon's warning (1968: 139) that liberation cannot come about from a reactive action based on a politics of revenge but only from channelling pent-up anger into meaningful action. Thus, Biko emphasises



Black Consciousness's notion of solidarity, one that is based not on a dogmatic sinking of differences, but on an intellectual elaboration that encourages Blacks to follow up on their chain of reasoning:

'Black consciousness' therefore seeks to give positivity in the outlook of the black people to their problems. It works on the knowledge that 'white hatred' is negative, though understandable, and leads to precipitate shot-gun methods which may be disastrous for black and white alike. *It seeks to channel the pent-up forces of angry black masses to meaningful directional opposition basing its entire struggle on realities of the situation.* It wants to ensure a singularity of purpose in the minds of the black people and to make possible total involvement of the masses in a struggle essentially theirs (Biko 1978: 30-1, my emphasis).

In short, Black Consciousness is a philosophy of self-emancipation. Like Fanon, Biko understands that there is no demiurge, that freedom cannot be brought from outside just as freedom cannot be given.<sup>27</sup> There is no use in simply waiting for men with guns to come and liberate them. They must stand up to oppression together and move forward together. Surely this was what the Soweto student rebellion of 1976 heralded. And, for Biko, this idea of autonomy was not only necessary but also practical, and in retrospect, his position is absolutely correct. Black Consciousness would represent a new stage of cognition and revolt, a stage that was essential – even to those in the mass democratic movements of the 1980s who had not been part of Black Consciousness – to the eventual unravelling of apartheid South Africa. After Soweto, June 16, 1976, Black Consciousness became a philosophy whose time had come.

Indeed, by May 1976 Biko's comments at the Black Consciousness trial had become public knowledge. Reported on daily in the *Rand Daily Mail*, he had become the 'toast of the shebeens . . . Here was at last the authentic voice of the people not afraid to say openly what all blacks think but are too frightened to say . . . Can the example of this man's courage have inspired the boys and girls of Soweto to face death, as they bravely did just six weeks later?' (Stubbs in Biko 1978: 120-1). The concreteness, indeed brilliance, of Soweto as an 'event', a subjective

moment that had become objective, initiated a new stage: the beginning of the end of apartheid.

Grounded in a specific situation and experience, Black Consciousness in South Africa is a product of the experience of a 'moment' – of apartheid, of postcolonial Africa and of the Black consciousness mediated by US-based Black freedom movements. So, while Black Consciousness as such signified a new stage of cognition, we have to ask, what is its legacy? Is Black Consciousness applicable to contemporary South Africa? If so, how?

To be sure, Biko's Black Consciousness may be too specific to be immediately applicable outside of its historical context, but as an idea of liberation, it still remains essential for any contemporary critique. Raya Dunayevskaya's discussion of the African 'revolutions' seems to talk to this issue when she argues:

It is not possible to comprehend the African reality apart from the compelling objective forces of world production, the pull of the world market, and the underlying philosophy of the masses which Marx called 'the quest for universality' . . . Even now . . . after all the set backs . . . far from rigor mortis having set in among 'the poor Africans', they are continuing the discussion of the relationship of philosophy to revolution (1973/1982: 243).

The point is that a philosophy born of struggle is ongoing. There is nothing to prevent it from presenting epochal truths. Even if philosophy belongs to its time, it should not be *reduced* to its time. After all, Soweto's 'concretisation' of Black Consciousness as a new stage enlivened rather than worked out the 'contradictory processes' internal to it (see Gibson 2008). Thus, while the brilliance of the 'Bikoian' moment is an historical event, 'Biko Lives'. When the death knell of apartheid sounded, what became urgent was working out the problem of the aftermath, namely, what needed to happen after the end of apartheid: to work through the contradictory relationship of subjectivity to objectivity by 'hold[ing] onto the principle of creativity, and the contradictory processes by which creativity develops' (Dunayevskaya 1973/1982: 246). This is what Fanon confronted and summed up in *The Wretched* as he reflected on the 'pitfalls'

of the anti-colonial movements. And it is this problematic that we are still confronting in the long postcolonial century.

TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING OR A RETURN TO THE OLD: FANON,  
BIKO AND CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

*Equally victims of the same tyranny, simultaneously identifying a single enemy, this physically dispersed people is realizing its unity and founding in suffering a spiritual community which constitutes the most solid bastion of the Algerian Revolution.*

— Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*

*The biggest mistake the black world ever made was to assume that whoever opposed apartheid was an ally.*

— Steve Biko, 'White Racism and Black Consciousness'

Biko's critique of the White liberal idea of integration was derived in part from Fanon's idea of Black consciousness. For Fanon, Black consciousness was a critique directed as much at the Black *évolué* as at Sartre's contention that Negritude was a 'minor term'. For Fanon, the critique returned to the problematic addressed in *Black Skin*, namely the problematic of recognition: the Black turning towards the White master and trying to 'make it' in White society. This problematic was couched in terms of alienation, or what Fanon called the quest for disalienation, which he brilliantly redeveloped in *The Wretched*, shifting the critique from the Black *évolué*'s troubling internalisation of 'whitening' to the nationalist elite's cynical desire for a place in the machinery of colonial/capitalist expropriation. For, if in *Black Skin*, the *évolué*, corrupted by the air of bourgeois society, goes from 'one way of life to another', absorbing values secreted by the White master (see 1967a: 221–4), in *The Wretched* these 'emancipated slaves' become the huckstering nationalist petit bourgeoisie and party leaders who 'betray' the emancipatory goals of the movement. Thus, for Fanon, postcolonial society cannot be understood simply as a psychological return of the repressed since it is the mass of poor people who concretely feel the degeneration and betrayal of the nationalist movement. So Fanon warned that if nationalism does not

become a humanism with programmes and practices that give it genuine social and political content, including real citizenship for all, it leads from national liberation to national chauvinism. 'Since the sole motto of the bourgeoisie is "replace the foreigner"', Fanon predicted, 'the small people of the nation – taxis drivers, cake sellers, and bootblacks – will be equally quick to insist that the ['foreigners'] go home to their own country, or will even go further and demand that the Foulbis and the Peuhls return to their jungle or their mountains' (Fanon 1968: 158) (in the case of contemporary South Africa, one only need insert Somalian, Mozambican, Congolese or Zimbabwean).<sup>28</sup> As racial, regional and tribal antagonisms come to the surface, the 'hollow shell of nationality' crumbles. Far from inevitable, this process of national degeneration results from a social programme that lacks a minimum of humanist content. Forbidding 'the expression of popular discontent', the political programme is based on driving people 'back to the caves' (Fanon 1968: 183). There, almost out of sight, they 'stagnate deplorably in unbearable poverty', and people who had hoped for something better, out of desperation and feelings of powerlessness and betrayal, lash out at their neighbour. While this situation is tragic and terrible, Fanon does not blame the poor. Rather he points his finger at the party of nationalist liberation which, masked by the rhetoric of Africanism, becomes a party of sectional interests. Betraying the people and becoming simply a means for private advancement, it channels popular discontent away from its real source and towards other poor people.

This situation is being played out in contemporary South Africa, where there is a strong sense that nothing has improved, that the 'unbearable poverty' and the criminalisation of the poor have, in fact, increased. Anti-human neoliberal economic programmes, along with the authoritarianism with which they are implemented at the local level, not to mention the perceptions of corruption and the ways in which the ruling party has become a vehicle for patronage and top-down social control, – in short, the betrayal of the idea of freedom – have created a desperation that has set the stage for all sorts of 'morbid symptoms' to appear (Gramsci 1971: 275).<sup>29</sup>

Inasmuch as Black Consciousness expressed national consciousness in South Africa, the contradiction between the image of South Africa as

a 'successful' postcolonial society, and the concrete reality of the mass of its population, is ironically often articulated within a sound bite of Black Consciousness rhetoric. In the context of schemes favouring the development of a Black petit-bourgeois class that trade on the rhetoric of nativism, Biko's critique of liberalism and the need for political autonomy has taken on a new relevance. Indeed, post-apartheid society has created the type of integration that Biko would have abhorred: an artificial integration where a Black middle class views advancement in terms of a shrewd mixing of 'ubuntu' rhetoric with possessive individualism. At the same time, South Africa's masses of poor people, many politicised by the long anti-apartheid struggle but marginalised from the post-apartheid polity, have been quick to understand that the betrayal of 'the struggle' is not simply a moral issue but a social phenomenon. This realisation, which has corresponded with outbreaks of 'disobedience' and revolt,<sup>30</sup> is seeing a return to authoritarian tactics once more, including smear campaigns, reverting to force, fear and ethnic and racial patronage in an attempt not only to keep a new mass movement from emerging, but also to threaten any opposition movement's legitimacy.

The period between 1977 and the present is marked by the rise of political containment and neoliberal shock treatments, as befits the 'latest stage' of capitalism. Whereas apartheid South Africa was a state-capitalist society based on White privilege, where the state guaranteed Whites welfare, full employment and a certain standard of living on the backs of Black labour, the normalisation of corporate capitalist power in post-apartheid South Africa is based on following a neoliberal structural adjustment programme. Its policies, replete with 'open' markets, privatisation, deindustrialisation and corporatisation of state-run sectors of the economy, have played a role in the country's unemployment rate which stands at almost 50 per cent. Alongside the 'handouts' to the rich through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) schemes, Moeletsi Mbeki (2009a) notes that small social grants, just enough to keep the poor from starving, have become crucial to the government's hegemony.<sup>31</sup> Freedom and liberation from apartheid – terms that once helped mobilise masses of people – have been reduced to the freedom and liberty of the narrowly defined neoliberal 'self' that competes in the world market. Heralded as the equal opportunity truth of self-advancement and self-promotion, BEE operates

within this discussion and framework of neoliberalism. One of Moeletsi Mbeki's criticisms of BEE is that it is an 'ideology of reparation' (2009a: 72), which typically encourages the Black elite to see themselves as primarily consumers and the beneficiaries of the production of others, namely Black labour. BEE, he argues, encodes the Black elite as 'weak', 'victims' and 'perpetual junior supporting players of White-controlled corporations' (2009: 70–1). In other words, BEE is a marketing project, the cost of doing business. It does not in any way trump or change neoliberalism, but is one of its expressions. Indeed, the self-as-commodity is presented not only as the ideology of the rising elite but also as the only possible way for the poor to raise themselves out of poverty.<sup>32</sup> The 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1977) of reparations encourages the idea that socio-economic elevation is a lottery that is available to all South Africans. Much like neoliberal ideology, notions of socio-economic inequality viewed through the BEE lens are dismissed as the old discourse of class politics, and the poor are understood simply as people who need to find ways to become entrepreneurs, responsible for their own self-exploitation as human capital. As Margaret Thatcher succinctly put it, 'there is no such thing as society',<sup>33</sup> which is to say no such thing as ethical social life, only ethical life centred on the 'care of the self'<sup>34</sup> and its fabrication as human capital, with self-emancipation understood as material well-being, quite literally the work of self-presentation.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the concrete socio-economic inequalities of capitalism and development – impoverishment and forced labour – are often reduced to abstract political rhetoric of the kind Fanon spoke about in *The Wretched*. Thus, while this sophistry presents the ideology of freewheeling contemporary South Africa, the abstract rhetoric of liberal humanism comes into conflict with reality. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, based on a discourse of human rights, was created to redress apartheid's horrors through forgiveness (Chipkin 2007: 173–87). It proposed no socio-economic redress at all and said nothing of the expropriation of African land that was systematised in the pre-apartheid Native Land Act of 1913. Any redress, in other words, is only to be found within the schemes of BEE.

Biko's critique of White liberalism speaks to this Black-empowered neoliberal discourse. It does not accept White normativity, or the idea

that Blacks be brought up to a White standard as though White liberalism or bourgeois self-interest is the benchmark of humanity. Moreover, it does not take an *a priori* individual as the basis of political change. Rather, Biko's idea of Black Consciousness is a process that comes into being in a social context. It is an activism that understands the importance of thinking as a form of collective activity that can only change the world through its collectivity. Thus Biko's Black Consciousness cannot be reduced to an individualist consciousness looking for an entrepreneurial niche in the capitalist market. Neither should 'Blackness' and the 'struggle' become the rhetorical space for the Black elite to market itself and find a niche for self qua 'human capital'; where the worth of individuals is ultimately measured in terms of capital accumulation, so that even freedom and creativity are limited, indeed defined, by marketability. Biko's Black Consciousness cannot be associated with ethnic entrepreneurship – the trading and marketing of niche ethnic identities – which finds a new expression in 'difference' and claims to 'authenticity'. While the neoliberal spirit might be perfect for the Black elite, who consider a 'world-class' education part of their self-fashioning, it is a far cry from what Biko had in mind.

Postmodern Black consciousness – and what Veriava and Naidoo call (2008: 233) 'corporate Black consciousness' – is nonetheless still an expression of Black Consciousness in a neoliberal guise. By denying a social world in favour of an individualist one, neoliberalism silences public discourse, leaving no public space that is not always already commercial. In this situation, neoliberal Black consciousness expresses a depoliticised version of Biko's Black Consciousness, one that is stripped of any ideas of Black solidarity and promoting instead a discourse of egoistic self-advancement that leads inevitably to fear and fragmentation, despite the chummy 'networking' that is conducted in posh downtown bars and restaurants as well as on the Internet. This superficial Black consciousness is a mask, a rhetoric and style of Africanity that can be put on and taken off as the occasion demands. One result of this discourse, manifested in the elective affinity of economic empowerment based on ethnic entrepreneurialism, is the rise of xenophobia, which is produced by the deteriorating situation for the poor and aided by the recent turn towards ethnic populism within the ANC.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to Biko's conception,

corporate Black consciousness, which is very much aligned with the ANC government, expresses a politics of resentment which, having embraced the morality of neoliberalism seeks remuneration.

#### THE DIALECTICS OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

*The bondsman becomes aware, through this rediscovery of himself by himself, of having and being a 'mind of his own'.*

— Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*

*If the philosopher . . . assigns himself the task of pursuing the immanent logic of other experiences and other existences instead of putting himself in their place, if he forsakes the illusion of contemplating the totality of completed history and feels caught up in it like other men and confronted by a future to be made, then philosophy fulfills itself by doing away with itself as isolated philosophy.*

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*

Fanon's scathing critique of post-independence Africa, and thus his critique of postcolonialism, was developed in his anti-colonial reading of the Hegelian dialectic and the quest for recognition in *Black Skin*. While in the conclusion to the section 'The Black and Hegel' (1967a: 216–22), Fanon emphasised social action rather than the labour of working on the thing (as Hegel had) as key to the development of the Black's Consciousness in a racist society, what Hegel identified as the slave's gaining a mind of his or her own remained an essential measure of 'self-emancipation'. Biko doesn't refer to Fanon's critique of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, but he does mention 'Hegelian theory', arguing in a Fanonian sense:

One must immediately dispel the thought that Black Consciousness is merely a methodology or a means toward an end. What Black Consciousness seeks to do is to produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society (1978: 51).



Thus, for Fanon as for Biko, Black consciousness was not a particular moment but the basis for a new humanism grounded in a radical alterity. Refusing to think in terms of stages – that is, of Black Consciousness as a passing stage – Biko resisted spelling out a future society, but he argued: 'If South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony' it cannot be 'without offering a strong counterpoint to the white races that permeate our society so effectively' (1978: 51). Likewise, though it is often assumed that Fanon moved towards a class position in his conclusion to *Black Skin*,<sup>36</sup> for Fanon, this did not necessitate a move away from Black consciousness. In fact, it deepened his conceptualisation in that Fanon's critique of the master/slave dialectic became an articulation of a race/class dialectic. After all, Fanon was talking specifically about incipient class attitudes within the Black world without dismissing the lived reality of Black workers in a racist society, who, he said, knew of one solution, namely, to fight collectively against all injustices (1967a: 224). Of course, Blacks had to know what they were fighting for, and, for Fanon, this knowledge would be intimately connected to praxis. As he puts it, 'To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act' (1967a: 222). For Fanon, becoming actional (in contrast to remaining reactionary or resentful) meant taking thought into the material world.

Following Fanon, Biko also underscored the centrality of mental liberation to the freedom struggle. Like Fanon, he was also concerned with the mind of the oppressed and saw Black Consciousness as a practical education, not in the sense of technique, but in the sense of thought practised in *the school of struggle*, that is to say, in the process or *act* of reflection on and through the experience of the struggle. Without this grounding, the worldview and struggle of the alienated Black middle class,<sup>37</sup> the subject of Fanon's *Black Skin*, is limited precisely to the terms given them by the White master.

Thus, it is not surprising that the nationalist middle class discussed in *The Wretched* does not gain a mind of its own, or if it does, it does so as an alienated stoic who has not experienced the mass dimension of 'revolutionary' Black consciousness (1967a: 225). Blinded by the capitalist technology commodity culture and the world market, the nationalist

middle class is beaten from the start (see 1968: 63), or they have, in 'bad faith',<sup>38</sup> accepted neocolonial capitalism as definitive, with the new rules of the national game of accumulation as normative. The resulting asymmetry means that these Blacks go from one *way* of life to another rather than one *life* to another, mimicking the colonialist rather than smashing the oppressive structures and beginning anew. After all, the nationalist struggle is often fought *only in relation and in reaction* to the White masters and so precludes mental and material liberation, producing instead participants who within this self-limiting framework do not develop a coherent liberatory philosophy. As Fanon infers, if the master furnishes the ground of the nation, it is already corrupt. Thus, there must first be, in practice, a discussion of philosophies of liberation that is open to all – from the bottom up, not cut off and behind closed doors. To aid this process, the radical intellectual has to undertake a double critique: first, against elitism and prejudice towards the poor, and second, against the complacency produced by such internalised elitism and prejudice. For both points of view are products of alienation from the damned of the earth, who may turn to intellectuals, not for technocratic assistance or uncritical praise (as might be commonly assumed), but for practical help in understanding the political situation and for genuine discussion about ideas of liberation. For Fanon, the greatest threat that confronted Africa on the eve of independence in 1960 was not the colonial regime, but the anti-colonial movement's lack of a serious discussion about how to put a working, humanist programme into practice. Indeed, Fanon set himself the task of filling this vacuum by writing *The Wretched*.

*The Wretched* is also Fanon's summation of the anti-colonial struggle. It is powerful, not least because what he had anticipated continues to occur. What characterised the anti-colonial movements on the eve of independence in 1960 – the lack of open discussion and the silencing of opposition – characterises post-apartheid South Africa as well. The transition from apartheid turned out to be a kind of 'passive revolution' in Gramsci's sense (1971: 105–20) inasmuch as it was a revolution *without* a revolution, with the opposition effectively contained from the start and the potentially revolutionary mass movements rendered ineffective. Of course, to speak of the South African transition in this way is not to discount real changes that have taken place or to forget that it was real

mass movements that forced these changes. What it does underscore, though, is the ways in which capitalist interests, both national and multinational, helped limit the form and content of South Africa's transition. Indeed, instead of addressing the deep-seated economic and social inequalities that are the legacies of capitalist 'development' in South Africa, every possible guarantee was provided to placate the interests of capital and prevent a feared White-capital flight.<sup>39</sup> And it played out like an 'abandonment neurosis' (1967a: 79–80), while the real movement that had brought about the crisis in capital was suppressed. The transition, in other words, took on a vicious class character.

Thus, while apartheid may have been the great leveller that Biko contended it to be, the incipient class character of Black South Africa was also clearly apparent during Biko's life, and it may explain Biko's insistence on creating solidarities and making sure that Black Consciousness students working with community-based projects were interacting and speaking with working people as part of their daily struggle under apartheid. As early as 1972 Biko warned:

This is one country where it would be possible to create a capitalist black society, if whites were intelligent, if the nationalists were intelligent. And that capitalist black society, black middle class would be very effective . . . South Africa could succeed in putting across to the world a pretty convincing, integrated picture, with still seventy percent of the population being underdogs (Biko 2008: 41–2).

This is exactly what South Africa has done: put across a pretty convincing picture of integration while 70 per cent of the population lives close to or below the poverty line.<sup>40</sup> How this was achieved is the focus of the next chapter. What is important to note here is that in contrast to neoliberal corporate Black consciousness, which has become synonymous with making fast money and treating your brother as a purse (Fanon 1968), implicit ideas of solidarity central to Biko's notion of Black Consciousness – however fragmented and often fleeting – continue to survive among the poor and other sectors of the population marginalised in the post-apartheid polity. Just as apartheid created the conditions for

Black Consciousness to form solidarities, Biko saw that the inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa could create conditions for new possibilities for solidarity. Yet without 'conscientisation' and clarity of thinking, potential solidarities would fragment, and old divisions encouraged by apartheid would remain or reappear.

After Patrice Lumumba's death and Fanon's own experiences in Ghana, Fanon argued that the greatest threat to Africa's liberation came not from colonialism, but from the absence of a liberatory ideology within the anti-colonial movements. By engaging Fanon in the South African context, Biko rose to the challenge of filling this void. But recognising the threat of such a philosophy of liberation, the ruling class murdered South Africa's greatest liberation theorist to forestall what seemed to be an imminent revolution. After Biko, nobody took up Fanon's challenge to develop a new humanism, and a philosophic void appeared. The biggest question for Black Consciousness now, as posed by poet Mphutlane wa Bofelo (2009a, 2009b), is 'the blackness of the bourgeoisie . . . Do we still call them black if they engage in economic activities which confine [South Africans] to squalor?' Speaking to the Black middle class and also to the Black Consciousness generation of the 1970s who have become super rich in the post-apartheid period (represented by people such as Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale), he adds that it is a 'pity how it seems we joined the struggle to be rich materially but poor in spirit!' Reduced to a 'Black is beautiful' rhetoric, Black Consciousness becomes a footnote to the 'pitfalls of national consciousness' that Fanon presciently described in *The Wretched*.

## 2

### The pitfalls of South Africa's liberation

*It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of people, their laziness, and let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Johannesburg's airport is like a set from a Disney movie: postmodern, clean and efficient. One leaves the terminal for a car park full of expensive cars and White faces, and travels to Johannesburg along a three-lane highway (a shock to someone coming south from Zimbabwe, where one judges a road not by width but by the extent of the tarmac and the number of potholes). The highway is lined with hi-tech companies, hi-security and hi-rental business and residential space.

And if one drives through the inner-city suburb of Hillbrow in the daytime, the racial/spatial dynamics of post-apartheid Johannesburg are clearly visible. Hillbrow in the 1960s was known as the Manhattan of Africa because of its concentration of European and Jewish immigrants in high-rise apartments, and the area became genuinely cosmopolitan during late apartheid. Now it is an overcrowded, dilapidated pan-African inner-city space, housing South Africans and Africans from all over the continent. As Hillbrow crumbles, its inhabitants are subject to high rents, evictions, water and electricity cut-offs and intimidation. Their situation is not unique; it is echoed across South Africa. In Cape Town, the formerly Coloured area called Macassar is now overcrowded with houses occupied by Coloured, African and even a few White families. Though Hillbrow

and Macassar have experienced a racial sea change over the past 30 years, the spatial legacy of apartheid has shifted but it has not been fundamentally challenged. Much of Johannesburg's central business district (and the stock exchange) has moved to Sandton, where rich Whites and the new Black bourgeoisie spread out in luxurious mansions. Next to Sandton is Alexandra, a crowded township, and a hotbed of radicalism and people's power in the mid-1980s, that has become even more cramped and overcrowded. Before GPS was standard, international business travellers on their way to Sandton were warned by their Avis rental-car maps not to use the Alexandra exit from the highway. They would drive directly from Johannesburg's airport to the gated communities of Sandton, seeing the real poverty of South Africa's damned of the earth only from afar and in the comfort and safety of their car.

Of course, and I repeat, there have been great changes since the ANC became the government in 1994. The crude racial laws of apartheid are gone. Grand and petty apartheid that determined where people lived, who they slept with, where they worked and how they were represented has been abolished. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for all its shortcomings, did make public the terrible deeds committed under apartheid: murders, tortures, beatings and forced removals have all become part of the historical record. The 1994 Constitution guarantees universal suffrage, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and freedom of sexual orientation. There is the right to love whomever you want and to live wherever you want. And yet the exclusivity of heavily guarded colonial spaces that Fanon describes has probably increased since the ANC came to power. Racial classification has not been abolished and the siege mentality of apartheid has been reframed – gated communities and secure shopping and entertainment centres are the new Manichaeian divides which, with private security and rapid-response patrol units, keep poor people out. Post-apartheid South Africa has created more poor people than anything else. Thus, behind the glitz and sheen of the new South Africa lurks a quite different reality that is expressed in data collated by the World Bank and the United Nation Development Programme. For example, with an average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of \$9 757 in 2007 (which puts it on a par with Brazil), South Africa's Human Development Index ranks just below Namibia (which has a per capita

GDP of just below \$5 200); and South Africa's life expectancy is just below that of Uganda, which has a per capita GDP of a measly \$1 059 (see UNDP 2009). Since the end of apartheid, the proportion of people living in poverty in South Africa has not changed significantly. Many households have sunk deeper into poverty and the gap between rich and poor has widened, with the number of people living on less than \$1 a day doubling from two million in 1994 to four million in 2006 (Klein 2007: 215).<sup>1</sup> Over a third of children among the poorest 40 per cent of the population suffer chronic malnutrition. Twenty per cent of urban households have no electricity, 25 per cent have no running water and a third have no flush toilet.<sup>2</sup> Life expectancy dropped from 48.4 years in 2003 to 43.3 in 2005, and South Africa is one of only a dozen nations worldwide where child mortality has risen since 1990 (see Stats SA 2010; UNDP 2009).

Report after report makes the same statements, but the facts need to be reiterated since the majority of the world's public, who welcomed the end of apartheid, is not fully aware that the socio-economic situation has worsened for the majority of South Africans. In fact, leading South African (Afrikaner) academic Sampie Terreblanche argues that 'the quality of life of the poorer 50 per cent has *deteriorated considerably* in the post-apartheid period' (2003: 28, my emphasis). He calls this the dark side of contemporary South Africa, albeit that the country has been transformed from a rigid, racially divided one into a highly stratified class society. But while Terreblanche observes these transformations, he also acknowledges that 'the highly-stratified class society has not been cleared of its erstwhile rigid, racial . . . legacy of apartheid and colonialism' (2003: 33-4). One third of the 15 million in the 'bourgeois classes', he adds, are White, while 98 per cent of the 30 million people in the 'lower classes' are Black. And, interestingly, the UNDP's (2009) *Human Development Report* notes that the share of White households in the top fifth of the income scale actually grew after the end of apartheid. One can quibble about the figures, but taken as a whole, South Africa's Black population is surprisingly worse off after the end of apartheid, with the Black working class, and especially the poor, being the biggest losers.<sup>3</sup> South Africa, in short, remains a multiracial, not a non-racial, society, where the correlation between race and poverty remains extremely strong.<sup>4</sup>

My argument in this chapter is that there was an historic opportunity to articulate a radical position with the goal of restructuring South Africa. The government's failure to alleviate poverty is not simply because of a lack of resources or the pressures of multinational capital, but is also due to the specific political-economic choices defined and made during the transition period by nationalist political elites that turned their backs on mass democratic participation.

One example of the consequences of such politics is the fact that the ANC's much-vaunted programme of building 1.8 million new houses fell well short of what was needed (indeed, by 2001 it was estimated that 'cost-recovery' programmes had resulted in the *eviction* of two million people (McDonald and Pape 2002: 162). Furthermore, the shortfall concerned not only the number of new housing units built, but also the very conception of what constitutes a house – the new structures are called 'kennels' in contrast to the larger 'matchboxes' built during the apartheid period – not to mention the quality or the location of the houses. Thus, the government's desire to privatise the financing and building of new houses has, in many cases, exacerbated the dire situation of the poor. The backlog of need far outstrips the construction of new homes. The wait is aggravated by long, often fictional, lists managed by corrupt officials that are used to justify patronage and then to dismiss demands for housing as queue jumping, while those waiting sink into an ever-deeper spiral of indebtedness.<sup>5</sup> Like other major urban areas, South Africa's urban growth has not been produced by a demand for labour, but has resulted in the opposite: increasing unemployment. In South Africa, like most countries of the global South, urbanisation is 'driven by the reproduction of poverty not the supply of jobs' (Davis 2006: 16). Terreblanche (2003: 77–8) also notes that urbanisation is a product of 'free marketeerism' imposed on the 'ash-heap of apartheid' which 'displaced the social crisis spatially from rural to urban areas' with the abolition of influx control. Terreblanche makes the point that the urbanised poor, impoverished by apartheid, have been disciplined and newly excluded by 'the relentless tyranny . . . of powerful socio-economic forces'. The eviction of nearly one million people from farms, as well as the still dire situation in the rural areas and in neighbouring Zimbabwe, has played an important role in pulling people to South Africa's urban areas. Urban populations are



growing at twice the level of the national average and the number of people living in informal settlements is increasing concomitantly.<sup>6</sup> For example, the living conditions in Kliptown (where the Freedom Charter was adopted), and in many other shack settlements, are deplorable. Amenities in informal settlements are scarce, with communal portacabins (one step up from pit latrines and the bucket system) being the most modern convenience, each meant to serve hundreds of people. The shacks themselves, made of discarded wood, branches, mud and corrugated iron, are far from temporary, many having housed families for over 30 years.<sup>7</sup> The situation is desperate and debilitating for many, and yet the ANC government, whose coming to power was helped by land invasions, has considered all new settlements illegal, taking to forcibly, and often brutally, removing communities using private security (the notorious Red Ants in Gauteng, for example) and the police.

So the question is, years after the end of apartheid, why has so little changed in South Africa? How were the dreams of freedom and social and economic equality so quickly dashed?

The answers are complicated and are partly a result of processes of depoliticisation resulting from an elite model of transition to which we must first return. By becoming calculable, professionalised and instrumental, an elite-driven negotiation normalises (or depoliticises) politics, thereby marginalising mass movements and reinscribing the story of the struggle against apartheid as one that leads teleologically to an abandonment of more radical ideas of national liberation. Post-apartheid South Africa has become more fully integrated into global capitalism during a time when the world has witnessed increasing inequalities between rich and poor and between North and South. Thus, it is not surprising that despite the growth of a sizeable black middle class, the Gini coefficient shows that income inequality has increased since the end of apartheid. However, while international capitalist powers and interests, including especially mining capital, were (and remain) absolutely essential to managing the transition from apartheid, pointing an accusatory finger at the IMF, USAID or the US- and UK-based multinationals obscures important determinants in the contested terrains of homegrown South African politics.

Much has already been written about the politics of negotiation by critical insiders (Bond 1999) and others who mapped the capitulation of

the ANC to an elite pact (Saul 1993; Marais 1998; Alexander 2003; Terreblanche 2003). In this chapter I offer a critique of this literature and practice, using ideas elaborated by Frantz Fanon and the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci. From Gramsci (1971: 275–6), I take the idea of an interregnum, which can be viewed as a moment of radical openness and possibility as well as repression and cynicism. Gramsci's idea of hegemony also helps to provide a corrective to overstressing the rewriting of the past simply as a text deconstructed from its context. Hegemony can be conceived of as processes of political, economic and social consensus, involving the interplay of force, consent and complicity, and implying a struggle or contestation in a number of different spheres of society at the same time. Hegemony is, by definition, contested and never absolute, shifting and pragmatic and never principled.

In 1960, Frantz Fanon, then Algeria's representative to the provisional government in Accra, joined a unit reconnoitering the south-western borders of Algeria looking for infiltration routes through the Sahara. Fanon jotted down thoughts that would be developed in his final work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, the goal of which was 'to put Africa in motion, to cooperate in its organization, in its regrouping, behind revolutionary principles' (1967b: 177). In those notebooks, Fanon raised a number of issues that remain remarkably prescient. They include, on the one hand, the impetuosity of the nationalist middle class whose eyes remain fixed on the colonial power structure and, on the other, the idea of a small group of revolutionaries who keep their minds and ears open to new impulses and voices from below. In the vortex of this contradiction, he writes of the laziness of the nationalist intelligentsia and 'the absence of ideology' in African liberation movements. Fanon remains one of the most serious and dialectical theorists of national liberation. His critique of the nationalist project and proclamation that 'the single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' (Fanon 1968: 165) is strangely applicable to the ANC. Rather than simply shout treason here, I want to consider the logic of Fanon's critique, and investigate the problem of the absence of a liberatory ideology (and a concomitant fetish that assumes the 'backwardness of the masses' in African revolutions), as well as the ongoing need to fill that void with a radical humanist project that begins from the lived experiences and needs of the so-called backward people as they make history.

Hein Marais (1998: 158) makes the point that the ANC was 'poorly equipped to wage a battle on technical grounds' with South African financial and mining capital because they had historically neglected the social and economic spheres. This might be true, but the ANC continued to believe that a technicist approach was needed, meaning that they were beaten from the start.<sup>8</sup> Economics should not be considered separate from a philosophy of human needs and liberatory ideas. The dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in the 1990s made it very difficult to imagine alternatives. It was accepted, even by the left, that South Africa emerging from apartheid would be determined by globalisation. But the shift from the Freedom Charter towards neoliberalism was an ethical shift away from ideas of the social and public good. In other words, overt manifestations of individual greed as justification for the profound inequalities would have been frowned upon in the late 1980s, but became quite acceptable by the late 1990s. My interest is not so much in how the rewriting of the past as a foundational or social myth has contributed to the idea of the 'nation', but rather the problematic of the expression of a philosophy of liberation in the anti-apartheid struggle itself.

Neoliberalism and globalisation are powerful and practical ideologies, but my focus is not solely on the ANC's betrayal of the Freedom Charter, nor the road from the neo-Keynesian Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (GEAR), or even from the formal and more open Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) to the later informal, elite, almost secret negotiations (see Terreblanche 2003).<sup>9</sup> Instead, I want to highlight the failure to develop ideologies of liberation to reflect the new passions and forces of the subjects of revolt that had made South Africa ungovernable. In other words, my contention is that the 'betrayal' came earlier than is often thought, revealing itself when the new movements of the 1980s were rammed back into the old binaries of leaders and masses, and when what Fanon called the 'sclerosis of thought' meant that a new beginning would not be allowed to emerge.<sup>10</sup>

As Lenin (1961: 212) put it against the Leninists, 'cognition not only reflects the world but creates it'.<sup>11</sup> But unlike the Leninist notion that these ideas would be introduced to the movement (by the vanguard party), Lenin, just as Marx before him,<sup>12</sup> found new sources for revolutionary

thought in 'lower and deeper' strata of the proletariat, including national liberation movements outside the party.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the issue of liberation is not simply a matter of the form of organisation, and certainly not simply a critique of centralised political organisation. The importance of NGOs to the hegemony of the capitalist world system (as discussed in the Introduction to this volume) indicates that, without a philosophy of liberation, a decentralised and left-leaning NGO can at best be 'useless' – no matter how well intentioned and critical of centralised and hierarchical authority they may be (Hallward 2007).

The paucity of thought in the anti-apartheid movements was commented on by a range of critics during the 1980s. From quite different political positions, S.C. Jongilizwe (a founder of Black Consciousness) and Dave Lewis (a White socialist and trade unionist) have spoken of the 'paucity of debate in the South African liberation struggle' (Jongilizwe 1986; Lewis 1986). Bob Fine (1990) identified the source of this problem as the subsumption of socialist ideas by the popular struggle, while Anthony Marx (1992) has demonstrated how the ANC (to which one could add the Black Consciousness organisation AZAPO) moved from 'nation' to 'class' in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the content of this rhetorical move and the discussions in the movement about ideas were limited.<sup>14</sup> By the early 1980s, the ANC had outmanoeuvred its opponents on the left. The United Democratic Front (UDF), established in 1983, was able to attract organisations and individuals formerly allied to Black Consciousness while isolating groups to its left in the National Forum. By the mid-1980s, formerly independent trade unions were adopting the Freedom Charter and thus, by 'sinking differences' and 'defeat[ing] intellectual elaboration' as Fanon puts it (1968: 199), curtailing discussions of alternate futures. Internationally, the ANC continued to promote itself and to be seen as the sole representative of the anti-apartheid struggle and it continued to use its position to raise funds and silence critics. Bob Fine and Anthony Marx are both right about what framed the debates of the 1980s, but what undergirded a turn to class (Marx) and a populism (Fine) was not the investigation or practice of participatory class politics, but the Manichaeian and sectarian character of the ANC's positions.

So, by 'ideology' I do not mean simply a sociological critique of the multi-class social composition of the anti-apartheid movement but, as I believe Fanon was describing, an expression of the power of ideas, that

is to say, an act of socially engaged critical thinking and self-reflection, which can become a force of change when it 'grips the masses' (Marx 1842/1975: 251). Material force must be overthrown by material force, Marx argues, and Fanon, through the experience of the Algerian revolution, was well aware of the asymmetry of force. Yet it is at the very moment of the interregnum, when the old ruling power can no longer rule, that the power of ideas becomes essential to the creation of an historic moment of change.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by 'absence of ideology', I take Fanon to mean an absence of a social vision, or a unifying liberatory ideology.<sup>16</sup> By emphasising the problematic of a liberatory ideology, and of the relationship between knowledge and action, Fanon understands the power of ideology (what I am also thinking of here as a philosophy of liberation) as a crucial determinant in the practice of freedom and thus the direction of the revolution. Liberatory ideology - which helps create the new rhythm, new language and new modes of being human (see Fanon 1968: 38) - is what is needed to develop the openings created by social movements; indeed, it is what taps into and makes conscious the powers of the mind created by these openings.

My desire here is to reconsider the lack of an ideology as it reveals a paucity not of strategy but of vision. My focus is not on the alienation of intellectuals from the common people (of which both Fanon and Gramsci spoke and which can take on an especially existential character in South Africa's racial politics), nor on the formation of worker-intellectuals or organic intellectuals, but on an *anti-intellectualism* that pervaded the anti-apartheid movement, including its intellectuals (whatever their social background). This anti-intellectualism traded on a Manichaean attitude, which it directed towards the movement's rank and file, who were encouraged by slogans and reductive simplifications, just when shades of meaning and engaged critical thought were needed. This culture of anti-intellectualism continues to be especially prevalent in the ANC, along with its ally, the SACP, though it was also prevalent in opposition groups such as the PAC and AZAPO. Rather than encouraging a culture of discussion, a virtue is made of a military-like discipline and silence in the ranks.

While it might seem that some factional issues are flattened or myriad tendencies inside and outside the ANC elided, my point is that while the

decades-long, multifaceted struggles in South Africa raised many questions and contained many political tendencies, they did not create a sufficient culture of political discussion grounded in ‘the freedom to think differently’ (as Rosa Luxemburg put it, adding that ‘freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party, however numerous, is no freedom at all’ [1961: 69]), and thus failed to develop an organisational culture based on principles that challenged the self-limiting transition, as defined within the context of a hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism and globalisation.

#### THE IDEOLOGICAL VORTEX OF THE TRANSITION LITERATURE

*To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they . . . create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.*

— Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

Originally developed in 1979 from the experience of Latin American countries where authoritarian regimes had displaced leftist or liberal democratically elected governments in the 1960s and 1970s (in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay), the ‘Transitions from Authoritarian Rule’ became part of the literature of reflecting the shift in US foreign policy, away ‘from supporting authoritarian regimes to promoting polyarchy’ (Robinson 1996: 44). This shift was a direct response to mass movements seeking fundamental change through the overthrow of the US-backed military/authoritarian regimes. This strategic move can be understood in Gramscian terms – the price of building a new legitimacy would be paid by allowing a limited political democracy. Whatever the costs of a limited democracy, an elite compromise (which, where possible, would co-opt part of the social-democratic left) could create more beneficial and more indirect links with US interests than those created by military dictatorship. And all the better if alternative structures did not already exist. These were places where neoliberal structural adjustment programmes could be more successfully introduced. Though the strategy is conservative in prescription, there remained a general optimism among the liberal and social-democratic left that a wider social-democratic polity

and economic redistribution could be attained in time,<sup>17</sup> even though the main architects of the strategy argued that 'a relatively stable mix of liberalization and democratization - what Robert Dahl [1972] has called "polyarchy" - may have the effect of freezing existing [highly inegalitarian] social and economic arrangements' (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986b: 12). Over the next decade O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's four-volume collection, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, and other works, such as the four-volume *Democracy in Developing Countries* (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989), became standard references for academics, students and the US government (note the revolving door between these groups), setting the frames of reference and parameters of debate and achieving intellectual dominance.<sup>18</sup>

By the time of South Africa's transition, democratisation literature had become, according to William Robinson (1996: 44), 'a veritable boom industry on US campuses and for academic publishers'. In South Africa's academies (and policy institutes), elite transition scenarios became the common language of debate (see Lee and Schlemmer 1991; Price 1991; Van Zyl Slabbert 1992), and the transition scheme mapped out by O'Donnell, Schmitter, Diamond, Linz and others in fact proved remarkably prescient, or perhaps remarkably prescriptive, predicting much of what happened in the South African transition. However, while the literature focused on the necessity of limited internal change as the strategy for a successful transition and concentrated on elite actors, their critics on the left, writing of the limiting factors in the South African transition, often focused on external factors, emphasising neoliberalism, globalisation and the collapse of Communism as major stumbling blocks (see Bond 1999; Alexander 2003). Though I do not deny the material weight of these external ideological factors, my focus is on how the emphasis on the confining power of the world system became a self-limiting political or *internal* ideological feature of the contested terrain of the South African transition.

In the face of the ideological sea change reflected in the Washington Consensus, the self-fulfilling proclamation 'there is no alternative' and the threat of capital flight in the period of the mid-1990s' high neoliberalism, it may have been too much to ask post-apartheid South Africa to develop an alternative scenario. Yet, to resign oneself to this

position is to capitulate to its ideology, which is ‘methodologically undialectical’ (Dussel 1985: 198 n.13). My point is that, despite the pressures from international and, especially, national mining and financial capital, the present structure of post-apartheid South Africa was far from inevitable. It is often forgotten that transition literature is, itself, part of an ideological terrain that accepts no realistic alternative (reminding us of the failures of those movements that have attempted a more radical route) and thus silences other paradigms. In contradistinction to the passive materialism of Feuerbach, Marx, for example, insisted that human ‘practical-critical activity’ expanded material reality, and that what was ‘ultimately determinant was not given economic or historical constraints, but free human action – the ability of “each single individual” to prescribe their own ends and make their own history’ (quoted in Hallward 2009: 22). Thus, a focus on and optimism about the benefits of institutional capacity building in the post-apartheid state is misplaced. Whether the post-development state could return to the Keynesian interventionist state is beside the point, since that discussion encourages an overly technical (that is to say, mechanical rather than human) approach to social questions; it limits participatory democracy and discussions of liberation, while obscuring the ideological subservience of mass movements and anti-apartheid intellectuals to capital and to the state. For example, even from a trade unionist standpoint (namely, in defence of its members), the post-apartheid institutionalisation of the once powerful Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), based on the promise of a future ‘development state’, proceeded with the neoliberalisation and globalisation of the apartheid economy, which resulted in the shrinking of its numbers.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, within the COSATU of the late 1980s, there were far more radical and transformative positions. But the point is that the decisions about, and strategies for, transition in South Africa are dialectically linked, but not absolutely determined, by economic pressures that are contestable. In other words, the economy is part of a terrain on which neoliberal ideas are reflected, but the terrain is not incontestable. The South African transition indicates the centrality of ideology in building a consensus around what has constituted the endings of apartheid.

On the surface, many of the prescriptions of orthodox transition studies can be applied to the South African situation. While taking note



of the demands from unions for economic redistribution and a social welfare system, O'Donnell and his colleagues advocated a neoliberal approach to economic policy, advising that a successful transition would need to separate social and economic issues from political democracy (polyarchy). By the 1980s it had become clear that, even more than a political amnesty, social and economic demands had to be elided to allow the old authoritarian regime and its backers to agree to an election and to accept its outcome. In the post-apartheid South African context, one key development that echoes the O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead model was the transformation – through co-option and marginalisation – of an apparently radical opposition movement into a pro-business group, advocating fiscal conservatism and free-market capitalism. The choice was not simply between a liberal pluralism and ethno-nationalism. In fact, as Fanon contended, both could and do co-exist, even if uncomfortably, in post-apartheid South Africa. With Mandela – the leader in whom the people put their trust – as the titular head, Thabo Mbeki, then foregrounding business and managerial interests, championed a technocratic approach as an answer to the problem of national development. And while Mbeki's presidency didn't so much represent the victory of liberal pluralism over ethnic nationalism (his African Renaissance employed an *ubuntu* rhetoric over its neoliberal framework and business model), the victory of an elite politics, of the ideology of technocracy, and of market-driven efficiencies over a politics of social needs and grassroots democracy, all represented the depoliticisation of politics and the suppression of grassroots, democratic voices.

In contrast to Mbeki's technocratic aloofness, Jacob Zuma came to power in an ANC that is built, at the local level, through patronage and vote banks. From a Fanonian perspective, the shift from Mbeki to Zuma has to be seen in the context of the crisis of national consciousness. Zuma's claim to be the authentic connection to the national liberation struggle – his rhetorical populism<sup>20</sup> (and ethnic) rhetoric – helped him to portray himself as a common person (and reinforced the idea of Mbeki as a distant and technocratic elitist). This enabled Zuma to tap into the anger of the multitude of rank-and-file ANC members and supporters, especially those who felt that Mbeki had not delivered.<sup>21</sup> The importance of Zuma's liberation credentials is not merely ideological but illustrates

the unfinished social character of the South African liberation struggle. Intrinsic to South Africa's homegrown structural adjustment programme was the containment of the mass movement. While co-opting the leaders of civic and trade union movements in the early 1990s, the government balanced the effects of neoliberalism on the poor with public-works programmes and welfare policies, such as the Child Support Grant and other welfare grants distributed at the local level. The degeneration of South Africa's liberation – into neoliberalism and social conservatism on the one hand, and individualism and ethnic traditionalism on the other – was presaged at the start. What specifically underlay the tension between Mbeki and Zuma in 2005 were the escalating social protests. Indeed, Zuma's election is in a sense a reactionary response to these. He was able to present himself as the rightful heir of the liberation struggle and at the same time, with a blend of ethno-populism, tapped into the discontent and rage rippling across the shack lands. Anthony Butler (2009) argues that Zuma's administration has veered rightward, economically, socially and politically. Economically, despite the rhetoric of the trade union movement that supported Zuma, the power of the Treasury is deeply entrenched and not budging. Socially, it is, as Butler puts it, 'the new era of social conservatism', one that envisions 'a fully fledged model of selective citizenship' with poor people, particularly women in the rural areas, only having access to community and collective services through 'traditional leadership'. In other words, far from any liberation, social conditions have remained the same, if not worsened. And politically, South Africa has become more authoritarian, more partisan and more dependent on what Butler (2009) calls an 'overbearing security apparatus'.

Perhaps what can be said of the ANC's fifteen-year reign is exactly what can be said of other post-authoritarian, social-democratic-type organisations in this period: not only have they 'talked left and walked right', as Patrick Bond put it, but even the talk begins from a conservative standpoint. But what really differentiates the ANC from other organisations in the transition from authoritarian rule can be seen in the ideological and territorial domains. Where, for example, Latin American authoritarian regimes of the 1970s claimed a national inclusiveness (against communist and terrorist aggressors), South Africa's apartheid regime claimed not only an inclusiveness, but also an exclusivity based on White

privilege. Thus, apartheid South Africa was run by a minority racist regime where the majority of the population were considered temporary sojourners in White South Africa, and the real quasi-national identity of most of the population was portrayed as tribal, with its geographic identity as the 'homeland'. The transition from apartheid was thus both a transition from authoritarianism, in the Latin American sense, and a liberation from a racially and spatially defined minority rule. Whereas the issue of national identity for the Argentinean or Uruguayan was very often taken for granted, what constituted identity for the South African, and what constituted the nation, were indeed the issues that were discussed in the struggles and the movements against apartheid. The legacies of those debates, and the promises of what the end of apartheid would bring, remain quite real in post-apartheid South Africa and turn on the most Fanonian of questions – namely the social and political, and indeed the economic, form and content of national liberation.

Because apartheid was considered the last phase of racial capitalism in South Africa, where the expropriation and exploitation of Black labour and land was key to its development, a radical restructuring of the economy was assumed to be part and parcel of the anti-apartheid struggle. The ANC's compromise with financial and mining capital, as well as with British and American political and economic interests, changed all this. By the early 1990s, the goal of deracialising civil society was uncoupled from the goal of fundamentally restructuring the economy. In other words, post-apartheid South Africa would create a multiracial set of beneficiaries that included some of the leaders and former leaders of the liberation movements, but would not benefit the majority of apartheid's victims.

The compromise with apartheid was particularly apparent in the rural areas, where largely undemocratic and despotic traditional leaders (many nurtured by the apartheid regime) were given a new lease of life by the transition. The compromise of democracy, indeed the sacrifice of democracy in the rural areas, took place simply for the sake of power (see Ntsebeza 2005). It showed up the fact that the ANC was essentially an urban organisation that needed to broker rural support. Believing that traditional authorities, especially the few who had been slightly critical of apartheid, were widely supported and could fulfil a local-government function by delivering rural support, the ANC embraced, fairly uncritically,

precisely those traditional authorities nurtured by the apartheid regime. In other words, these authorities were not willingly supported, but were rather buoyed up by force and fear, and as Lungisile Ntsebeza (2005) describes, rural votes were garnered by intimidation. In short, the tension between the post-apartheid Constitution and the Bill of Rights enshrining democratic principles on the one hand, and an acclamation of the role of unelected traditional authorities on the other was resolved in favour of the latter. Despite their previous role as apartheid's enforcers in the rural areas, traditional authorities have not only survived, but have won 'unprecedented power in rural governance . . . irrespective of the fact that a large number of traditional authorities became "stooges" of colonial and apartheid regimes' (Ntsebeza 2005: 296). In this context, the post-apartheid neoliberal agenda strengthened the undemocratic and patronage practices of the traditional authorities. For example, rather than providing an alternative, the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), born of the mass participatory civic movements of the late 1980s, simply reinforced the status quo, operating in a way that was remarkably reminiscent of rural chiefs and headmen. This should not be surprising, since the ANC compromise strengthened tribalism (and patronage), while its programme of land redistribution has not fundamentally challenged existing power structures on the land, where White farmers still hold feudal power over rural workers.<sup>22</sup>

Through a policy of coexistence (see Ntsebeza 2005: 297–9), the ANC took over rather than challenged apartheid rule in rural areas and has thereby made fundamental change problematic. The situation is particularly acute for women in rural areas, since they remain subject to patriarchal structures that treat women as perpetual minors. The South African Constitution promotes equal rights, but property rights in the rural areas tend to be controlled by men – a legacy of how women were bound to the reserves through forms of traditional male authority. Across the fluid rural/urban conceptual divide, unelected chiefs and headmen in the shack settlements continue to wield significant power and, with it, conservative notions of women's place, sexuality and role.

In addition, while post-apartheid South Africa is defined by class in many fundamental ways, it is also mediated by the real lived experience of being African, Coloured, Indian, Zulu, Xhosa, and so on, terms that

continue to have political and geographic relevance. In other words, while the Constitution promotes equal rights, in reality there is a plural practice that applies differently to different citizens. Poorer citizens – who are by definition marginalised politically – are treated not as citizens but as temporary sojourners (to use the language of apartheid), and are therefore more likely to have their rights trampled on.<sup>23</sup> Though constitutionally a democracy, South Africa is not a liberal democracy, in the sense of one law and one set of rights for all its citizens. As Mahmood Mamdani (1996) famously argued, the main urban residences are governed through civil law and rural residents are subject to customary law. On this point, it should be acknowledged that for the poor, the distinction between urban and rural areas is not so clear. It is not only rural residents who do not have equal access to rights; rights are not equally accessible to all urban residents either, as we shall see in the story of the shack dwellers told in Chapters 4 and 5.<sup>24</sup> The point, however, is not simply to abhor the imposition of top-down ‘democracy’ on the people, but to consider how the liberation struggle itself creates new subjectivities and new forms of grassroots organisation and participation from below.

#### WHAT KIND OF TRANSITION? WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY?

*The battle in the factories has not only strengthened the movement for change, but has also given birth to a type of politics which has rarely been seen among the powerless: a grassroots politics which stresses the ability of ordinary men and women, rather than ‘great leaders’, to act to change their world.*

— Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*

Social movements were central to making apartheid South Africa ungovernable in the 1980s and pushing the apartheid regime into negotiations. Of these social movements, the civic movements, including the youth as well as the trade unions, were particularly important, the latter becoming the focal point of opposition when other organisations were banned. It is worth remembering this moment of people’s power when everything seemed possible. There was a heady period for a few months in early 1986, writes Mzwanele Mayekiso (1996: 67), who was a

leading activist in Alexandra township, when apartheid rule was being displaced 'street by street, by our own form of self-government'. It was a liberating experience, though it did not last for long. Even at that high point, there were deeply authoritarian, anti-intellectual attitudes in the liberation movements that feared the development of grassroots democracy. The May 1986 call by the ANC to make South Africa ungovernable was radical in the extreme since it reflected the praxis of township activists, especially the youth, and had the potential to open up a notion of people's power well beyond the ANC's control. While ungovernability became a slogan, the mass activity that created it also developed new directions in self-governance. In Alexandra, this translated into attempts to develop a dual power structure where 'certain institutions normally under the arm of the repressive state could be liberated and made to work in ordinary people's interests outside state control' (Mayekiso 1996: 74). American academic Robert Price (1991: 191) finds the period of insurrection in South Africa akin to 'such uprisings as the Paris Commune in 1871, Russia in 1905, and Hungary in 1956'. Quoting Trotsky (who developed his theory of permanent revolution from his experiences of the 1905 revolution and the St Petersburg soviet), Price finds 'a process uncannily similar to that which would occur some eighty years later in the black townships in South Africa'. He goes on: 'Within this chaos there arose a need for a new order, and elements within that order began to crystallize. Regularly recurring meetings in themselves introduced the principle of organization. The meetings elected deputations, the deputations grew into representative assemblies' (Trotsky quoted in Price 1991: 192).

The insurrection in South Africa, in other words, created what Fanon calls a radical mutation in consciousness, simultaneously a liberation of consciousness and spaces of and for politics. Street committees became the basis for political participation, and 'people's courts' developed with the goal of actively involving local communities in discussions of justice that were educative and that resulted, as Mayekiso remarks, in lower levels of crime (Mayekiso 1996).

Thus, the ANC's call to make South Africa ungovernable in a sense simply recorded what was already happening outside of its control: spontaneous mass mobilisations, daily meetings and discussions about

possible futures. Similar activities were taking place in workplaces. In the factories, rank-and-file experiences of shopfloor democracy engendered education programmes in labour history, and the mushrooming of cultural expressions including worker poets and myriad forms of history recorded from below. These experiments in participatory democracy expressed a new social consciousness in Fanon's sense.<sup>25</sup> In Fanon's schematic mapping of anti-colonial activity, resistance is first determined by the coloniser; that is to say, the actions of the occupier 'determine the centers around which a people's will to survive becomes organized' (Fanon 1967c: 47). With mass action, a fighting culture develops, not as a celebration of the past, but as new forms of social activity, transforming the subjectivity of accepted ways of life expressed in daily meetings, decisions, discussions and actions into a new way of life. Issues such as education and language, as well as relations between children and adults, men and women, and even questions of sexual orientation, which had never been an issue for any of the liberation movements, were discussed. And by the 1980s, many hoped that such participatory democracy would become the basis of a post-apartheid society. As Frank Meintjies and Mi Hlatshwayo argued in *Staffrider*, worker culture expressed the 'union's anti-hierarchical position thus recognising the importance of every worker's experience'. They insisted that workers' self-understanding was a gird against the ruling class 'determin[ing] our thinking and actions' (Meintjies and Hlatshwayo 1989: 3-4).

The SACP intellectual 'Mzala was not alone when he considered these developments as a "form of people's government" at an embryonic stage' (1986: 10). Fanon notes that 'the enemy . . . at opportune moments . . . combines the policy of brutal repression with spectacular gestures of friendship, manoeuvres calculated to sow division, and "psychological action" . . . using agents provocateurs and practicing what might be called counter-subversion'. Instructions are then issued to the police forces to become more human and to 'throw in a few shillings too' (Fanon 1968: 136-8). This is precisely what happened in South Africa. For example, Joint Management Centres, combining security, intelligence and welfare, developed strategies to try to win hearts and minds while activists were tortured. Fanon argues that this is exactly the moment when 'knowledge of the practice of action' (1968: 147) is necessary. He argues

that the mindset of the revolt against colonialism is liberating at first: things are clear; it is 'us or them'. But, while ungovernability was spectacular and exciting, it was also often needlessly brutal and Manichaeian, and killed off space for thinking and self-reflection in the process. Exploiting this weakness, the apartheid government changed tactics. In Natal, for example, politics became a bloody rivalry; encouraged by the security forces, gangs of UDF-allied youth fought against gangs of IFP youth and vice versa. Membership of these gangs was based on locale or school, or on the way one dressed, and often had little to do with political differences.

Thus, while remaining critical of the class character of the elite pact, one must be wary of falling into a binary position – seeing mass movements as the answer rather than as a challenge to radical thought and praxis. Simply heralding mass movements leads, as Fanon argues, to opportunism. He couldn't have said it any more clearly.

However populist, the mass movements in the end expressed a contradictory class position that became abundantly evident once they were demobilised. The 'community', as Friedman points out, became 'elusive' (1993a: 8), and what had been represented by a single organisation (such as the Alexandra Civic Organisation) became contested by competing interests.<sup>26</sup> Without pressure from below, the anti-apartheid elites, wittingly or unwittingly, carried out capitalist plans, while the masses sank further into poverty. Marx elaborates on this class division between the real movement and the programme in his critique of the founding of the German Social Democratic Party in 1875.<sup>27</sup> In South Africa, once the real movement, expressed in the actions of people's power, had been defeated, rightward programmatic shifts were almost inevitable. Indeed, the elite pact represented wholly different class interests.

Marx argues in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that proletarian revolutions rise and fall only to rise again by constantly engaging in self-criticism. The problem is that these expressions and experiences of direct democracy, however flawed and limited in their practice, were, at best, celebrated but not translated into a radical, self-critical rethinking of liberation theory that mapped out paradigms of social and ethical practices for a post-apartheid society.<sup>28</sup> This ideological pitfall was exploited by ANC and SACP intellectuals who were able to



capture the narrative of liberation and applaud the idea of people's power as if they were its authors, while emptying it of philosophic meaning and remaining the self-appointed leaders and future negotiators.

While the apartheid state simultaneously dampened down activism and began working out transition scenarios, it also began secret talks with ANC leaders. Capital was flowing out of South Africa at an alarming rate (see Price 1991), and by the late 1980s, the crisis of the apartheid state pushed local business and multinational capital interests, as well as political leaders in the regime itself, to look for a viable alternative. Yet, because of the residue of mass action (and the fact that the threat of further action was claimed and exploited by ANC elites – as in 'only we can control the masses, so deal with us'), the strategy of elite-pacting included a partial and selective incorporation of representatives of the social movements in the negotiations. These included the trade unions (as part of the tripartite alliance of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP), though not the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) (the heir to the UDF). Eventually the expansion of the pact, a consequence of the mass movements themselves as well as the fear of a mass movement outside of the elites' control, produced the democratic Constitution, but did not, in fact, change the transition thesis. Indeed, by separating movement representatives from the movements, the rank and file and the leaders began to speak different languages. Enamoured by political power, they gave up real political power, namely ongoing participatory democracy from below. If it was at first hoped by some insider leftists that the inclusion of COSATU and the SACP, as well as the ANC's own principles as laid out in the Freedom Charter, would guarantee a different kind of transition – where the economic basis of apartheid would be fundamentally challenged and the working class institutionalised into the frameworks of the post-apartheid polity (Adler and Webster 1995, 1999) – that hope was quickly dashed. According to O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's (1986b: 46–7) idea of transition as a 'compromise among class interests', negotiation is always a capitulation to bourgeois property rights, and thus results in an institutionalisation of trade unions as 'governing of their members'. Moreover, this process is nothing other than a means to develop an ideological consensus, namely a hegemonic idea about what constitutes the end of apartheid. In South Africa, once the mass movements were

demobilised, the number of people included in the negotiations (that is, those admitted as insiders) was diminished.

The conventional concept of transition, as a transition to an electoral democracy or polyarchy, is starkly separate from social questions. Defined in terms of participation in elections, it has been a quantitative rather than qualitative change. Apartheid and post-apartheid society are, in other words, not opposites but operate along a continuum. Just as the US had a limited democracy (based on property, race and gender) in the nineteenth century, apartheid in South Africa was a democracy for Whites only. Indeed, before the 1894 Glen Grey Act, some Blacks had the vote; but from 1910 to 1961, the Union of South Africa had a Westminster-style parliamentary government in which Blacks were progressively disenfranchised. South Africa became a republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961, but apart from ceremonial changes (from a Governor General to a State President), Westminster-style constitutional arrangements continued. Inclusion was still based on race.<sup>29</sup> In 1984, a second republic, established in response to the growing trade union movement and the Soweto revolt, created an executive presidency and a racially defined, tricameral legislature. Legally deracialised, though not de-ethnicised, participation in post-apartheid South Africa after 1994 was open to all, though the actual ability to freely participate in elections has varied and continues to vary across the country.

Although the transition literature mentions the possibility of more radical scenarios in the picture of democratisation, they insist that political democracy (polyarchy) alone is a worthy goal 'even at the expense of foregoing alternative paths that would seem to promise more immediate returns in terms of socialization' (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986b: 14). This self-limiting goal is the South African transition in a nutshell. Whether the phrase is 'even at the expense' or 'there is no alternative', it silences the discussion of other scenarios. Where the struggle against apartheid had the effect of empowering a whole layer of disenfranchised people, polyarchy has the effect of disempowering them. Depoliticised, politics becomes at best the domain of the professionals, while the people are 'sent back to the caves' (Fanon 1968: 183).

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN THE 1980S: SPONTANEITY AND ORGANISATION OF THOUGHT

The South African case highlights what happens when theorisations of spontaneity and people's power do not happen,<sup>30</sup> when there is no dialectical relationship between spontaneity and organisation, when grassroots mass movements are reduced to 'mindless activism' and become little more than a chorus for the nationalist vanguard party. Fanon criticised spontaneity not because it needed leadership but because it lacked an organisation of thought, that is, a theory of liberation. His criticism of spontaneity was not directed at the movements themselves but at the laziness of the intellectuals who either ignored them or dumbed them down when serious analysis and engagement were needed.<sup>31</sup> Though democratic forms developed in other anti-colonial movements in Africa, the political leaderships subsumed them under a central administration. Confronting this 'iron law of oligarchy', Fanon argued for a vigorous decentralisation and a rigorous dissemination and flow of ideas between the organisation and the people. His view was that painstaking explanations and constant checking of policy and practice, based on the involvement of the common people in decision making, were crucial, and rested on a belief that the formerly damned of the earth have the ability and the interests to rule in the most open, inclusive and egalitarian way.

Without the swirl of ideas between spontaneity and organisation, the 'art of politics', Fanon argues, is transformed into 'the art of war': 'In every [locality] a government in miniature is formed and takes over power . . . Each man or woman brings the nation to life by his or her action, and is pledged to ensure its triumph in their locality. We are dealing with a strategy of immediacy which is both radical and totalitarian' (1968: 132).

The nation is proclaimed in each locality, and with it a certainty that people can pass from subject to citizen without a transition, in one fell swoop. Fanon argues that problems emerge when the immediacy of action takes the place of a 'chain of reasoning' (1968: 138). Such immediacy dovetails with a movement towards authoritarianism, and a concomitant narrowing of grassroots democracy and of the chances of ongoing discussion. Rather than confronting problems through deepening the dialogue, tactics become strategy and theory is reduced to slogans and

rhetoric. In Fanon's narrative of decolonisation, activism alone is likely to exhaust itself. The early euphoria dissipates as everyday resistance suffers the setback of no clear victory. Colonialist and corporate capitalist interests are forced to the negotiating table, while the nationalist organisation attempts to control the mass movement by telling them to keep faith with negotiations on the one hand and threatening them with a right-wing coup on the other. The grassroots movements are quietened and called on only to support negotiations.

What happens if we apply Fanon's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity to the struggles in South African townships in the mid-1980s? Among the township youth who were in the vanguard of the struggle, there was an unrealistic sense that the new society already existed, and that all that was needed was more action. Rather than challenge this exhausting and increasingly dangerous activity, the township Leninists, for example, proclaimed a people's war (Mzala 1987), treating the youth like cannon fodder. At the same time, the multiple bannings, arrests and states of emergency put an enormous strain on the liberation movement as a whole. State repression curtailed political discussion. The struggle between state and social movements became a battle for political space, where the brutality of the state was reflected back and internalised as a brutality of thought. Yet, even under these conditions, the contending slogans 'liberation before education' and 'education for liberation' indicated that ideas about 'what kind of education for what kind of liberation' needed to be discussed in a new way, acknowledging that the struggle is a school not limited to practical problems. Fanon argues that the Manichaeic analysis, which helped form so much of the first phase of revolt, is limited (see 1968: 135-44). Action based on reaction depends on the brutality of the enemy, so a shift in the enemy's tactics towards negotiation necessitates a re-evaluation that is in fact long overdue. This is when ideological underdevelopment becomes crucially important and is exploited by the state. Political education, at first, means explaining the long-term objectives of the fight, as well as developing a new dialectical attitude towards the movements from below in which education becomes part and parcel of the creation of the new social individual.

The lack of mediation expressed an ideological limitation of the mass movement. Unable to go forward, doubt crept in. Militants looked for

an analysis and an interpretation of where they had come from and where they were going, but the ANC and UDF (later the MDM), as well as the PAC and AZAPO, were never able to provide such an analysis beyond their own vanguardist presuppositions. Rather than a reworking of theory in the new reality, the ANC's call to make the townships ungovernable was based on both the military option and the negotiation option. Both encouraged psychological processes of disempowerment by articulating the stuff of politics outside the people's own activities. The hope that 'MK is coming'<sup>32</sup> expressed another 'immediacy' that blocked mediations of the mind. Consequently, exhausted by endless activism, the direct democracy of the civic movement easily degenerated into factions and self-appointed leaderships that would brook no disagreement, producing what Fanon (1968: 147) called a 'brutality of thought'. On the other hand, the intellectual activity that had accompanied the actions of the civics and unions was slowly diverted back into ANC strategies and the newly formed SANCO quickly became subservient to ANC hierarchies. Under the pressure of unity, alternative ideas were seen as dangerous. The external leadership of the ANC had always argued that its strategic goal was to force the apartheid government to the negotiation table. The call for ungovernability became a tactic to create an atmosphere of chaos in order to create an opening in the negotiations. It was an expensive tactic, as the rank and file of the movement, without further discussion, simply became its cannon fodder. Indeed, when the period of negotiations began, the possibilities for debate about a future South Africa became further curtailed and suspended in favour of an elite compromise and an agreement on economic policy 'that would exclude half of the population from a solution that was really aimed at resolving the corporate sector's long-standing accumulation crisis' (Terreblanche 2003: 98). Anti-apartheid politics, which had been presented as a multi-class alliance, immediately took on a class character. At the local level, in contrast to the period of people's power in the mid- to late 1980s, when the goal was to destroy Black local authorities (or make them unworkable), by the early 1990s, the goal became participation in local government. Movement activities became subordinated to this goal as incipient local political elites jostled for position.

Certainly the SACP played an important role during the 1980s in suppressing alternative views. Yet much of the opposition movement also remained trapped by the SACP's crude Marxism, and its Manichaean debating style was crippling to new intellectual currents. Even though many were critical of the SACP/ANC's two-stage theory, and of the ANC's promises of economic redistribution, they remained stuck in the tactics of the anti-apartheid struggle. And, in the context of the states of emergency imposed by the government in the late 1980s, the brutality of the regime, aided by its agents provocateurs and third forces, ensured that violence would turn inward, as described by Fanon, thus nurturing a culture of brutality and making an emergent dialectic of liberation all the more difficult.

The ANC followed O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's suggested scenario, curtailing the activity of the mass movement to a supporting role in the negotiations. Although there is a great deal of difference between being called on to make the townships ungovernable and to support negotiations, the need to carry out party orders unquestioningly applied equally either way. As Fanon opines: 'The party, instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontent, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people . . . forms a screen, and forbids such ideas . . . frequently reminding the people of the need for "silence in the ranks"' (1968: 183).

Immersed in populist rhetoric, top ANC leaders nevertheless recognised the divide between what had been agreed upon vis-à-vis national and multinational capitalist interests and what had been promised to the masses. The point was to not give up the old populist rhetoric but to attach it to the new reality by insisting that politics should be left up to those who understood the subtleties of negotiation – an insistence that echoed a line that SACP theorists had used against the workers (and the workerists), that they didn't understand the complexity of politics and, without the party's leadership, couldn't develop more than a trade union consciousness. By the early 1990s, former workerist intellectuals, now closer to power, were attacking their own legacies, as well as undermining the rich memory and culture of direct democracy developed in the 1970s and 1980s through the 'relentless participation' of shopfloor organising.<sup>33</sup> As worker poet, Matserane Chimurenga Wa-Mapena, put it:

When we fight for a living wage  
You call us communist  
When we reason  
We are treasonably ungovernable  
You forget about our constitutional rights  
How soon you forget.<sup>34</sup>

#### THE LEFT'S IDEOLOGICAL CAPITULATION

*National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people . . . will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Perhaps even more astounding than the ANC and SACP's elective affinity with neoliberal, globalised capitalism has been the speed of the ideological capitulation of South Africa's independent left. To understand the marginalisation of the left and its project of transforming South African society, it is necessary to retrace the end stages of apartheid. For it is at the point of apartheid's 'opening' (which can be dated from the unbanning of the anti-apartheid organisations and the release of Mandela in February 1990)<sup>35</sup> that the ideological underdevelopment of the movements and the unpreparedness of the intellectuals became crucial, especially as the logic of elite compromise began to control the process. Between February 1988, when the democratic opposition was made illegal, and February 1990, when Mandela was released, COSATU and the UDF represented the internal anti-apartheid movement. On the face of it, one would think that this would bolster the power of the unions. Yet they had already become ideologically subservient to the ANC and thus were distancing themselves from the idea of grassroots control, turning their focus to elite representation while the ANC busily discussed deals with multinational mining interests behind the scenes.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, while the class character of the movement seemed assured by pro-worker rhetoric, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe underlined its ideological confusion. Stunted by the SACP's dominance in theoretical matters, the workerists had always emphasised practical action. And while militants

had advocated independent trade unions, and had, for example, supported the Polish organisation, Solidarnosc, critical analyses of 'really existing socialism' were left in the desk drawer.

Apartheid's opening coincided with the collapse of Communism. The collapse had a debilitating effect on the ANC, SACP and their supporters, who were left in an ideological vacuum. The accompanying disillusionment, argues Dale McKinley (1997: 105), 'combined with the new conditions of negotiation, made the movement more susceptible than ever to a strategic and ideological accordance'. The SACP for its part addressed the collapse of Communism in three ways. The first was a defensive Stalinist reaction, which had resonance among some militants (see Jordan 1990). The second, developed by SACP (and ANC) leader Joe Slovo (1990) and mirroring Communist parties in Europe, was to move towards a middle road of social democracy, an idea that dovetailed with the views of other ANC leaders. The third position, slightly to the left of Slovo, was developed by a leading party intellectual, Jeremy Cronin, who had been elected to the Central Committee of the SACP in 1989, and became the editor of the *African Communist* in 1990. Cronin's approach was akin to that of Eurocommunism of the 1970s and 1980s, gesturing towards a pragmatic Marxism (influenced by the French intellectual Louis Althusser, especially his reading of Gramsci's idea of hegemony) in place of the SACP's more hard-line Stalinism. Rather than Slovo's appeal to liberals, Cronin's 'theoretical reconstruction enabled the SACP to deny anything more than "mild Stalinism" and hold on to the banner of Marxism-Leninism' (Nash 2009: 177).<sup>37</sup>

What was clear was that none of the three options offered a fundamental reassessment and, despite rhetoric to the contrary, they were all schooled in the positivistic realities of the world market, which meant that politics and the need for a compromise with capital would be guided by an elite compromise. The formerly critical, anti-Stalinist, Western, Marxist left also failed to critically reflect on the new situation and, instead, many swarmed to join the SACP. One of the great ironies of the early 1990s was 'the rapid movement into the SACP of a large grouping of leftists' who had been the SACP's strongest critics (Morris 1991: 16). Too enamoured with the structures of power, South Africa's critical Marxists were unable to develop their very reason for being,



namely the capacity for critical reflection (Nash 1999: 79–80). Coming from organisations and intellectual traditions that had formerly been at odds with it, the SACP appeared to many to be the one remaining place where left intellectuals had relevance.<sup>38</sup> Thus a replay of Fanon's critique of the 'laziness' of intellectuals that undergirds his analysis of the pitfalls of national consciousness became apparent with the collapse of Communism.

The centrifugal pull of the independent left to the ANC and SACP included strident workerists and independents such as Alec Erwin (Minister for Labour in the new ANC government) and Moses Mayekiso (of the National Union of Metal Workers), who had been instrumental in developing a workers' charter (as a counter to the Freedom Charter). Key leaders of civic organisations who had previously had an independent base were also among this group. Tragically this shift came at exactly the same time as the SACP was justifying a strategic compromise with capital and pushing the logic of neoliberalism (and thereby forging continuity in terms of the South African state's servicing of the interests of big capital and the mining companies). The ANC's ability to control popular participation was crucial. By the 1980s, promoting a polyarchic-democracy discourse (Robinson 1996) became part of what Peter Hallward (2005) calls the 'politics of containment', and was often aided by a social-democratic-leaning or populist and centralised party (such as the ANC with its rhetoric as the party of liberation) led by a charismatic figure (such as Nelson Mandela) and fully allied with multinational capitalist interests. The concept of civil society became central to a US-backed 'second independence' in Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s as the World Bank linked good governance to a new round of structural adjustment. In response to the gathering crisis in apartheid South Africa, Robinson (1996: 330) argues that a key element of US policy in the mid to late 1980s was the creation of a programme designed to support moderate black leadership and marginalise radical black leadership and, in the words of USAID, 'broaden understanding of the free market system and prepare black business owners, managers, and employees for success in a post-apartheid South Africa'. Robinson's summary of the goals of the various co-ordinated democracy-promotion projects reads like a road map for post-apartheid South African development and includes: (a) supporting

an emergent Black middle class; (b) supporting the development of a nationwide network of grassroots community leaders among the Black population that could win leadership positions in diverse organs in civil society and compete with radical leaderships; and (c) the cultivation of a Black business class that would have a stake in stable South African capitalism, develop economic power and view the White transnationalised fraction of South African capital as allies and leaders (Robinson 1996).

Thus brokered, the South African transition followed this elite transition scenario almost to a T. Yet, it should be remembered that the silencing of the mass movement *had to be homegrown*, and had to come from within the liberation movement. To silence oppositional thinking, the ANC elite traded on its claims to be the sole and historical representative of national liberation, thus rendering illegitimate any movement or individual that denied or challenged this. In time, the civic organisations became mere pressure groups co-opted into the ANC's patron-client political structure, delivering community support in exchange for 'development' handouts.

But while the disillusion and disbanding of a critical left seemed to come all at once (Morris 1991), it had its roots in the ANC and SACP's ideological dominance in the unions (COSATU), and in the civics and youth organisations (UDF). Though these organisations continued to contain independent views, the independents were not able to match the organisational power of the ANC/SACP. In other words, it is the ANC/SACP's hegemonising ability to marginalise other discourses that remains central in post-apartheid South Africa. Caught within this bind, the independent left remained trapped by the dominant discourse and isolated from the rank and file of the movements. It was incapable of finding a new element through an engagement with the contradictions and problematic of the revolt itself. The independents were thus unable to develop a positive programme through 'the school of the people', as Fanon put it (1968: 127). It was this estrangement (and the physical and temporal gap) between the radical intellectual and the people that Fanon traced in *The Wretched* (1968). Unless developed into a humanism – a social and political programme that addresses the elemental needs of the mass of people and includes them in the very discussion of the nation – national

consciousness, national renaissance, etc., become empty slogans, cynically repeated at rallies and anniversaries with the goal of advancing the interests of a new huckstering elite. This trajectory has been repeated all too often in African revolutions, including in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead of national consciousness becoming a basis for a new internationalism, what we have seen, as Fanon foretold, is its degeneration and the development of new xenophobias, new regionalisms and new tribalisms, all in the context of a capitulation to the accumulation of capital.

By the mid-1990s, talk of fundamentally restructuring the economy had disappeared, as the ANC explicitly embraced a monetarist approach. Mandela himself reflected this change: after his release from prison, he declared that it was inconceivable for the ANC to modify the Freedom Charter, but by 1991 he insisted that the 'ANC was not an enemy of private enterprise' and was determined to 'create the necessary climate which the foreign investor will find attractive' (quoted in Terreblanche 2003: 92). However, speaking to union delegates at a COSATU special congress in September 1993, he warned: 'How many times has the liberation movement worked together with the workers, and at the moment of victory betrayed the workers? . . . You must support the African National Congress only so far as it delivers the goods.'<sup>39</sup>

But on May Day 1994, Mandela again made clear his economic policy: 'In our economic policies . . . there is not a single reference to things like nationalisation, and this is not accidental. There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist ideology' (quoted in Marais 1998: 146).

And by 1996, *The Economist* could reassure its readers that the ANC weren't scary socialists at all, but part of a new Black elite accumulating the 'outward symbols of prestige . . . that so mesmerise status-conscious whites' (quoted in Saul 2005: 211). In part, the contradictory character of Mandela's statements reflected who he was speaking to, but the trajectory of his remarks was quite clear.

After experiencing neoliberal South Africa's war on the poor, it is difficult to look back at the ANC's early economic policy without a degree of nostalgia. Certainly in retrospect, the 1994 RDP seemed progressive. Yet, the RDP represented a shift away from a more radical social-democratic paradigm. Begun as a debate within COSATU, it spoke of the need for

government to nationalise strategic areas and establish new public corporations. However, the later RDP White Paper dropped all discussion of redistribution and embraced the free-market system, privileging private entrepreneurship, initiative and competition. In other words, the RDP already contained a significant neoliberal agenda. Pressures from mining capital, for example, were not counter-balanced by pressures from mass mobilisation, since the ANC had either demobilised popular power or brought it under party control. These shifts were also not in a separate realm from the ideological, as Marais (1998: 244) has aptly put it: ‘The discourse of “reconstruction and development” has also been enlisted as the broad ideological frame for another hegemonic project geared at servicing the prerogatives of the more privileged sectors of society.’

In other words, the technocratic left who had pinned their hopes on an interventionist state had been hoodwinked. The same state would intervene as a promoter of a neoliberal agenda geared towards serving the more privileged. This prerogative would become abundantly clear with GEAR. Unlike the RDP, which was developed with some input from left intellectuals, GEAR was introduced by decree without any discussion even among ANC cadres. Perhaps this fact alone explains why some intellectuals remain nostalgic for the RDP and see a fundamental divide between it and GEAR policies. At the time, some (ex-insider) intellectuals still hung onto the idea that GEAR could be progressive.<sup>40</sup>

Under the guise of fiscal conservatism that would see redistribution only as a result of never-never trickle-down policies, GEAR did herald a new stage of attacks on the poor, even if some of these policies were already being established in the transition years. GEAR was a structural adjustment programme that emphasised making basic services profitable through corporatisation and privatisation, and encouraging a flexible labour market (part-time, casual and low-paid). With GEAR, the ANC made explicit its shift away from any claims to social democracy and into the embrace of a Thatcherite ‘new Labour’. This shift meant that the challenges of extreme inequality and debilitating poverty, and the demands of social movements that helped bring it to power and continued to vote for it, would be ignored.

PESSIMISM OF THE INTELLECT IN THE INTERREGNUM

*The more a dominant class is able to absorb the best people from the dominated classes, the more solid and dangerous is its rule.*

— Karl Marx, *Capital*

Many on the South African left had articulated the hope for some kind of social democracy. Even the populist Freedom Charter spoke the language of direct participation and was tied to the idea of a structural change in the ownership of land – ‘all who work on it’ – and in the control of factories – ‘by the people’. Yet post-apartheid South Africa abandoned all these goals. The neoliberal agenda has reinforced the deep inequality of the society inherited from apartheid and colonialism, and legitimised the regime of capital accumulation on which it was based.

At the same time, the space for an oppositional politics to develop has been severely curtailed. Instead, a whole layer of experienced organisers from civic organisations and trade unions has been co-opted by government departments, headhunted by NGOs, or bought off by BEE opportunities, creating a significant loss of seasoned activists and helping to sow ideological confusion. Always a minority, the far left has become extremely marginal, having been taken off guard by the speed of events. By the late 1990s, there was little space available to offer criticism of the ANC, and where there was criticism it was largely dismissed as ultra-left or counter-revolutionary.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in the 1990s the ANC seemed to have become completely unassailable, having successfully legitimised its elite pact, and traded on the respect given to it by suppressing criticism. For example, the militancy of the 1998 ‘Year of Fire’ strike action was all too easily subsumed into a COSATU ‘job summit’ which, despite all its rhetorical opposition, ended up endorsing GEAR. This development indicates how the institutionalisation of the trade unions had seriously weakened rank-and-file participation. The culture and consciousness of shopfloor participation, once held as sacrosanct by the workerists of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and COSATU, had been compromised. Many began to regard the unions as a kind of privileged sector, from which the non-unionised, the unemployed and the poor find little benefit.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, among the formerly unionised there is a cynicism that the unions are interested only in collecting monthly dues

and have abandoned those workers who lost their jobs as factories closed down. While some unions have fared better than others, all have capitulated ideologically to the ANC and have experienced a loss of autonomy and membership. Subsumed under the weight of its leadership, critical voices in the unions are rarely heard. By the late 1990s, COSATU was almost fully institutionalised (both formally and informally) (see Buhlungu 2010), and the union leadership in government had too much to lose if it left the government. By the late 1990s, the social movement unions of the 1980s had become business unions, and O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's (1986b: 12) almost counter-intuitive insight that the participation of unions might result in 'an increase rather than a decrease in the overall inequality' had become reality.

Ultimately, what was largely missing from the transition debate was an analysis of the consequences of the ideological capitulation that was seen as necessary for a limited or controlled transition. Resistance was reduced to reconciliation with reality and, with the transition to bourgeois democracy, it seemed that the end of the dialectic and the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1993) was reached.

What was, and is still, needed is a critical analysis of the ideas that necessitated ideological capitulation. The idea of hegemony (Gramsci 1971) should not foreclose a discussion of a fundamental reorganisation of society, but should reconfigure such a discussion into the development of a counter-hegemonic project, or perhaps better, a principled, humanist one. This discussion depends on a relationship between the intellectual (understood as a social group) and the lived reality of the mass of South Africans as they think about the pitfalls of South Africa's liberation. What Gramsci called 'the philosophy of praxis', or what Fanon called the 'untidy idea' of self-determination, is both movement and goal, both a consciousness full of contradictions and an absolute humanism. The committed intellectual is a product of this contradictory relationship (Gramsci 1971: 445; Fanon 1968: 150). The need to think through what kind of society one wants to fight for is a necessary part of the freedom movement. In one sense, a moment of praxis was reached in the 'Durban moment' of the mid-1970s, where, on the one hand, White leftists worked with Black workers to form independent trade unions while, on the other hand, young Black intellectuals organised in the townships and schools

under the umbrella of Black Consciousness. Both movements were underscored by significant anti-elitist and anti-Stalinist trends, as well as implicit ideas of a future society. Another key moment was the rise of people's power in the townships in the 1980s, when there was tremendous excitement about ideas of a popular, participatory socialism. These ideas never became the basis for a new kind of organisation that would also prefigure a new 'society', but were subsumed by directives from above. The necessity to think through what kind of society one is struggling for does not happen without a conscious concept of organisation, as well as a commitment to organisation of thought, a philosophic clearing of the head and a confrontation with past failures. Put simply, focused on the immediate, the transition in South Africa did not include a full discussion of such future scenarios. To problematise the certainty that 'there is no alternative' to a neoliberal, globalised, capitalist economy with its laws, orders and mind-forged manacles, we have to reassess the very openings created by the movements against apartheid, not only as symptoms of the crisis of South African society in the period between the old and the new, but also as fields and processes of contestation.

The possibility of redistributive reforms (the strategy of much of the South African left) is suddenly implausible. What does this say about democracy? It underlines how the democratic transition in South Africa is about power, about creating consent behind predetermined socio-economic policies. As Gramsci (1971) argues, hegemony is ethical, political and economic. The focus on economic interests directs our attention to how power works. The transition became a private event to which the mass of people involved in grassroots movements were not invited. In contrast, the social and political programme that Fanon says is a necessary aspect of national liberation is developed through dialogue that is transparent. In Fanon's sense, the praxis of what he calls humanism is an utterly different notion of democracy, a radical movement that must constantly deconstruct the workings of power.

Post-apartheid South Africa has become much the same as other parts of Africa, where the mass of people experience the daily anti-humanism and economic authoritarianism of structural adjustment and its political enforcement. The homegrown neoliberal shift in South Africa has created more unemployment than employment, along with an ideological

justification for this.<sup>43</sup> It has shifted the blame for poverty from the apartheid state to the free market, and thus on to the poor themselves, making poverty the fault of the individual and obscuring the real structural legacies of apartheid and colonialism.

As mentioned earlier, however, ideology is not simply an illusion or a matter of false consciousness; it is a lived experience. The creativity of cognition is especially fertile in periods of crisis and uncertainty, aptly characterised by Gramsci (1971) as an interregnum. In this situation, ideology plays an exaggerated role. The battle of ideas in culture and in politics becomes extremely important; the organic (or organisational) linkages and threads between grassroots movements and radical ideas, between the popular and the revolutionary become critical. The new reality engendered by the mass movements (its new subjectivities) demand new concepts. This new beginning, while located in the activities and democratic self-expression of the social movements, also seeks, by entering into the 'field of contradictions' (see Gramsci 1971: 405), to transcend them. South Africa proves the importance of Gramsci's adage, 'optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect' (1971: 175n). In the movements against apartheid there was plenty of optimism of the will, and many were willing to die for the cause but, in the analysis of the transition, there has not been enough critical intellectual work. The technicist hopes of institutionalised class compromise are not only counter-productive but also obfuscating, subsumed under state capitalism calling itself socialism.

One aspect of hegemony is the degree to which dominant groups name reality. At one level, ANC leaders can go on for years speaking the language of the struggle, and the SACP can wax elegiac about socialism; thus, both help to create confusion and to deflect social pressures away from government and elite interests. At another level, the government can continue to use co-opted trade unionists, civic leaders and ideologues, as well as enforcers of its policies, to 'act as a bulwark against any bid to mount overt, leftist challenges against government conduct and policies' (Marais 1998: 264). The distorting of the rhetoric of liberation to enforce pro-business economic policies is in fact a legacy of the contested terrain of the early 1990s. As Jeremy Baskin (1991: 465) warned, where the unions had earlier been accused of being communists, in the post-apartheid era 'the charges will be packaged differently: there will be less talk of



“communist” and more of sabotaging national reconstruction’. At another level, however, the ANC’s continual reference to ‘the struggle’, even if it is to create ‘silence in the ranks’ (Fanon 1968: 183), betrays a deeper insecurity. For the establishment of hegemony requires the silencing or marginalising not only of other ideas, but also of other ways and other processes of thinking.

In the 1970s, Steve Biko had probably contributed more than anyone else to the development of a counter-hegemonic ideology. Understood as an idea, rather than in a narrowly organisational sense, Black consciousness was, as I argued in the previous chapter, absolutely central to the new stage of struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though there has been a tendency to play down and rewrite the contribution of Black Consciousness, one of its most astute critics, Neville Alexander (1993: 41), argues that Black Consciousness ‘made it possible for the youth especially to understand how the cultural revolution was an integral and a decisive part of the struggle for the total liberation of black people’. Biko’s category of ‘the mind’ as a potent factor in the process of liberation (1978: 83) has too often been dismissed as a psychological category, limited to a phase in the process of liberation, rather than representing an ongoing problematic. Black Consciousness found some of its most exciting and sustained development in cultural productions, where part of building up the self-confidence of the people became an expression of everyday reality and an envisioned future. This new stage of consciousness, and confidence that apartheid was dying, was realised in the township revolts of the 1980s, but since it did not become a new beginning for radical thought, it reflected the interregnum where the new could not be born. Therefore, when the collapse of Communism occurred, it immobilised not only the SACP-allied left, but also the small independent South African left. There was no philosophical reckoning; instead, as the transition got under way, the intellectual left either drifted closer to the SACP or was drawn away from politics by the newest theories emerging from Europe. The nationalist elites outmanoeuvred the radicals in the ANC and the MDM, while filling the discourse with technical rhetoric.

Thus, while many who struggled against apartheid in the 1980s hoped that such participatory democracy could become a basis for a post-apartheid society, this was never raised to a philosophic principle that shifted the ground of reason. The intellectual straitjacket of the ANC and

the SACP remained. In fact, during this period the sphere of cultural production, poetry not political theory, proved the best expression of this elemental democratic form. Fanon viewed local expressions of direct democracy as both a strength and a weakness. As I have argued, Fanon blamed the weaknesses of the movement on the anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals rather than on the so-called backwardness of the masses, pointing to the absence of the political education of the educators in the programmes of the political opposition. Too often celebrating the Manichaeian certainty of the struggle, they failed to see its inner contradictions and trajectories. Thus, for Fanon, the 'strength of spontaneity' refers both to mass activity and its theorisations, both of which help the rebellion reach beyond itself towards a self-understanding. As Fanon puts it, it is 'the essence of the fight which explodes old truths and reveals unexpected facets, which bring about new meanings' (1968: 247). In short, changes occur at the intersection of spontaneity and organisation within the framework and epistemic structures of intellectual communication and exchange, and they flow from the resources the people draw on as they reflect on their revolutionary experiences. Such an explosion of old truths and new meanings needs patient nurturing and organisation.

Before I conclude this chapter, I want to address one related and major issue that comes up in subsequent chapters as well: the problem of organisation. In terms of creating a living organisation (what Fanon calls '*un parti organique*'), the profound problem has been the intellectuals' inability to understand their estrangement from the people. This problem has been compounded by an anti-intellectualism masquerading as pseudo anti-elitism, such that one dumbs down to the so-called level of the people, rather than attempting to simplify the language or technical jargon one uses, and to speak a language that people understand. There is absolutely no basis for the claim that, after the radicalising experiences of the 1980s, South Africa's dispossessed are not interested in political ideas. At the same time, there is also no reason to think that discussions of ideas have not been taking place among the dispossessed. The very movement of people and their multiple subject positions – as rural labour in the homelands, as migrants in the hostels, as workers, as unemployed, as township and shack dweller activists, etc. – create fertile ground for the exchange of ideas. Such a subterranean movement of ideas often yields

incipient organisations. But it is not simply a question of organisation – far from it. It is a question of the type of intellectual sediment that remains after the death (or absence of its original members) or the defeat of a movement such as people's power in the 1980s.

It is clear from Mayekiso's (1996) account of his work in Alexandra township that critical ideas were important and that organic intellectuals were created out of the people's-power experience. And it was precisely these organic intellectuals, the best people of the dominated classes, that the ANC government sought out as its spokespeople. In some cases, a position in local government was the pay-off for years of struggle, while for others the pay-off was for keeping quiet, especially as mass movements were sidelined – it was a choice of being in the game or in the wilderness. SANCO provides just one example. As a grassroots democratic organisation emerging out of the township movements of the 1980s, the movement should have stood on its principles, namely bottom-up democracy, during the early 1990s. Instead, it withered as an independent organisation and, since 1994, has been transformed into its opposite – a hierarchical and patronage-based organisation that enforces ANC policies and acts to contain poor people's struggles.

#### OR JUST ANOTHER COUNTRY?

As the rhetoric of the national democratic struggle dissipated into that of an African Renaissance – which appeared increasingly threadbare by the late 1990s in the face of the material reality and increasing pauperisation of masses of people – new struggles began to develop out of necessity. Whether such movements would be allowed to progress (and in doing so hear their own voices manifest a 'higher conception of life', as Gramsci [1971] put it) and whether intellectuals could hear these voices and aid this development remained a crucial question. For all the sacrifice and struggle, post-apartheid reality is a disappointment, closing off radical thought. Not one of the Freedom Charter's promises has been realised. Yet the realisation of the disconnect between rhetoric and reality did begin to challenge a few radical intellectuals to return to the source, the struggles for freedom and try to engage the cerebral sediment in people's experiences. Just as ongoing struggles over the production of the past

include the recovery of radical democratic ideas, cultural forms and experiments in the people's struggle for a new way of life, the struggle over the production of the present includes the articulation of new ideas of liberation.

Ideological hegemony of a limited transition has remained crucial to present-day South Africa, where resistance without a concurrent battle of ideas moves along familiar lines, reproducing old ways of being and thinking. A critical engagement with South Africa's transition has also made clear that what remains central is not what Fanon's thesis on national liberation is often remembered for – namely, the cathartic effects of violence – but rather his sharp critique of the nationalist project. He envisioned a humanist programme at the heart of the project of national liberation, built on the experience of direct democracy and participation. Without this, he argued, the national liberation project was doomed to retrogression.

Are the problems of post-apartheid South Africa unique or is it just another country repeating the experiences of other African independence movements and other transitions from authoritarian rule which have been unable to extricate themselves from the structures and discourses of old regimes? Did the South African anti-apartheid elite have a choice? Did it willingly jump into a homegrown structural adjustment programme and BEE, or was it pushed away from a genuine redistribution that would attempt to rebalance and redraw the social and economic map of apartheid? While the negotiated settlement provided the framework for the continuation of the class structure, which has been made all the more hegemonic through the development of a Black middle class, the larger question that remains is, how long will the masses of Black people in South Africa wait for fundamental improvements in their lives?

It turns out, as we shall see in the following chapters, that new struggles challenging the pitfalls of national consciousness would not come from the organised working class – the force that had fundamentally changed the political landscape in the 1980s but lost power in the 1990s. Rather, it would come from those outside the formal class system, in short, from post-apartheid's underside: the excluded, marginalised, the 'damned of the earth'.

# 3

## The new ‘reality of the nation’

### *The rich and the poor*

*People who had given everything, wonder with their empty hands and bellies, as to the reality of their victory.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In the previous chapter, in reaction to those who argued that the ANC had no alternative but to implement a neoliberal transition in the context of the Washington Consensus, I discussed the strategic choices and ideological pitfalls of the political class that took over state power in South Africa after the end of apartheid and implemented its own homegrown structural adjustment programme. Much of this transition, I argued, had been scripted by political science ‘transition literature’ and much of it was proactive, mapping out what should be done to establish a pacted, elite democracy, overseeing neoliberal economic policies. From another vantage point I argued that Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* is perhaps one of the most perceptive and undervalued critiques of this transition scenario.

At the end of his critical chapter ‘Spontaneity, its Strengths and Weaknesses’, Fanon writes, ‘The people find out the iniquitous fact that *exploitation can wear a black face*, or an Arab one, and they raise the cry of “Treason”! But the cry is mistaken; and the mistake must be corrected. The treason is not national but social’ (Fanon 1968: 145, my emphasis). I want to consider this ‘social’ treason by looking at the logic of South Africa’s self-limiting political transition from apartheid in light of Fanon’s

humanism. In doing so, I shall also be turning to Marx. I argue that both Marx and Fanon are grounded in the concrete struggle of ordinary people, and pose a theoretical challenge and an ideological alternative to the existing (bourgeois and elite) transition, which, in Fanon's terms, simply 'wear[s] a black face'.<sup>1</sup>

In South Africa, humanism has become important in the battle of ideas claimed by liberals, radicals and Africanists. What is noteworthy is that the spaces to debate ideas about the possibility of new humanisms are developing, even if the discussion is limited and detached from the reality of ordinary people's lives.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the measurement of how far we've come since the end of apartheid is considered in stages, focusing on constitutional changes made and the standards of middle-class life in civil society. The lived experience for many in post-apartheid South Africa is either bracketed off or also considered in stages, reducing liberation to a question of access to basic services.

As part of this dialogue, I want to suggest another standpoint by returning again to Fanon's dialectical methodology. The dialectic for Fanon was alive: it was about lived experience, but lived experience not only as existential suffering but as resistance, revolt and struggle reflected in actuality and in ideas. His famous criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre, for not understanding the lived experience of the Black, alludes to a methodological difference I want to underline here: that between synthetic thought and negativity. Though Sartre was not a liberal but a radical, this difference is essential to a proper understanding of Fanon's dialectic (Gibson 2003). While Sartre's argument concerning Negritude appears dialectical in that negation is eventually subsumed into a higher synthesis, he makes light of Hegel's insight that all negation tends to see itself as absolute and lends momentum to the dialectical process. Sartre only imposes a mechanical schema: thesis = White / antithesis = Black / synthesis = multiracialism (in the sense of cosmopolitanism<sup>3</sup> rather than non-racialism<sup>4</sup>). Because, for Sartre, Black consciousness merely contributes to this inevitable and pre-existing goal, Fanon felt that Sartre had curtailed possible future action and undermined Fanon's subjectivity. In other words, Sartre the existentialist had forgotten the specificity of the lived experience of the Black, reducing it to what he called a minor term in the dialectic; he had simply sublimated the specificity of Black lived experience into a pre-existing

abstract universal term, the proletariat. Interestingly, Sartre also creates a division between race and class, thus skipping their specific – that is, experiential and logical – interrelatedness.<sup>5</sup> For Fanon, the dialectic is a movement that develops through contradiction and struggle rather than one that elides them. Translated politically, Fanon's dialectic can be seen as the difference between the radical mutation in consciousness that is created by a movement emerging from below as it works out its ideas in the untidy politics of open discussion and disagreement, and the formal consciousness that characterises a movement whose pre-existing meaning is given in political directives from above. For Fanon, national liberation could not be given but is a product of political action and agency. After all, for Fanon, a dialectic of reciprocity, made concrete in terms of a national liberation movement against colonialism, is not reducible to the dialectic of labour, although one cannot deny its centrality. Fanon is not simply replacing one dialectic (the anti-colonial) for another (the class struggle) but, through a logic of interpenetration, deepening each. The result is a much more open-ended or, as Fanon puts it, 'untidy' dialectic that is best understood in a social context. At least, that is where Fanon saw the possibility of freedom, the realisation of which is never automatic but requires communication that is guaranteed only by what Fanon calls the 'consciousness of self' (Fanon 1968: 247). Thus, Fanon hammers away at the inadequacy of national consciousness,<sup>6</sup> for it is at the very moment that the victory over colonialism seems to be won that a more serious problem appears: exploitation that wears a Black face.

This chapter begins with the question of emancipation and the trap of seeing Black political empowerment as proof of South Africa's triumph. Using Marx's argument from his (1843) essay 'On the Jewish Question',<sup>7</sup> I argue that Black political emancipation in South Africa is not full emancipation because it leaves the state of human emancipation unfinished. Rather than offering a critique of economic policy, I then move to a consideration of Fanon's idea of the 'uselessness' of the national bourgeoisie and to the issues of agency and resistance, by re-engaging both Marx and Fanon's conceptions of emergent subjectivities, namely 'the poor' who are no longer in quotation marks but are self-representing. Finally, noting Fanon's engagement with Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), I argue that Fanon's critique of the nationalist

bourgeoisie's 'social treason', seen through the lens of 'Black political empowerment', is a call for committed intellectuals to rethink the ground and sources of humanism.

#### THE INADEQUACIES OF POLITICAL EMANCIPATION

*Now it must be said that the masses show themselves totally incapable of appreciating the long way they have come. The peasant who goes on scratching a living from the soil, and the unemployed who never find employment do not manage, in spite of public holidays and flags, new and brightly-colored though they may be, to convince themselves that anything has really changed in their lives.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

*In a tram one night, facing me, a Black. He was a Black tall as a pongo who tried to make himself very small on a tram seat. On that filthy tram seat he tried to abandon his gigantic legs and his starved boxer's trembling hands. And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose was like a peninsula off its moorings; even his négritude was losing its color through the effects of a perpetual tanner's bleach. And the tanner was Poverty . . . He was COMICAL AND UGLY. COMICAL AND UGLY, for a fact. I sported a great smile of complicity . . . My cowardice rediscovered!*

— Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*

Political emancipation, writes Marx in 'On the Jewish Question', is certainly a big step forward in terms of what he calls 'the prevailing scheme of things'. This offers a good way to think about South Africa after the end of apartheid, where formal political equality and universal suffrage were seen as enormous steps forward in the prevailing situation. But it is *the prevailing scheme of things* – the South African state (inherited from apartheid) and the disciplining whip of capitalist neoliberal globalisation – that remains the determinant.

In 'On the Jewish Question', Marx argues that the limitation of political emancipation is reflected in a lack of social and economic change, and emanates from the growing social isolation in a society where, as he puts it later, the fetishism of commodities rules, reifying and crushing



social relations, creating 'material relations between persons and social relations between things' (Marx 1873/1976a: 166).<sup>8</sup> How this essay speaks to us today has to do with Marx's conception of political and human emancipation in a society where the individual leads an *imaginary* life as a citizen of the state and a *real* life as an alienated and monadic isolated being, an object of the capitalist economy. While Marx's essay does not have much to say about political economy because he had yet discovered neither the key to political economy (namely alienated labour) nor identified the proletariat as the key to its critique (that would come in the following year), it gives us some important insights into the dialectic of political and human rights. It is his critique of the limitation of civil rights that I want to focus on here; in particular, the paradox that political empowerment within the state is simultaneously proof of a mighty step forward and of disenfranchisement – that is to say, the absence of human liberation.

In contemporary South Africa, political rights won with the end of apartheid correspond neatly with Black political empowerment, that is to say, a universal franchise that elected an African nationalist organisation, the ANC. Because Black political empowerment in the South African state occurred as just that – *within* the South African state inherited from capitalist accumulation, based on segregation, dispossession and circumscribed political rights as individual egotistical rights based on private property – it indicates the degree to which the mass of Black South Africans have remained disenfranchised. This is not a personal issue – an issue of which Black leader is to blame – but, as Marx puts it, it is an issue of the 'sophistry of the political state itself' (Marx 1843/1975: 221). That is to say, Black political empowerment within the state in no way constitutes the negation of the state, but the very opposite: a 'perfection' of the state as a fetishised power, and thus its emphasis as an apparently 'neutral' and transcendental object that just needs to provide services by working more efficiently. Critics rail against the problem of corruption, for example, rather than seeking its source in the limited human emancipation of Black political empowerment within the state. This contradiction stems from the problematical character of the category of political emancipation, in which the political life of the people is relegated to a voting block, a mere means of reinforcing 'the egoistic self-interest of

those in possession of the material and social means to exercise their rights in society (Marx 1843/1975: 226). This class determination is only one side of the equation. The other side of the equation is that people's political and civil rights are abrogated as soon as they come into conflict with the dominant political and economic interests.

It is particularly interesting that in the South African situation, the ruling party continues to use the language of race and nation in its trumpeting of the free market, while at the same time it narrows race to a political phenomenon disconnected from capitalist reproduction. This failure of post-apartheid South Africa to address economic inequality has been widely discussed (Bond 2004; Terreblanche 2003) and touched on in the previous chapter. My point here is that any talk about fundamental structural change in the economy has become limited to the discourse of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), a discourse that supposedly promotes the development of a Black capitalist class.

#### THE TWO MBEKIS AND THE USELESSNESS OF THE BOURGEOISIE

*True liberation is not the pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact. Liberation is the total destruction of the colonial system, from the pre-eminence of the language of the oppressor and 'departmentalization', to the customs union that in reality maintains the former colonized in the meshes of the culture, of the fashion, and of the images of the colonialist.*

— Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*

In 1956, Nelson Mandela argued that the realisation of the Freedom Charter was inconceivable without the 'smashing up' of the financial and gold mining monopolies. The 'democratisation' of these monopolies, he added, would 'open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class' (Mandela 1956). Over 50 years later, it is clear that such democratisations have not happened. Instead, post-apartheid South Africa has seen the development of only a 'small class of unproductive but wealthy black crony capitalists' (Mbeki 2009a: 61). In a critique of BEE, Moeletsi Mbeki, Thabo Mbeki's brother, makes a

compelling case that contrary to what many believe, BEE is not simply an ANC invention but a neocolonial policy (with roots in the Urban Foundation established by Harry Oppenheimer of Anglo American and Anton Rupert of the Rembrandt Group, after the 1976 Soweto rebellion).<sup>9</sup> Mbeki argues that BEE was developed by national and multinational corporate capitalism 'to co-opt leaders of the black resistance movement by literally buying them off with what looked like a transfer of massive assets at no cost. To the oligarchs, of course, these assets were small change' (2009a: 67). The rise of more new (US dollar) millionaires than in any other African nation (in fact, the fourth most in the world in 2008 [SA Goodnews 2008; see also Gumede 2007: 179]), alongside state-funded BEE schemes, has helped create a powerful and rich Black elite, which, though small in number, are not exactly small change. Moeletsi Mbeki's point is well taken: 'Overall BEE is crony capitalism . . . Most of these so-called business leaders are agents of white capital, hand in glove with the state; they aren't entrepreneurs . . . Our country is undergoing very rapid de-industrialisation under the joint influence of its lack of entrepreneurial ability and Asian competition.'

Continuing in a neo-Fanonian vein, Mbeki notes:

There was a wide sociological gap between grassroots activists and the leaders of the struggle. The latter did very well out of it, because they took over the state. They and their children now make up the ranks of the emerging middle class . . . The government spawned an enormous bureaucracy which was spectacularly successful in feeding off these resources, without creating work for the wider population (quoted in Rivière 2008).

The result of such attitudes (which in a Marxian and Fanonian sense see the state as a great prize) is that the state is simply a means of accumulation. Patronage and corruption are the consequences. Though Moeletsi Mbeki doesn't go deeply into the political implications, BEE and the curtailing of democratic voices in exchange for social grants creates a vast and stigmatised 'urban underclass', which, he adds, is a 'ticking time bomb' (2009a: 87–8). There is no race solidarity: Black capitalists are just as exploitative as White; in fact BEE companies have been among the worst

labour law violators (Gumedé 2007). Corruption and patronage are not simply a consequence of BEE; rather BEE is a consequence of a limited transition that 'allows' a minority of the Black population to feed off state resources,<sup>10</sup> the logic of which is of patronage, corruption and exploitation.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this Fanonesque critique, Moeletsi Mbeki remains convinced that a South Africa that makes a populist alliance with the trade union movement and local businesses offers the best chance to get beyond what he calls the mercantilist stage. But, he adds, this historic opportunity to build an indigenous bourgeoisie was missed by the ANC, which instead embraced a comprador BEE deal with international finance and mining elites. In other words, the elite compromise stifled indigenous capitalism, and neoliberal policies have resulted in the destruction of local industries. In terms of the South African situation, Mbeki is right to point out that with neoliberal open markets came a flood of cheap goods from China, which aided the de-industrialisation of South Africa and the loss of semi-skilled jobs that had been created by the 'development-state' model of the 1960s and 1970s. In Mbeki's view, for capitalism to develop, it has to be rigorously supported by the state (which is akin to the old import-substitution model) and devoted to the accumulation of capital (based on the availability – through high levels of unemployment – of cheap labour). Thus Mbeki does provide a new perspective. The old problem of the accumulation of capital and technological backwardness is addressed through the creation of cheap, skilled labour. Yet the problem for the nationalist bourgeoisie remains: it can't become an 'authentic' bourgeoisie, because it can't accumulate capital. Part of the problem, argues Fanon (1968), is not only capital flight, but that that capital doesn't circulate to the colonies unless investors are given assurances that guarantee not only a high yield on their investments but also direct access to government.

In other words, Thabo Mbeki was not simply duped by powerful White mining capital, but was a willing participant in the programme to create a small Black capitalist class at the expense of the majority of the population. Moeletsi Mbeki disagrees with the result but not the goal. The reality is less clear. While White capital continues to hold most of the key decision-making positions, there is a small, super-rich Black elite that is not simply made up of compradors. The creation of such an elite

does raise questions about Fanon's proclamation that the creation of the bourgeoisie is a waste of time. Is Fanon's an *a priori* critique of the bourgeoisie, or is he critical only of its corrupt and unproductive mimicry in Africa? For example, in *The Wretched*, he argues:

The theoretical question that for the last fifty years has been raised whenever the history of under-developed countries is under discussion – whether or not the bourgeois phase can be skipped – ought to be answered in the field of revolutionary action, and not by logic . . . The struggle against the bourgeoisie of under-developed countries is far from being a theoretical one. It is not concerned with making out its condemnation as laid down by the judgment of history. The national bourgeoisie of under-developed countries must not be opposed because it threatens to slow down the total, harmonious development of the nation. It must simply be stoutly opposed because, literally, it is good for nothing. This bourgeoisie, expressing its mediocrity in its profits, its achievements and in its thought, tries to hide this mediocrity by buildings which have prestige value at the individual level, by chromium plating on big American cars, by holidays on the Riviera and weekends in neon-lit night-clubs (1968: 175).

Three possible positions emerge from a reflection on Fanon's statement that the bourgeoisie must be opposed because they are good for nothing. The first, which I would call 'Fanon lite', reflects Moeletsi Mbeki's position, namely that Fanon is, in fact, not against capitalism or the creation of a bourgeoisie *per se* but specifically against a huckstering and corrupt, at best mercantile, 'middle-man' caste. In other words, Fanon, in this view, is in favour of an 'authentic', risk-taking, productive and innovative bourgeoisie. The second and more pragmatic position is represented by the bourgeois 'stageist' socialists (not limited to the SACP) and the radical nationalists. This position holds that Fanon was pragmatically in favour of the development of a popular and non-corrupt national capitalism (perhaps a form of planned state-capitalism and import-substitution) that could help the nation escape the poverty trap, develop a national economy and create the economic basis for socialism.

The third position is what I would consider a radical Fanonian position. It is critical of any form of economy whether it be called capitalism or socialism (in its African, social-democratic or 'soviet' form) that is based on the exploitation of labour (that is politically directed and enforced from above). After all, Fanon is critical of those regimes that rationalise exploitation in the name of the nation, the struggle or as a 'sacrifice' for some future socialism. He is the most Marxian when he is critical of alienated and exploited labour, envisioning a society based on the principle that the human being is 'the most precious of all possessions' (1968: 99). Based on the struggles of the 'damned of the earth', what could the poor, in a radical Fanonian sense, possibly bring to the development of capitalism but their long-term degradation wrapped in the dream of making entrepreneurs of themselves? Already alienated from land and cattle, and made into cheap and surplus labour, they have certainly experienced 'accumulation through dispossession' (Harvey 2003: 137-82) and have become, in Thabo Mbeki's words, 'not required' by modern society. What then can the poor possibly bring to the development of capitalism other than being, in Marx's expression, its 'gravediggers'?

Fanon insists that a radically new humanism is possible. What is needed is rethinking from the bottom up. And this is precisely the thing the bourgeoisie cannot do because

the fact is that everything needs to be reformed and everything thought out anew . . . Perhaps it is necessary to begin everything all over again: to change the nature of the country's exports, and not simply their destination, to re-examine the soil and mineral resources, the rivers, and - why not? - the sun's productivity . . . Let's be frank: we do not believe that the colossal effort which the underdeveloped peoples are called upon to make by their leaders will give the desired results (1968: 99-100).

Fanon acknowledges that the situation of the newly independent nation is fragile, encircled and in permanent danger. The deepening of national consciousness as a social and humanist project, nevertheless, begins under these conditions, just as the intellectual's work begins from the principle that 'we need something more than human output' (1968: 99, 247).

Thus, while Moeletsi Mbeki's (2009a) argument that BEE is nothing but a deal created by South Africa's 'economic oligarchs' to 'co-opt leaders of the black resistance' who make 'a small class of unproductive but wealthy black crony capitalists'<sup>12</sup> might well be a perfectly Fanonian description, both Mbekis agree that building a bourgeoisie and developing capitalism in South Africa is still *the* answer. In this vein, the former president insists:

we abandon *our embarrassment* about the possibility of the emergence of successful and therefore prosperous black owners of productive property . . . and think and act in a manner consistent with a *realistic response to the real world* . . . As part of our continuing struggle to wipe out the legacy of racism we must work to ensure that there emerges a black bourgeoisie (Mbeki 1999; my emphases).

To be sure, this call to be 'realistic' in the face of the real world is a necessary one, but Thabo Mbeki presents the problem as simply a matter of psychological will,<sup>13</sup> as if race and class are no longer complicit in the reality of post-apartheid South Africa, and the accumulation of capital is not at its roots. *In reality*, the idea of Black empowerment has become increasingly 'nativised' and commercialised, dislodged from the political and socialised conceptualisation developed by Biko's Black Consciousness in the 1970s with its focus on community programmes, stressing instead a pragmatic and retrograde use of ethnic culture. BEE is essentially a conservative project that acts against empowering poor communities by naturalising poverty and reinforcing the neoliberal status quo. If BEE adds a wrinkle to the idea of Black political emancipation, it is only to reinforce how narrow and limited that emancipation has been.

Coupling the psychological critique with his philosophical humanism, Fanon points out that the elite's compulsion to 'prove ourselves' (as Thabo Mbeki argued) is neither correct nor reasonable but a 'nauseating mimicry' of colonialism (Fanon 1968: 95, 311), with its ideology of 'possessive individualism' reflected in the narcissistic self-fixation of 'me, me, me' (Fanon 2008: 187), which reduces *being* to *having* (Fanon 1967a: 44).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Marx also speaks of the reduction of being to having as a key

element of capitalist reification. He argues that this subsumption makes us

so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when we directly possess, eat, drink, wear, inhabit etc., in short, when we use it . . . Therefore all physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of all the senses – the sense of having. So that it might give birth to its inner wealth, human nature had to be reduced to this absolute poverty (Marx 1844c/1975: 352).

If this sounds too much like a moral imperative, let's not forget the 'real' materiality of *not-having* in contemporary society, which reduces being to nothing, and also the materiality of the revolt of the non-being and the have-nots, namely the material poverty of the poor in the *real* world of South Africa.

With the recognition of political rights, therefore, the majority of South Africans have in no way risen above the material horizon of social inequality upon which the apartheid state and economy developed. In this context, Thabo Mbeki's conception of 'the real' (abandoning the embarrassment of being a successful black capitalist) remains a fairy tale that elides the debilitating legacy of apartheid – namely exploitation and poverty. But let's not kid ourselves. Such rhetoric is steeped in what Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah once called the fetish of the 'gleam' of power and commodities (Armah 1968), replete with the BMWs and jet-setting cosmopolitanism that goes along with it. This 'gleam' always ignores or covers over the reality of exploitation and the pauperisation on which it is built. It is an elite gaze and ethical standpoint, which is privileged to elide the most basic human commitment without any kind of 'embarrassment' (even in a bourgeois moral sense) at not accounting for the well-being of the other. With this sleight of hand, the idea of liberation is transformed into the egotistical market-based activity that is indeed 'stupid and one-sided'.

But it is not simply the number of Black millionaires or Black managers or a critique of corporate tokenism that is at issue here. The project to create a Black capitalist class is a serious one. The Black



bourgeoisie Mbeki speaks of is not made up of the street traders or car guards; its members are not found in the informal economy that the World Bank and its ideologues<sup>15</sup> tout as the basis for economic empowerment for the poor, or even in the micro-financed saving schemes; the very lifeblood of capitalist reproduction is not petty entrepreneurship but human labour and the expropriation of African land.

Let's be honest about what Thabo Mbeki calls the 'legacy of racism': South Africa's wealth is directly correlated to the quite literal exhaustion and destruction of African labour. What Marx calls capitalism's 'werewolf hunger' for labour is vividly represented in South Africa's gold mines, for example, which remain central to multinational South African capitalism and which, as Bolivian tin miners famously put it, 'eat us' (Nash 1993). But the distress created by the legacy of apartheid and repackaged by neoliberal capitalism is universal, not partial, and includes 'hidden', and often gender-specific, labour – domestic, household, subsistence, informal and casual – which has been crucial to South Africa's 'development' in general and to its mining profits in particular. Distress is seen everywhere and is not restricted to towns, but extends to rural districts where great expropriations of land fundamentally undermine attempts at self-sufficiency.

If the end of apartheid abolished apartheid laws, it did not end the law of capital. It certainly did not free the majority of Blacks from having nothing to sell but their labour, nor has it ended the pauperisation of labour, employed and unemployed. Indeed, one could say that it has, in fact, expanded the law of capital. Despite the empowerment of a Black elite, or perhaps because of it, working people, unemployed and employed, have not been freed from the discipline of waged labour. After all, the terms *surplus labour* and *surplus population* are not limited to apartheid but express realities of neoliberal capitalism, where, for example, the popular victory against the pass laws has become, in the post-apartheid period, the perpetual motion of people. From the rural areas and also from the cities there is, as Stephen Greenberg (2004: 31) puts it:

a circling mass, forever seeking ways to make ends meet amid the wealth of Africa's wealthiest city . . . As fast as the globally competitive agricultural economy is spewing out and driving them towards the cities, the cities are ejecting them and pushing them

to the margins. The formal economy relies on this vast surplus labour army.

In other words, in its neoliberal phase, present reality is mired not only in the legacy of apartheid and segregation, as policies that control people's movement and labour are being reconfigured under the rhetoric of 'free market', but is also rooted in the reality of a South African capitalism which, having been built on the backs of Black labour, is now, in its post-apartheid phase, becoming increasingly 'post-industrial'. Thus, Thabo Mbeki's need to forget about the embarrassment and to embrace 'the gleam' of capitalist success and material accumulation is a very colonial idea in which 'the Black is in every sense of the word a victim of white civilization' (Fanon 1967a: 192).<sup>16</sup> In the face of the inhumanity of poverty, the wealth and opulence of the comprador bourgeoisie are indeed, to use Fanon's moral term, 'scandalous', particularly because they are founded on slavery and nourished by blood (Fanon 1968: 96).<sup>17</sup>

In his 1956 speech given to the first congress of Black writers, Fanon wonders about the emergence of a 'post-racial' society. He says that 'for a time it looked as though racism had disappeared. [But] this soul-soothing, unreal impression was simply the consequence of the evolution of forms of exploitation' (Fanon 1956/1967: 37). This change – from overt to more subtle forms of racism – is seen in the discourse about the poor in South Africa. Under apartheid and colonial rule, the African poor were poor because it was 'their nature as Africans'; today the African poor are poor because it is 'their nature as the poor'. In today's multicultural South Africa, forgetting the fact that 90 per cent of the poor are Black simply indicates the assumed logical relationship between poverty and race: that the language of apartheid has been replaced by the colour of money and the language of corporate capitalism and markets. It is not only the fact that exploitation can wear a 'black mask' and that racism can take many forms that indicates how deeply racism is embedded in South Africa's socio-economic structure, and consequently how these structures are constantly produced, reproduced and reinforced.

Moreover, just as Black elites seek political empowerment in the state, Black political emancipation is not emancipation from racism because it leaves the state of human emancipation unfinished. Wasn't this exactly

what Fanon was talking about in his critique of the pitfalls of national consciousness, namely that the nationalist bourgeoisie can achieve political empowerment in the state without transforming *the state of reality*? Thabo Mbeki himself has gestured towards such a conclusion in a paper titled 'The Historical Injustice' delivered just after Steve Biko's death in February 1978. After referring to Fanon's critique of the senility of the national bourgeoisie, Mbeki argues that 'black capitalism, instead of being the antithesis, is rather a confirmation of parasitism with no redeeming features whatsoever, without any extenuating circumstances to excuse its existence. If you want to see a living example, go to the Transkei' (Mbeki 1978: 10). This is certainly in direct contradiction to the 'reality' he refers to after the ANC gains power. Yet, the imperative to 'go to the Transkei' remains a moral imperative centred on seeing a living example of an objectified and suffering humanity, rather than experiencing the grounded 'reality' of elemental resistance in the Transkei. While the difference between this and the earlier Mbeki quote about embarrassment remains politically significant and can be attributed to the differing political contexts, it betrays his synthetic thinking that cannot be excused by reference merely to different political contexts.

For Marx, *the principle* of contradiction and the incompleteness of liberation are not only the limitation of the new political leadership, but also what he calls 'the nature and the category of political emancipation' (Marx 1843/1975: 226). The class character of this determination is reflected most clearly in the reduction of the political and civil life of the people to flag-waving support for those in power who speak in the name of the people. This is to say that as a member of civil society the individual is apolitical or, as Fanon argues in *The Wretched*, depoliticised, to be brought back only at scripted events to legitimate the political elite. Meanwhile the party becomes simply administrative, encouraging an administrative (and technicist) mentality towards the people, with leaders such as Mandela acting as figureheads (the revered father of the nation). The social life of the masses qua political actors is thus abrogated in favour of an individual and politically *anti-social* and *depoliticised* 'representation'.<sup>18</sup> In practice, when civil rights come into conflict with the political life of the country – that is, when they threaten the administrative life of the party – they are trumped and violated. The loyalty of the opposition is therefore

decided in advance, and in the end, loyalty to the party trumps everything else, with mass action defined as disloyalty to the party, the nation, the revolution, and so forth. Politics returns to the Manichean paranoia of the previous period. And as the regime sees threats everywhere, the byword becomes 'those who are not for us are against us'.

Marx's (1847) dictum – the more powerful the state, the more political the nation – seems to be correct, for the ruling class must use all its abilities and ideological obfuscation to depoliticise the danger. The state, as the World Bank has recently shown, is more, not less, important as an enforcer of neoliberal privatisation and the party remains its 'unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous and cynical' representative (Fanon 1968: 171). Fanon maintains that the leader who had stood for 'moral power' and who, in almost a dreamlike way, had embodied the aspirations of the people, plays an important role, pacifying the people through drunken celebrations of liberation (1968). The calendar becomes full of 'freedom days' while 'the party, a true instrument of the power of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilized' (Fanon 1968: 165, 171–2). In South Africa, the authoritarian apartheid state was taken over by the ANC and the authoritarian strands of the apartheid National Party and the ANC 'made common cause' (Desai 2002b: 26).

The question for South Africa is: what are the new social forces in Fanon's sense, and how can those who have nothing to lose, and are excluded from the political game, challenge the hegemony of this dominant party?

#### THE POOR

*At first . . . England tried to abolish pauperism by charity and administrative measures . . . [where] charity is cunningly combined with revenge of the bourgeoisie in the poor laws . . . Then it came to see in the progressive advance of pauperism not the inevitable consequence of modern industry but on the contrary the consequence of the English poor rate. It regarded the universal distress merely as a specific feature of English legislation. What was previously ascribed to a lack of charity now began to be attributed to an excess of charity. Finally, poverty came to be regarded as*

*the fault of the poor themselves, and consequently they were punished for it.*

— Karl Marx, 'Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform by a Prussian"'

In 1844, Marx discovered, so to speak, the proletariat. Of course, class struggle existed throughout history, as he puts it most famously in the *Communist Manifesto*.<sup>19</sup> But it was the actions of the Silesian weavers in 1844, who not only smashed up the machines, like the Luddites before them, but also tore up property deeds, that caught Marx's attention and generated for him new theoretical threads. For these 'backward' weavers, turning against not only the visible enemy (the industrialists) but also against the hidden enemy (the bankers) manifested for Marx a new stage of consciousness and organisation that went beyond the 'more advanced' English and French workers' struggles of the time (Marx 1844a; see also Dunayevskaya 1958). Marx thus found, in the social actions of the German poor, the key that enabled him to conceive a praxis in contrast, not only to the elitism of the social reformists and bourgeois socialists who, through administrative methods, wanted to make pauperism a 'national institution', but also to his former comrades (today's vanguardists) who assumed the German poor needed to be taught to see beyond 'their hearth, their factory, their district'. Rather than playing schoolmaster, the educators themselves needed to be educated by the actions of the weavers. 'The cleverness of the German poor', Marx adds in a dialectical quip, 'stands in inverse ratio to the cleverness of the poor Germans' (Marx 1844a).

Marx had already indicated the importance of the actions of the poor two years earlier, in his first economic essay of 1842. In this article about the legislation against wood-stealing, which again took up the cause of the poor – a class, he says, 'who occupy the same position in civil society as dead wood does in nature' (quoted in Van Leeuwen 1972: 192) – he champions the rights of custom and communal tradition over the property rights of rising capitalism and 'primitive accumulation' or, to put it in modern parlance, the right to the commons, to communal land, market-gardening and subsistence farming against enclosure and privatisation.<sup>20</sup> With the worldwide struggles against contemporary 'primitive accumulation', struggles around land, water privatisation, eviction, and electricity

cut-offs, Marx's question remains: 'if every violation of property . . . is called theft, is *not all private property theft?*' In other words, if privatisation of the commons is by definition theft, then the principles of justice (based on private property) are themselves based on theft – 'the law lies and the poor are sacrificed to a legal lie' (Marx 1842/1975: 228). Two years later (in 1844) Marx takes a crucial step. The German poor he had been defending in his journalistic writings had gone further than the politicians and expressed a practical solution to the theoretical problem of alienation. Although they were not versed in the discourse of politics, it was not the isolation from the political community that had moved the German poor, but their isolation from their own physical and spiritual life. In short, the actions of the Silesian weavers gave Marx's philosophical humanism a human concretion grounded in the materiality of necessity; they beckoned a new humanism – what Marx in *Capital* calls 'new passions and new forces' for the reconstruction of society where 'human power is its own end' (Marx 1873/1976a: 928). These new passions and forces were manifested not in the realm of parliamentary politics, but in the immediate struggles of the poor from which a new basis of 'truth' is found.

In South Africa, the power of co-option and the sophistry of inclusion – in other words, hegemony – are far more sophisticated than in nineteenth-century Prussia, but the tactics are similar. Despite the fact that the quality of life of the majority of South Africa's population has not improved since the end of apartheid, the ANC remains hegemonic and has won every national election. Even after a number of Mbeki loyalists split off from the ANC to form the Congress of the People (COPE) after Zuma's election as leader of the ANC, it made little dent in the ANC's continued dominance in the general election of 2009.<sup>21</sup> Critics have pointed to a number of factors to try to understand this phenomenon: the lack of a credible national opposition; the continuing ability of the ANC to call itself the party of liberation and to call on its left – ANC militants, the SACP and COSATU – to support it and its claim to legitimacy, which makes a vote against it 'illegitimate'; the continuing importance of patronage and vote banks in guaranteeing voting blocks; the continuing importance of a politics of ethnicity in voting and the power to co-opt and buy off dissent or, if necessary, ruin oppositional movements.

I have already mentioned how Fanon speaks of the myriad ways in which claiming legitimacy 'for the people' makes illegitimate those who oppose it. Here I want to rethink this issue with Marx's point about the Silesian weavers in mind; namely, that elite parliamentary politics – which involves the majority of the population in a brokered vote every five years – works to depoliticise, fragment and reify social consciousness, encouraging 'privatised' and isolated (that is, alienated) thinking, and has very little to do with concrete, everyday struggles of common people and their isolation from their own well-being. This doesn't directly answer the question of how the ANC remains electorally hegemonic, but it begins to shed light on the limitations of the apparent consent, which is based on a combination of force, patronage, delivering votes and the lack of a credible opposition. Furthermore, the ANC, asserts Ashwin Desai, creates schizophrenic feelings: 'If Thabo Mbeki comes around, or Mandela, to remember the 16 June Soweto uprising, people still see the need to go to the meeting and chant the slogans of the party of liberation: the ANC, slayer of apartheid. But the next day they are fighting evictions, and denouncing the ANC as a party of neoliberalism' (quoted in Spaulding 2003: 488).<sup>22</sup>

'The people' are right on both counts: The ANC did fight apartheid and was a party of liberation, but it is now the party enforcing evictions and electricity cut-offs. Rather than the people's collective schizophrenia, the reality expresses the schizophrenia<sup>23</sup> of the ANC, which 'talks left but walks right' (Bond 2004).

Positivist social science studies – especially those that derive attitudes from voting patterns and surveys – cannot deal with this 'schizophrenia', and Marxists often have trouble with it too, speaking of a 'false consciousness' and stressing the division between what Marx calls 'in itself' and 'for itself consciousness' (Marx 1847/1976: 211).<sup>24</sup> I do not think that false consciousness is a particularly useful way to go about trying to understand the issue. It leads not only to the search for a 'true consciousness' (with which false consciousness is contrasted), but also to the thinking that the potentiality of a 'for itself consciousness' exists outside of the experience of the oppressed, and is something they should have almost in a categorical sense, and thus something that should be brought to them from the outside (by the party, the intellectual, the

leader, and so forth, rather than as something that is a product of struggle).<sup>25</sup>

I want to return to Marx's understanding of 'truth' as emerging from the Silesian workers' actions – actions which upset old categories and ways of thinking, and serve as a basis for Fanonian practices.<sup>26</sup> For it is the practical questions of everyday life that compel the dialectic, even if, at the same time, what the oppressed often say in their everyday discourse is contradictory and, in Gramsci's sense, 'common sense' (1971: 421) – or as Marx put it, the question of truth is a practical question (Marx 1845b/1975). By focusing on the 'spontaneous philosophy of the multitude' (Gramsci 1971: 421), which contradicts society's dominant ideas, we arrive at a social situation that emphasises social struggle, illuminating the difference between the poor – fragmented, alienated, repressed and literally beaten down – and *the poor* as an active community collectively fighting cut-offs and evictions through group action. After all, for Marx, material conditions create social consciousness, but it is the real struggles of necessity that create new ways of thinking; grassroots struggles over housing in the cities not only change subjectivity, but also change the way we think and speak about the poor and about a politics of the poor.

In Marx's terms, such struggles pit right against right – the abstract right of property against the concrete right to live in the city – and just as Fanon railed against the dead abstractions of European liberal humanism, Marx, too, considered the concrete humanism that emerged from the movements for freedom far more important than proclamations of universal human rights. For example, he argues that the question the workers had raised in the struggle for the eight-hour day – 'when does my work day end and *my day* begin' – was greater than what he called 'the pompous catalogue of the inalienable rights of man' (Marx 1873/1976a: 416). The simplicity and brilliance of the workers' conception, and Marx's understanding of it, remains extraordinarily relevant in the context of the low-wage, long hours of seasonal, casual and 'flexible' sweated labour that characterise the working life of most of the world's population, for whom the demand 'jobs for all' does not address the question, 'What kind of labour should human beings do?'<sup>27</sup> Just as the simple questions that have emerged in response to the ANC's vaunted 'house'-building



programme, 'What constitutes a house in post-apartheid South Africa?' and 'What will I do when they cut off my electricity?' are vital philosophical matters. Indeed, the issue of what kind of labour human beings should do goes to the core of human rights, and for Fanon, like Marx, it touched on the issue of truth itself.

In *The Wretched*, Fanon first poses the unemployed, the poor and the starving peasant as 'the truth' because, unlike the moral universalism claimed by European colonialism, and often mimicked by nationalist leaders, the oppressed (when listened to and taken seriously) understand the most practical human questions. Rather than being a discourse on individual morality and bourgeois right, 'truth', Fanon maintains, 'is the property of the national cause'. Truth, in other words, emerges in the social struggle against the dominant powers and is thus 'that which hurries up the break-up of the colonialist regime' (Fanon 1968: 50). In this sense, perhaps South Africa's 'poor' are akin to Fanon's starving peasants, who, taken for granted by the party of national liberation, marginalised and outside the postcolonial system, 'have nothing to lose' (Fanon 1968: 61). And it is precisely from these 'truths' – the 'detritus and dead wood' of society, who constitute the Achilles heel of post-apartheid South Africa – that social action, in all of its contradictoriness, emerges as a new expression of subjectivity, a self-conscious poor not only as force but also as reason. Of course, Fanon understood that the poor could be bought off with a couple of kind words and a few crumbs – their consciousness was rudimentary and subject to manipulation by the powers that be (Fanon 1968: 138–40), and in this sense they can become the fodder for nativist and reactionary politics. But he also emphasised the power of new concepts that can be born in the struggle, and that can help set forth 'a new person' (Fanon 1968: 316). It is this contradiction that must be kept in mind and is essential to Fanonian practices.

One example of the possibility of a new consciousness was caught by Ashwin Desai (2002a). Around the new millennium a new generation<sup>28</sup> of often quite local and localised social movements began erupting.<sup>29</sup> The title of Desai's book, *We Are the Poors*, came from a woman, Girlie Amod, involved in a struggle against eviction at a housing estate in Chatsworth in Durban: 'We're not Indians, we are the poors.' The exclamation captured the imagination of the moment. It was not only a

response to an ethnic slur (that is, divide and rule) by an ANC councillor, but like Fanon's description of the Black sugar worker in *Black Skin, White Masks* who cannot consider proof other than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery and hunger, the statement represents an implicit philosophical statement about post-apartheid identity and future battle lines as 'identities were being rethought in the context of the struggle' (Desai 2002a: 44). Rather than 'dead wood', 'the poors', who have 'begun to jump the firebreaks of race and place' and build 'non-racial communities from the bottom up' (Desai 2002a: 7, 53), not only speak out but challenge committed intellectuals to listen. Replacing a practice of uncritically applauding speakers on a podium and reciting empty slogans that had become the norm of the ANC's post-apartheid politics, a new movement against eviction, argue Desai and Pithouse (2003: 23), developed democratic meetings where 'everyone can speak, everyone is obliged to listen and decisions are taken by a show of hands'. The apparently marginalised, localised and practical battles were kept alive by a discourse of future triumphs. At meeting after meeting, the poors were declaring that 'the ANC ha[d] betrayed the democratic spirit of the struggles against apartheid . . . [and] the community movements [were] put[ting] themselves forward as the true torchbearers of liberation' (Desai and Pithouse 2003: 25).

The organisation of these new struggles, often around the practical issues of subsistence, land and free movement, have histories dating back to the struggle against colonialism, but they are often sidelined during the immediate independence period as they were in South Africa. While resistance to utility privatisation begs the question of 'rights' – the pitting of the human rights of 'the poors' (literally cut off from the basic needs of water, electricity and shelter) against the 'rights' of private property – it also raises the larger question of creating new spaces where a politics of the poor may be organised – where the vision and the practice of a non-racial alternative post-apartheid South Africa, expressed in rights and responsibilities, may be freely discussed and acted on. Whether successful or not, these new movements raise a series of organisational questions. Would they be able to represent and sustain themselves, or were the movements only able to erupt spontaneously around an issue and die off just as quickly, remaining effective only insofar as they are impulsive,

single-issue campaigns working to gain access to or incorporation into the state? Ballard et al. (2005: 627–8) argue that the post-apartheid social movements are in fact 'not spontaneous uprisings of the poor . . . but are dependent to a large extent on a sufficient base of material and human resources', including individuals who help organise campaigns and leverage resources.<sup>30</sup>

The issue, in other words, is the relationship between spontaneity and organisation and the legacies, material and conceptual, of mass-movement organisations, along with the issue of responsibility, which rests not only on local organisations, but also on intellectuals who are committed to labouring on what Rosa Luxemburg calls the most precious and lasting aspect of an apparently 'chaotic' and 'disorganised' movement: 'its mental sediment' (Luxemburg 1906/1999: 9). After all, the truth that the poor understand (as a self-developing subject) shrivels and dies unless it is nurtured by discussion, openness and comradeship.<sup>31</sup> As Fanon puts it, 'Brother, sister, friend – these are the words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme to get on' (1968: 47). Against the discourses of property rights and bourgeois individualism, the 'forms of organisation of the struggle' suggest a different language and vocabulary. The difficult question revolves not only around the issue of spontaneity and organisation but also around their relationship to philosophic principle and vision.<sup>32</sup> As we shall see in the following chapter, the beginnings of the urban revolt, which was first organised by the Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town and the Landless People's Movement in Johannesburg in 2000, burst open in 2004 (see Pithouse 2009a). Understood wrongly as service-delivery protests, these local uprisings, which stretched across the country, expressed the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity: organised locally, they had no links to other revolts and had difficulty sustaining the rebellion over time; but importantly they expressed a break with the state/party discourse of 'development' and an unwillingness to be co-opted and spoken for.

Fanon did not fully plumb the issue of philosophy and organisation, but he did recognise that the culture of elitism led to a self-devaluing on the one hand, and to the need to move beyond the immediacy of force to include the mediation of reasoning on the other, and thus tease out the

rebellion's own 'rational basis' (Fanon 1968: 146). Fanon does not operate under romantic illusions that there will be an immediate understanding of the most complicated problems. This is why he emphasises a dialectical process, a deepening spiral, rather than a straight line that works its way through contradictions and does not proclaim, once and for all, the automatic construction of new identities. For the articulation of 'the truth' is, of course, fragmented and fragmentary. And the harsh realities of life under neoliberal capitalism mean that new movements are always under threat and shot through with contradictions, including retrogressive and reactionary ideologies, which have to be faced squarely and openly.

Fear – and I am talking about a life on the edge created by daily battles of survival as well as the fear of stepping out of line against a regime of surveillance, force and armed threat – remains an important determinant in politics, as Biko put it (1978). Fear is all around, also created by neoliberal policies that generate zero-sum market-based identities of haves and have-nots, and are bolstered by a politics of divide and rule where the marginal are always, by definition, a stigmatised mass. In such oppressive conditions, where social worth is judged solely on the basis of being surrounded by luxury goods, ongoing psychological liberation – the liberation of the mind from the sense of inferiority – remains indispensable precisely because self-consciousness cannot come about all at once. In light of this, Fanon argues that it is the radical intellectual's role to continually undermine ideologies that characterise the poor, the marginalised and the masses as backward and 'lumpen', incapable of governing themselves, and also, at the same time, to battle other self-appointed 'liberation' ideologues, who, by proclaiming themselves the consciousness and 'leadership of the proletariat', only add to the weight of inertia. For these elitist attitudes rely on and encourage a sense of worthlessness among the common people, who are often told that their ideas carry little weight. Because of this lack of self-esteem, the first job for the honest, radical intellectual is to help formally marginalised people to clarify their own thinking. Antonio Gramsci usefully explains this process in a subsection of *The Prison Notebooks*: '[The philosophy of praxis] is consciousness full of contradictions, in which the philosopher himself, understood both individually and as an entire social group, not only grasps the contradictions, but posits himself as an element of the

contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore action' (1971: 405).

What is important, in other words, especially in times of crisis when movements are forced underground and their leading militants are imprisoned, is that the intellectuals engage contradictions and create a movement of thought and self-clarity. This is precisely also Fanon's position.

Fanon's perspective, derived from the specific social context of movements against colonialism, has been articulated in the new South African struggles. A vision of an alternative, which can be gleaned from the practice of the common people in organised contradiction to reality, enables Fanon to make concrete Marx's contention that the realm of freedom is based on the transformation of alienated labour into a form of self-realisation. 'If conditions of work are not modified', Fanon warns, 'centuries will be needed to humanize this world which has been forced down to animal level' (Fanon 1968: 100). Indeed, for Fanon, the practice of participatory democracy is central; the necessary modifications to the conditions of labour can only be effected through people making decisions, experimenting at a local level, learning from their mistakes, and 'starting a new history' (Fanon 1968: 99, 188-9). For Fanon, decision making is an expression and act of creation of the social individual. From a psychological point of view, non-alienating activity is essential to an individual's sense of self. At the same time, these new social relations engender the reproduction of a newly created self who understands that 'slavery is opposed to work and that work presupposes liberty, responsibility, and consciousness'. Fanon bases this notion on what some have considered simply utopian forms, namely the claim that 'in those districts where we have been able to carry out successfully these interesting experiments, we have watched man being created by revolutionary beginnings' (Fanon 1968: 192). Whatever the concrete limitations of these new beginnings, this notion of prefiguration is quite different from the discourse of nationalism because it conceptualises a novel and breathtakingly simple idea of development based on a new idea of organisation and philosophy. Fraught with contradictions, the biggest problematic, as we have seen in South Africa, was the speed at which grassroots organisations, committed to radical transformation, were marginalised,

and the masses of people reduced to a strategic tool of another political project during the negotiation period of the early 1990s.

FANON, *THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE* AND 'THE WILL TO LIBERTY'

*Bourgeois revolutions . . . storm from success to success; their dramaturgical effects outdo each other; people and things seem set in sparkling brilliance; ecstasy is the everyday spirit; but they are short lived; soon they have attained their zenith, and a long crapulent depression lays holds of society . . . On the other hand, proletarian revolutions . . . criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts . . . until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible and the conditions cry out: 'Hic Rhodus, hic Salta'.*

— Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*

Political revolutions do not attack the basis of centralised power, namely the state, but seek to capture it, Marx asserted in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, arguing that 'all revolutions perfected the [state] machine – along with the repressive measures, resources, and centralization of governmental power – instead of smashing it' (Marx 1852/1975: 122). As mentioned earlier, the state tends to be seen as a neutral power, which, in the liberal history of political theory with the self-interested individual as the starting point, protects individuals from engaging in a war of 'all against all', as Thomas Hobbes puts it. But we have learnt that rather than simply a transcendent, value-neutral object (even if also understood as a Leviathan), the state is an object of some desire, and that all the parties that contend for domination regard 'the possession of this huge edifice as the principal spoils of the victor' (Marx 1852/1975: 122). Thus, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx writes that, after the revolution, a state of siege is imposed on the country and 'every stirring in society' is repressed 'by the means of state power' (Marx 1852/1975: 119). His statement that 'the bourgeoisie never wearied of crying out to the revolution . . . "be silent, still!"' is echoed by Fanon, who writes that 'embryo oppositions are eliminated' and the movements are kept in check (Fanon 1968: 181–2) with the party

leaders demanding silence and 'behav[ing] like common sergeant-majors' (Fanon 1968: 183).<sup>33</sup>

Marx's and Fanon's critiques of the fetish of state power and the state as the object of political struggle and economic benefit, relate directly to the actions of the ANC and post-apartheid South Africa. While attitudes to the state are directly applicable to the problematic of 'social treason', as mentioned earlier, my concern here is to highlight the importance of subjectivity and the importance of the practical-critical activity of thought in Fanon's engagement with *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.

In *The Wretched*, Fanon reiterates Marx's differentiation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, arguing that in the latter, the hitherto subjugated nobodies become protagonists, and the absolutely dehumanised now become an absolute historicity 'living inside history' (Fanon 1968: 147). What Marx calls the 'practical-critical activity' inherent in proletarian revolutions is seen by Fanon in the radical mutation of consciousness and the emergence of a new language and a new vocabulary. Thus, Fanon's insistence that the 'clarity of ideas must be profoundly dialectical' (Fanon 1968: 193) means that beyond the spatial Manichaeanism of apartheid, time must become, as Marx puts it, the space for human development. Fanon's proposal that time be set aside and space be created for public dialogue, discussion and the proposal of new ideas and experimentation – the process of self-determination – is analogous to Marx's discussion of the constant critical re-evaluations that characterise proletarian revolutions. It is this idea of the objectivity of subjectivity, both critical and practical, and indeed the new passions and new forces (what Fanon calls the creation of a new person) and the power of ideas that remain so alive in *The Wretched*. In this sense, Fanon's book should be considered both a retrospective – that is, a profound critique of anti-colonial movements – and a perspective for the future.

In the conclusion to *Black Skin*, whose publication pre-dates *The Wretched* by eight years, Fanon opens with the following quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

The social revolution . . . cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order

to drug themselves against their own content . . . Before the expression exceeded the content; now the content exceeds the expression (Fanon 1967a: 223).

Decolonisation is revolutionary insofar as the content exceeds the expression and is thus understood as an historical necessity not inevitability. Fanon clarifies this in an article on Africa's liberation, arguing: 'It is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this decolonization is the fruit of an *objective dialectic*' (Fanon 1967b: 170, my emphasis). Later, in *The Wretched*, where Fanon speaks of decolonisation as a 'programme of complete disorder', he further adds that decolonisation 'cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we discern the movements which give it *historical* form and content' (Fanon 1968: 36, my emphasis). In other words, in Fanon's view, the programme of complete disorder breaks up the timeless spatial vortex of colonial Manichaeism, which was kept in place by lines of force, and it is out of this challenge that a new history begins. For the uprooting of the old society is a double process: 'the thing' – the dehumanised 'native' – becomes human, Fanon says, 'during the same process by which it frees itself' (Fanon 1968: 36–7). The implication here is that far from a simple substitution of one regime for another, the double movement, the very process of substitution itself, indicates that it is a transition from Manichaean to dialectical logic where the 'will to liberty is expressed in terms of time and space' (Fanon 1968: 240). This, I think, is critical to a new understanding of Fanon's conception of decolonial subjectivity (that is, the *historical* protagonist) and humanism, and one of my contentions is that, in post-apartheid society, the self-organised poor are becoming historical protagonists.

Decolonisation involves more than eradicating the lines of force – police stations, army barracks and border checkpoints – that keep the zones apart; it requires fundamental social and economic change, that is to say, a fundamental reorganisation of the aspects of control and an examination of the limits to such a reorganisation.<sup>34</sup> Continuous revolution – in Marx's words, a continuously unfolding dialectic and constant self-criticism – is central to what Fanon means by 'transform[ing] the national revolution into a social revolution' (Fanon 1967c: 169). And



the revelations of new lines of force in the name of nation, the market, private property and the new and continuing spatial legacies of apartheid rule, mark out future challenges. Fanon's reference to the revolution's 'form and content', and his insistence that the creation of new subjectivities are not the result of 'supernatural powers' but are born in the social process, are reminiscent of his quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that the revolution 'cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all superstitions concerning the past' and has found its 'own content' rather than 'drug[ging itself] against [its] own content'. And, for Fanon, to find an appropriate form – to transcend the colonial vortex – requires emphasising the subjective side of the dialectic, or perhaps understanding in Gramsci's way that 'objective always means "humanly objective", which can be held to correspond to historically subjective' (Gramsci 1971: 445). In other words, subjectivity becomes objectivity through praxis, or, as Fanon puts it in his resignation letter from Blida hospital to the Resident Minister of Algeria, objectivity is 'a subjective attitude in *organized* contradiction with reality' (Fanon 1967b: 53, my emphasis). The humanly objective appears in Fanon's profound retelling of the *lived experience* of anti-colonial political activity. Under the pressure of his critical analysis, the activities described disclose an experience that 'explodes the old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets which bring out new meanings and pinpoint the contradictions camouflaged by these facts' (Fanon 1968: 147). Thus, in Fanon's conception, truth is not separated from subjective life and from a self-understanding which, in its unfolding as a self-referential absolute, is the 'rebellion' that 'gives proof of its rational basis' (Fanon 1968: 146). By reflecting on itself, the rebellion provides its own social content and vision of an alternative society. This seems incredibly germane to South Africa, where the content of the movements against apartheid far exceeded the political leadership and its intellectuals, who were 'drugged' by the political manoeuvrings of the elite transition.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE TREASON OF THE INTELLECTUALS

Fanon's invocation 'to change the world', as he puts it in *Black Skin*, is more than a rhetorical fillip to conclude his analysis of the racial Manichaeanism of the colonial condition. Like Marx's analysis of proletarian

revolution in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Fanon's painstaking confrontation with the pitfalls of the revolution conceives the 'new person' not as a miraculous creation, but as a product of the movement for freedom.<sup>36</sup> The disappearance of the colonised and the appearance of a new humanity are 'prefigured in the objectives and methods of the conflict' (Fanon 1968: 197). Such objectives are neither simple reflections of spontaneous activity, nor the enactment of pre-existing aims. Content neither with praising its strengths nor criticising its weaknesses, this prefiguration is a fruit of the hard labour of 'tarrying with the negative' (Hegel 1977: 19), and it means that the sources of human objectivity must include the practice of thinking. The new concepts that Fanon is anxious to set forth at the conclusion of *The Wretched* are indeed the product of the movements' own self-reflection. As such, it would not be far-fetched to label the race for positions in the new regime as the treason of the intellectuals.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, it is not so far-fetched in the South African context.

Given the dismal, frequently horrific, consequences of revolutions in the twentieth century, Fanon's claims for the redemptive power of revolution to transform life for the better may seem little more than dreams from another era. Yet, as I have insisted, for Fanon the revolution is not simply an act but also a hermeneutical space that challenges the material and ideological basis of power and helps to create new, unforeseen meanings and powers of the mind. In short, it is a transformative 'fighting culture' (Gibson 2003) that is intimately linked to mental liberation, for it is the essence of the fight that explodes old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets, which bring about new meanings (Fanon 1968). The changing attitudes then create space in which a liberatory ideology can be developed, articulated and discussed in the heat of the battle. Thus we can find, in Fanon's description of revolution, both a dialectical theory that views movements from below as transformative, as well as a warning that the greatest threat to Africa's liberation is the lack of a liberatory ideology. All this might seem dreadfully idealistic and unrealistic, but one would be hard-pressed, as I have been arguing, to deny that the great tragedy of the South African civic movements of the late 1980s was that strictures were placed on open discourse about the future. This was, as Fanon put it – though perhaps very few would have accepted this in the heat of the battle and the states of emergency – the greatest threat. This

closing of the mind to 'idealistic', but at the same time very practical, ideas about economics and politics was fully exploited in the elite transition, where technical language explicitly excluded popular discussion.

During his stay in Accra as a representative of the provisional Algerian government to Ghana, Fanon took a trip to the Algerian frontier. In his notebook, he made the following summation: 'Colonialism and its derivatives do not, as a matter of fact, constitute the present enemies of Africa. In a short time this continent will be liberated. For my part the deeper I enter into the culture and political circles the surer I am that the great danger that threatens Africa is the *absence of ideology*' (Fanon 1967b: 186, my emphasis).

Of course, there are plenty of ideologies and plenty of ideologues and, having just come from Nkrumah's Ghana, Fanon gives added concretion to his own warning (see Gibson 1999b). Today there are copious numbers of intellectuals working for the World Bank, the UN, talk radio, TV news or as university professors, while others ply their trade for political parties, NGOs and other liberal groups. A much smaller number of intellectuals give their energies to fighting injustice, working with progressive human-rights organisations and social movements. But I am thinking of a different kind of intellectual: partisan and oppositional, a fighter against injustice, involved in social struggles but not infected by what Fanon calls intellectual laziness, willing to keep attuned to the challenges emerging from below in order to shift the ground of reason lower and deeper and thus question dominant 'progressive' paradigms. Intellectuals on the left often have one thing in common with liberals: an elitist attitude towards working people. This is frequently justified by a culture of immediacy that pervades a global neoliberal capitalist order, where movements – especially poor people's movements that are under-resourced and facing attack by the state – are often hard-pressed to open up discussion on their long-term and principled goals. Thus, any discussion about ideas becomes a discussion of strategy.<sup>38</sup> Yet, political activists are intellectuals, and have a responsibility to reflect on liberation ideas. Not to accept that responsibility is a form of intellectual laziness, just as intellectuals who have broken with the ruling ideology have a responsibility to keep open the precious spaces for independent discourse. So, what can a small group of 'honest' intellectuals, who are fairly

insignificant and powerless and who operate in a period of retrogression, do?

The first step is taking history from below, *in the making*, and the lived experiences of struggle seriously, which also means taking theoretical preparation seriously – in other words, clearing the mind or intellectual disintoxication, as Fanon might put it. The intellectual who comes to support an anti-colonial movement lives in an ‘unstable zone’, as Fanon argues; often schooled by colonialism (or at least in its mindset), the intellectual who supports the movement against colonialism is apt to uncritically praise the externals of the people’s struggle and become fixated on the inert outer garments of culture (Fanon 1968: 224). These externals of culture – what Fanon calls the ‘sacredness’ of the sari (Fanon 1968: 221), or the hollowness of cosmopolitan multiculturalism – represent a reification of culture that operates within the terms inherited from colonialism, and is an expression of alienation and of the intellectual’s disconnectedness. To really break with colonial and bourgeois culture, it is therefore not enough to praise a culture of survival; rather, the intellectual has to become aware of the lived experience of the oppressed and tackle the culture of discouragement internalised by the colonised. At the Second Congress of Black Artist and Writers, held in Rome in 1959, Fanon spoke of the dual and integrated role for the radical intellectual as being in the service of both ‘the people’ and developing a ‘new humanism’. The latter was truly a theoretical and practical task that found its sources in philosophic thought and in people’s anti-colonial actions.

Fanon’s conception of freedom and the unleashing of the creative powers of the mind of the African are thus inseparable from his realistic assessment of independent Africa’s fragility, surrounded by imperialist forces and ideologies. And it is in this context that Fanon reminds intellectuals that their active participation in building ‘the reality of the nation’ means discovering and encouraging a cacophony of ‘universalising values’ already existing in both the activities and the ‘will of the people’ (Fanon 1968: 247). Heralding its success (with such events as the 2010 World Cup), post-apartheid South Africa continues to drown out cries of betrayal. Yet, at the same time, the revolt of the poor and their self-organisation shake up the celebrations of South African ‘success’ and

point out that the treason is not simply a national treason, but a social one. As Marx argues, it is only when human beings recognise their own force as social force and are therefore no longer separate from political power that human emancipation can be said to be accomplished (1843/1975: 234). In Fanon's terms, this amounts to the deepening of national consciousness into a consciousness of social and political (namely, human) needs. The continuing struggle for redistributive justice around basic human needs in South Africa, expressed, for example, by the self-organised movements of oppressed people, represents the beginnings of a movement that refuses to separate its own human forces from a critique of the social and political force and the structure of post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike the earlier new social movements, these new movements do not depend on prominent personalities or well-resourced institutions, and have instead developed organically. And although some of the leaders were part of anti-apartheid struggles, these new movements did not emerge out of anti-apartheid activism, but from a new generation of activists and intellectuals, many of whom are quite young, often in their twenties. Thus, they also challenge radical intellectuals to shift the geography of reason and not only to battle the privatisation of space, but to open new spaces in which a humanism can be voiced and discussed. These new movements of the poor, specifically the shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, will be discussed in the next chapter.

# 4

## Unfinished struggles for freedom

### *The birth of a new shack dwellers' movement*

*The struggle that started in Kennedy Road was the beginning of a new era.*

— S'bu Zikode, 'We are the Third Force'

#### 'WE ARE ON OUR OWN': THE BIRTH OF A NEW MOVEMENT

On 19 March 2005,<sup>1</sup> in a scene reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle, 750 Black shack dwellers barricaded a major ring road near the Umgeni Business Park in Durban, and held the road against the police for four hours. The shack dwellers had been waiting patiently for Nelson Mandela's historic 1994 election promise of housing to be realised. The houses, they believed, were to be built on a nearby piece of land, but under the pressure of real estate and commercial development, this promise was broken. Instead of new houses, people found themselves facing bulldozers and threatened with removal to a place miles outside the city, far from work opportunities, schools, hospitals and the communities they had been part of.<sup>2</sup> Not unlike the apartheid practice of treating people as 'surplus population', the politics of market forces had thrown into relief the human reality of post-apartheid South Africa and all its broken promises.

The Kennedy Road settlement is squeezed between the Clare Estate and the Bisasar Road garbage dump, the largest in Africa. Trucks continually enter the dump, passing Electron Avenue and other similarly

named roads from a bygone age of technological innovation under apartheid 'development'. Along Kennedy Road, the dump is ringed by a long concrete fence and topped by perfume rods that spray out fumes in an attempt to mask the smell. People constantly walk up and down the hill, to and from their jobs as domestic workers or gardeners in the houses on the Clare Estate, or to pick through the dump. Entry to the noxious and toxic dump is officially prohibited to shack dwellers, but if one walks alongside the fence that abuts the shack settlements one sees that, every few yards, concrete panels have been removed for easy access, and some make a living by sifting through the detritus, collecting cardboard, plastic or metal to sell to recyclers in the 'informal economy'.

Most of the Kennedy Road 'informal settlement' is not 'on' Kennedy Road, but is accessible through numerous paths that criss-cross the hills.<sup>3</sup> The people there are desperately poor. Forgotten in post-apartheid South Africa, they live without basic services like sanitation, water or electricity, in shacks dug into the side of the hill and built out of advertising boards, corrugated iron, branches and mud, their 'temporary' shelter having become more or less permanent. For a long time, there wasn't even refuse collection.<sup>4</sup>

Kennedy Road itself is on the Clare Estate, a mainly Indian, middle- and upper-middle-class residential area that has experienced skyrocketing real-estate prices. In the interstices of the estate – in the valleys and along riverbanks and against the municipal dump – there are eight different shack settlements, each with varying histories and organisations. One of them is the Kennedy Road settlement, which has a radically democratic political culture that took years to develop. Other shack settlements have different forms of government, some based on political patronage often overseen by an *induna* (chief) and some are more respected than others, but often governance is along hierarchical and patronage lines.<sup>5</sup> Because there are material interests at stake, the creation of democracy is often a continually contested and hard-fought struggle. Each settlement is configured by different material realities, often limited by physical space, size and geography, which determine the feasibility of such things as common meeting spaces. But, despite these constraints, looking down from the hilltops, there is something special about this area of Durban. The real-estate developers understand it, and it is not lost on the shack dwellers either.<sup>6</sup>

On 19 March 2005, despite the local councillor's promises,<sup>7</sup> the bulldozers moved in. Seeing their 'Promised Land' being levelled, the shack dwellers acted, blockading Umgeni Road with burning tyres and mattresses, bringing traffic and businesses to a halt. The police, taken by surprise, called for support. They attacked with dogs, punching protestors. Four hours later, fourteen of the 750 people from the Kennedy Road settlement had been arrested, including two teenage students. Two days later, on 21 March – Human Rights Day in South Africa (the anniversary of the day in 1960 when apartheid police fired on pass-law protesters in Sharpeville, and killed 69 people) – 1 200 people demonstrated, demanding that the local police release the fourteen people or arrest the whole community. The people themselves had begun to self-consciously mobilise for their own rights; they were finally beginning to press the state to be accountable. For more than a decade, the people's anger had been rising steadily. Many people had given up hope of formal employment, or were being forced to use what the World Bank terms their 'entrepreneurial' aspirations and 'resourcefulness' in the informal economy. But collecting cardboard, plastic or metal from the stinking dump, or even gardening and cleaning for residents on the Clare Estate, doesn't provide many 'opportunities'. Ironically, the World Bank, not the ANC or the local council, consulted the shack dwellers about the toxic dump, giving their views some representation. The problem was that the World Bank had consulted the shack dwellers to justify a carbon trading project, which, far from benefiting the poor, was bound to leave them homeless and without means of subsistence.<sup>8</sup> The shack dwellers had understood that change promised by the government would be slow and that they needed to take responsibility for their own welfare; but by 2005, it had become crystal clear that their interests weren't being considered at all. As one shack dweller put it, they had finally grown 'tired of living and walking in shit' (quoted in Kockott 2005).

So, on that day in March, the people from the Kennedy Road settlement organised quickly and staged their protest. They revolted because they felt betrayed. Although they might not have initially seen it in these terms, their action proved to be the beginning of a movement. They saw themselves as being *on their own* against the local government, the police, businesses, the rich, the media and the courts. Character-



istically, they did not wait for the media or for professional activists to arrive. What was key to their actions was that they already had a democratic decision-making body, the Kennedy Road Development Committee, whose participatory meetings and social demands quickly caught the imagination of adjacent communities. Indeed, this imagination was captured at the welcome-home party for those who had been arrested, when the chair of the Kennedy Road Development Committee, S'bu Zikode, affirmed the actions of the crowd with a memorable speech: 'The first Nelson Mandela was Jesus Christ. The second was Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The third Nelson Mandela is the poor people of the world' (quoted in Patel and Pithouse 2005). The resonance was clear. The poor weren't Christ, but Christ was the first Mandela, the first liberator who articulated a new heaven on earth. Mandela is Christ reborn, grounding liberation firmly on South African soil, his long imprisonment during apartheid a metaphor for the nation, just as his release is identified with the birth of a new South Africa. Yet, the failure of the historical Mandela to liberate South Africa demanded the birth of a new Mandela: the poor themselves. After many promises, all of them broken, they saw through the empty rhetoric of the local authorities. Enough was enough – *sekwanele, sekwanele!* – truth emanated from their own experiences: they had become the 'new reality of the nation', declaring the shack dwellers' movement a university where they 'think their own struggles' and 'are not poor in mind' (Zikode 2006). Subtly criticising Mandela's historical leadership, the poor were taking matters into their own hands, seeing themselves as the force and reason for their own liberation; they had become their own Mandelas.

#### UNFREEDOM IN THE DAWN OF FREEDOM

*Our brothers say we are born free because we born after Freedom . . . As teenagers we are saying there is no freedom in our life.*

— Pinky Zulu, 'Unfreedom Day 2006'

Even if they had previously never heard of a 'social movement', by March 2005, the shack dwellers had effectively become such a movement, by virtue of their self-organisation and by developing their own relationships

with other shack dwellers. For it was the *universality* of the Kennedy Road shack dwellers' experience and demands that was immediately understood and taken up by neighbouring settlements. The development of such horizontal links among shack settlements suggested a new kind of movement in the making. By May 2005, the people from Kennedy Road and five other shack settlements, as well as residents from local municipal flats, organised a march of over 3 000 people. With banners expressing their collective will ('We want our land') and homegrown political education ('The University of Kennedy Road'), the marchers presented a memorandum of ten demands that they had drawn up through a series of meetings and community discussions (see Patel 2008). Written by the shack and flat dwellers after careful discussion, this memorandum, which included the need for housing, jobs, sanitation, medical care, education and safety from police brutality and environmental toxins, became a people's charter<sup>9</sup> – one that sought to represent not only Durban's 800 000 shack dwellers, but the poor across South Africa, where nearly three million households live in 'informal' housing.

Their demands were far from revolutionary; they were the demands of loyal citizens making reasonable requests, borne of their citizenship, for inclusion in the 'new South Africa': for housing, safety, health care and political representation.

The march ended at the offices of the local ANC councillor, and there the marchers declared that if the councillor did not resign, they, his constituents, would declare Ward 25 without a councillor. They brought along a coffin to represent the councillor's political death.<sup>10</sup> The point is obvious, but what is also worth noting is the marchers' self-consciousness, both as a class pitted against the interests of property and as a collective pressing the government to deliver not only on its promises, but also to include those promises in its future deliberations. The marchers, in other words, were self-consciously challenging the elite character of the local government and, by implication, the class character of the 'elite transition'.<sup>11</sup>

Some months later, following a meeting of twelve settlements at Kennedy Road, the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, was launched.<sup>12</sup> There was no donor funding, no NGO, no civil society funding nor political party backing. Consistently ignored by the local council and often treated as criminals, shack dwellers across Durban began

to join the movement. 'The only language they understand is when we put thousands of people on the street,' proclaimed Zikode (2006: 187), and throughout the following year, mass marches and demonstrations brought the plight of the shack dwellers to local, national and even international attention, with stories being featured in *The Economist* and other international and local media, including a full-page story in the *New York Times*. On a quick learning curve and with few resources, the movement was able not only to represent itself but also to respond to misrepresentation in the media. And soon it became clear that the shack dwellers weren't going away. Daily demonstrations and actions in all of South Africa's major cities continued to occur alongside Abahlali's growing reputation and media presence.<sup>13</sup> Despite President Mbeki's call for these actions to stop, they continued. 'These are the things the youth used to do in the struggle against apartheid,' he complained, but that was exactly why the actions were legitimate.

In early 2006, Abahlali began to organise a boycott of the local government elections scheduled for March that year. This was a logical development following their 'burial' of the councillor, and the decision to boycott was marked by a march from the Foreman Road settlement into Durban's city centre, under the slogan 'No Land, No House, No Vote', which had earlier been employed by the South African Landless People's Movement in a national campaign in 2004. Though the march was legal, it was banned by Durban's city manager, Mike Sutcliffe. Two days later, on 3 February 2006, surrounded by riot police, the 3 000 shack dwellers amassed at the Foreman Road settlement and decided to go ahead with the march. Behind the banners of 'University of Abahlali baseMjondolo' and 'No Land, No House, No Vote', they marched out of the settlement. As they entered the paved road, the police immediately attacked. A number of people were seriously injured and 45 were arrested. Sutcliffe issued another ban, this time on a march planned for 27 February. The police again cordoned off the exits to three large settlements and made a number of arrests. But this time the people were prepared. With the support of progressive lawyers, Abahlali was able to take Sutcliffe to the High Court and won an interdict allowing them to march into the city.

Certainly there are continuities between these struggles and the struggles against apartheid. Many in Abahlali see the struggle as unfinished, and even Mandela had acknowledged the shack dwellers' struggle in 1993, when it was widely believed that the end of apartheid would see the upgrading of 'informal settlements' and that these settlement conditions were a direct consequence of apartheid.<sup>14</sup> In fact, South Africa has always been a country of extremes, of rich and poor, and developments in the South African economy have always been the province of powerful mining and financial interests in the context of global capitalism. The end of apartheid actually strengthened this proprietorship. While co-opting some of the best brains of the struggle and transforming the formal movements into structures of governance, the ANC promised that the legacies of apartheid would be addressed. Yet, the ANC's actual policies and practices never matched its rhetorical promises. At first this was put down to the politics of transition, especially at the local government level, where apartheid functionaries lingered. But after the government's embrace of neoliberal economic policies, the shift became clear. Though subject to international pressures, the direct authors of the 'homegrown' structural adjustment were the new Black and old White elites.<sup>15</sup>

Today it is clear that the main beneficiaries of post-apartheid economic redistribution have been (and continue to be) South Africa's banks and multinationals, now even freer than they were under apartheid. This includes the moneyed White elites, as well as the new much smaller Black elites,<sup>16</sup> and the South African economy is more integrated into the global economy than at any time in its history. Moreover, post-apartheid South Africa's quick move to roll out a neoliberal economic model to encourage capitalist global investment shifted priorities and resulted in deep cuts in budgets for social services. Serious discussion of the social and economic consequences of years of colonialism and apartheid has given way to a neoliberal discourse about the poor, who are represented as 'undifferentiated, unwilling carriers of social diseases' (Barchiesi 2007: 46-7) – in other words, as morally corrupt and behaviourally undisciplined – or, to use the language of apartheid, 'surplus population'. Needless to say, the post-apartheid housing programme is part of this project, ultimately aimed at moving the poor out of the cities. Built far from the urban centres, one-room closet-sized houses are economically nonviable

for many. On the contrary, living close to both economic opportunities and to educational opportunities for their children is vital.<sup>17</sup> Thus, when the Durban municipality described its plan for a 'city without slums', it was correctly understood by the shack dwellers as the return of the apartheid policy of 'influx control' and the removal of 'black spots'.<sup>18</sup> Once again, Black people were to be pushed out of the city and dumped in the peripheral ghettos.

Despite policies to discourage the growth of shack settlements, which included ending the practice of providing electricity connections to these areas,<sup>19</sup> shack settlements have continued to grow and local government planning continues to lag further and further behind the need for housing.<sup>20</sup> In an already desperate situation, local government practices, such as destroying 'illegal' settlements and 'illegal' shacks and refusing to provide electricity, are worsening already dire conditions. Rather than discouraging settlements, they are contributing to their expansion, thus creating further overcrowding, further strains on resources, such as water and electricity, and resulting in increasing numbers of deaths from fires.<sup>21</sup>

The class character of the situation is plain. Access to 'sufficient water' is guaranteed in the South African Constitution, but as Alex Loftus (2006) maintains, mediated by left-wing technocrats who argued for sliding tariffs, the struggle for free water ironically limited its supply. The metering of water (with technology directed to 'limiting water supplies') and 'cost recovery' have resulted in a drop in water consumption among the poor.<sup>22</sup> In the shacks, the situation is worse. The lack of access has resulted in the further deterioration of already deplorable conditions: a few working taps and toilets serve thousands of people. And it is not simply that those in the shacks can't afford sufficient water and electricity - some can - but insufficient water and no electricity, along with the fact that fire engines are often not dispatched when fires do start, has resulted in frequent fires and avoidable deaths. As S'bu Zikode put it:

We have seen that when the wild forests and plantations of the rich are on fire, there are often large helicopters with hundreds of tons of water to extinguish the fires. But when our shacks are on fire, the helicopters and ambulances are nowhere to be found . . . Helicopters only come for us when we march. The state comes for us when we try to say what we think (Zikode 2008a).<sup>23</sup>

The urban real-estate market has magnified the threat to shack dwellers. What was marginal land is now becoming prime real estate and local housing officials have become paid hacks of the developers, who, schooled in the bootstrap discourse of World Bank seminars, insist that the shack dwellers have got to understand that it is far too expensive to build housing for them in the city, and that new developments will create economic opportunities on the city's margins. As each of South Africa's big cities – Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town – vies to become 'world class' (in other words, a city without shack settlements), government discourse about informal settlements is becoming increasingly reactionary. In Fanon's terms, governments have come to see the existence and growth of shack settlements as a sign of a 'constitutional depravity' that must be eradicated. Sounding much like the colonial public health official of the early twentieth century who spoke of 'the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations . . . those hordes of vital statistics bereft of all humanity' (Fanon 1968: 42), the post-apartheid government now speaks of the growth of shanty towns using 'terminology otherwise applied to life-threatening epidemics' such as 'eradication' (Huchzermeyer 2006).

The term 'eradication' refers to the necessity of psycho-social segregation from the threat of contagion and, at the same time, to economic segregation as a means of protecting property values. Eradication, as Marie Huchzermeyer (2008b: 53) points out, aligns with the government's '*continued fixation* with orderly and segregated development in South African cities' (my emphasis). An example of policy priorities arising from this fixation is the city of Tshwane's<sup>24</sup> 'slum eradication' programme, which is considered an example of 'best practice' by the Gauteng Province's Department of Housing. In a frank presentation of its accomplishments, at a seminar on informal settlements in a Johannesburg hotel, it became apparent that the city of Tshwane's key to successfully managing 'mass invasion' was the shifting of resources away from basic needs such as water supply and into the employment of private security companies. Of course, this begs several questions, argues Huchzermeyer: 'What does "mass invasion" mean to the municipality? A flood of desperately poor people who, at all costs, must be prevented from entering the city? A sinister parallel emerges with the exclusionary apartheid policy, a point that the current ANC government is unwilling to admit' (Huchzermeyer

2008b: 53). On this point, it is worth noting that the main difference between the current situation and that of apartheid is the privatisation of security, which, much like a 'third force', allows the 'state' to appear separate from its own illegal and violent practices. Firmly ensconced in this logic, Tshwane city concluded by noting that the challenges to success are 'foreigners' and 'political intervention', making the connection between the two unmistakably clear (Huchzermeyer 2008b).

So, on 21 April 2006, twelve years after the birth of a new South Africa, generated by the first full and free election, 5 000 South African shack dwellers from the fourteen informal settlements that had joined Abahlali the preceding year came out, not to celebrate freedom, but to mourn 'Unfreedom Day', and they have done so ever since. How can 'we celebrate freedom when we only hear tales of freedom or see people's lives changed for the better in other parts of the country, but never in our communities?' asked S'bu Zikode, questioning, in effect, the state of freedom in the whole country. 'How can a community of 5 000 people celebrate when it is expected to make do with six taps?' (Zikode 2006). Indeed, how can the country celebrate? And what can be done so the country *can* celebrate?

#### WHO IS S'BU ZIKODE?

*Government officials, politicians and intellectuals . . . have no idea what they are talking about. They are too high to really feel what we feel.*

— S'bu Zikode, 'We are the Third Force'

*The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves and put forward new ideas. The branch meeting and the committee meeting are liturgical acts. They are privileged occasions given to a human being to listen and to speak. At each meeting, the brain increases its means of participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

The president of the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali's baseMjondolo, is 35-year-old former petrol station worker S'bu Zikode.<sup>25</sup> A father of four who has lived in the shacks for over ten years, he is a former Boy

Scout from a small rural town who gained distinction at school but had no money for university. Born in 1975, in the village of Loskop near the town of Estcourt in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, he came to Durban in 1997 and was able to attend the University at Durban-Westville for a semester, during the very short period of reduced student fees after the end of apartheid. But soon he was unable to afford the fees, so he got a job at a petrol station and moved to Kennedy Road in 1999. In 2001, he was the first elected chair of the Kennedy Road Development Committee and before that was chair of the Clare Estate Slum Clearance Project. He speaks of having tried 'so-called diplomacy' and recounts how he approached high-profile members of the ruling party and tried to make deals about access to basic human necessities. Now he says it was 'all in vain' (Zikode 2008b).

A short, slight man with a welcoming manner and warm smile, Zikode is both engaging and articulate, with a reflective and calm demeanour. A radical humanist, not a firebrand, but a teacher and listener, Zikode has become a significant national public figure, appearing on television, on radio and in the national and local print media. While S'bu Zikode might be viewed as Abahlali's philosopher – indeed, he articulates the struggle as 'thought on the ground, running' – he has rigorously resisted calls to run for local government or to be the single spokesperson of the movement. He maintains that the problems are systemic, and sees himself only as the people's servant, elected on their behalf and subject to recall. Zikode has remained remarkably consistent and true to the principles of grassroots democracy and shared leadership and to critically reflecting on these struggles. In 2008, he decided not to run as president of the movement, arguing:

My intention was always to remain strongly committed to the movement but it seemed clear to me that all the positions at all levels of leadership in our movement need to be shared, that the burden of leadership in a movement of volunteers needs to be shared, that I need time for my family and to be able to read and think about what we have achieved with our living politics, a politics that was always based on us thinking carefully about our lives and our struggles. We have to change ourselves before we



can change the world and, without time to think, that change becomes difficult (Zikode 2008c).

This is an important articulation of principle. It insists not only on the space for thinking, but also on the centrality of self-reflexive thought to the movement itself. When members called on Zikode to reconsider his decision not to run, he took it seriously, adding that the movement's 'calls for a leader who is willing to learn and who is prepared to be led . . . [is] very important in our Movement's work of defining itself and knowing itself before someone else from somewhere else defines our Movement' (2008c).<sup>26</sup> This, of course, is an expression of a Fanonian principle: the leader does not lead the people, but rather helps in the work of self-clarification; the philosophic idea of 'knowing thyself' is and must be a social and collective process.

Zikode has developed a knack of talking over the head of the government to a larger constituency and his message is a challenge to the nation. He reminds people what the struggle has been about in the most profound and basic terms. In response to the shack dwellers' threat to boycott the 2006 local election, ANC politicians accused Abahlali of being a 'third force'.<sup>27</sup> The charge was picked up in the popular press and gained a life of its own. Certainly the accusation is outrageous, but it is also threatening since it associates the shack dwellers' movement with the murderous apartheid-sponsored violence of the early 1990s. But Zikode didn't deny it. Instead, he took it on and cleverly turned it around, linking the struggle against apartheid to not only the struggle for basic necessities, but also the post-apartheid government's indifference to life in the shacks: 'Government officials, politicians and intellectuals who speak about the Third Force have no idea what they are talking about. They are too high to really feel what we feel.' And quite literally, high up in their offices, they cannot see the people down below - physically, conceptually and experientially - and quite possibly, for this reason, the third force may not be something the politicians can understand. Zikode continues: 'We are driven by the Third Force, the suffering of the poor. Our betrayers are the Second Force. The First Force was our struggle against apartheid. The Third Force will stop when the Fourth Force comes. The Fourth Force is land, housing, water, electricity, health care, education, and work' (Zikode 2006). The implication is clear: The 'second force', the ANC in

power, had betrayed the struggle and produced not liberation but a 'third force', namely the suffering of the poor. In this logic, the as-yet-unrealised 'fourth force' is, of course, a vision of an egalitarian future.<sup>28</sup>

Zikode was quoted in an article in the *Mail & Guardian* on Christmas Day 2005, reminding people, in the tradition of liberation theology,<sup>29</sup> that there was never a holiday in the shacks: 'When the evening comes, it is always a challenge. The night is supposed to be for relaxing and getting rest. But not in the *jondolos*. People stay awake worrying about their lives. You must see how big the rats are that run across the babies.'<sup>30</sup> Giving notice to the ANC that their vote could not be taken for granted, the shack dwellers decided to boycott the 2005 municipal elections.<sup>31</sup> Based on the equation 'No Land, No House, No Vote',<sup>32</sup> the shack dwellers' decision was not based simply on a critique of local government policy. It also spoke to the form and content of democracy in post-apartheid South Africa, based on the exclusion of the voices of the masses of poor and working people and legitimised by periodic elections. Abahlali therefore declared that it was no longer going to government offices to sit on 'comfortable chairs' and listen to 'crooks and liars'. In the future, 'they must come and sit with us where we live' (Zikode quoted in Pithouse 2006b: 179).

On Clare Estate, the ANC, unsure of the Indian middle-class vote, has traditionally relied on the votes of the shack dwellers at election time.<sup>33</sup> But in response to Abahlali's boycott, the ANC decided to substitute class for popular solidarity, shifting its focus to the Indian middle-class homeowners. By arguing that only the ANC could save their property values from the shack dwellers who were claiming their right to the city, the ANC was indicating that the failure of the ANC to put the people's needs first was less a failure than a policy. Moreover, the city officials' technicist response to the concrete problems articulated by Abahlali was almost Kafkaesque. They stated that they were going to develop a 'business plan' to 'improve delivery in an integrated manner' (quoted in Pithouse 2006b: 174). After years of being ignored, the shack dwellers weren't going to be fobbed off with such verbiage. Boycotting the election was not taken lightly, but for Abahlali, democracy meant much more than a periodic vote. The decision to boycott represented a real shift in thinking about the core values of post-apartheid society. For them, democracy was not about an election every five years, but about day-to-day life that

included reciprocity, caring and the inclusion of those who had been systematically excluded and told that they were too stupid to understand. Abahlali was simply speaking a different language that emanated from below and was grounded in the struggle of the everyday. The organisation was concerned not with political negotiations but with principles that flowed from an open and egalitarian moral discourse and democratic practice: 'Our struggle is for moral questions, as compared to the political questions as such. It is more about justice,' declared Zikode. 'Is it good for shack dwellers to live in mud like pigs, as they are living? Why do I live in a cardboard house if there are people who are able to live in a decent house? So it is a moral question' (Zikode quoted in Ngiam 2006).

Just as the struggle against apartheid brought the vote, the shack dwellers' struggle has challenged the meaning of the vote and given a voice to the poorest of the poor: 'Now *the tide has turned*,' argued Zikode in 2006, 'you are hearing from the horse's mouth . . . We have come out to say *this is who we are, this is where we are and this is what we want*' (interview with Zikode in Beresford 2006, original emphasis). Continuously staying open to new creative impulses and questions and to innovation from below remains a core principle. As self-organised shack dwellers, Abahlali was becoming an author of its own history with everyone able to participate – an example, in Fanonian terms, of the 'practice of freedom' taking place in the 'structure of the people' (1968: 143).

Abahlali has consistently refuted the discourse of 'service delivery'; they insist instead that their demands are about 'being human'. 'It is not only about physical infrastructure,' says Zikode, 'we have shifted our thinking'; from the beginning, 'the struggle is the human being, the conditions that we live in which translates into demands for housing and land'. Through Abahlali, he adds, 'people are starting to remember that they are human beings' – even the police. Often harassed and criminalised (with trumped-up murder charges and such), with leaders including Zikode imprisoned and beaten up in Sydenham police station, members of Abahlali have suffered at the hands of the police. But after sustained mobilisation in late 2007, a shift in police behaviour became apparent, and Abahlali was determined to continue this trend and work with the police around issues of safety.<sup>34</sup>

There is a moralism to 'the culture of Abahlalism', a deeply rooted humanism where everyone shares everyday suffering and pain, as well as

laughter. Reflected in the democratic openness and respectfulness with which they conduct their meetings, Abahlalisms is a culture of sharing that is rooted in the ideas of community and reciprocity found in the long struggle against apartheid. 'We fought, died and voted for this government', Zikode says, 'so that we could be free and have decent lives', but 'this government does not treat us like people who can speak and think for ourselves' (Butler and Ntseng 2007). Thus life is not only about a struggle for decent living conditions, but also about a mental liberation from years of subservience and the lack of self-confidence that so oppressed the poor during the apartheid period, and sadly also during the post-apartheid period. One of the major goals of Abahlali, therefore, is a kind of moral revolution, the creation of a society where the poor will be treated as human beings with minds of their own. 'We are poor in life, not in mind,' Zikode likes to say.

Yet at every turn, Zikode is reminded that poor people in post-apartheid South Africa are not valued as much as others, and while Abahlali has successfully forced itself on to the agendas of government institutions and 'civil society', there is a constant struggle not only to keep these spaces open but through their inclusion to transform them. Whatever tactic has been employed, from mass marches to challenges in the courts, from meetings with local government to the No Vote campaign, what remains essential is that no actions take place without ongoing discussion and decision making at the meetings in the shack settlements. Court cases (including appeals to the Constitutional Court), for example, can be long, procedural and expensive affairs that can drain the resources and challenge the integrity of any poor people's movement. And while it appreciates the *pro bono* work of lawyers, Abahlali has always been careful to develop and sustain a mode of organising from the bottom up, through constant consultation and principled refusal of 'biryani money'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, as a movement, it has avoided two pitfalls, namely dependency on donors and professionalisation:

All decisions about money are taken collectively, publicly and democratically in the movement's open weekly meetings and all donations should therefore be channelled through the movement's official structures so that decisions about how to use

the money can be taken in these meetings. Abahlali is a 100% volunteer organisation and no member is paid for any work undertaken for the organisation and no money is allocated to individuals – it all goes for collective expenses such as lawyers, bail, transport, sound hire, etc. as determined by the discussion at the weekly meetings (Abahlali 2006a).

What remains important to Abahlali is that all activities are based on ongoing thinking from the underside, among the poorest of the poor in the shack communities. Abahlali's critique of the discourse of service delivery thus emerges from the conception of being counted as active participants in decisions and actions, rather than being seen as pariahs to be managed and controlled, by forcing themselves into those spaces where they have not been invited, and making their presence in these spaces a kind of 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 2007), one that contests the elite form of South Africa's democracy. Their claim to practical and intellectual equity, remarks Cooper-Knock (2009a), 'does not rest on claims to equal, technical knowledge but . . . in their capacity to reason through their situation'. In other words, the shack dwellers' knowledge derives from their existentially experienced situation of being in the shacks, and their politics from theorising their situation.

#### THINKING IN THE COMMUNITIES

*It is true that if care is taken to use only a language that is understood by graduates in law and economics, you can easily prove that the masses have to be managed from above. But if you speak the language of the everyday . . . then you will realize that the masses are quick to seize every shade of meaning . . . Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand . . . The more people understand, the more watchful they become and the more they come to realize that everything depends on them.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Fazel Khan<sup>36</sup> has already indicated that he has seven taps and a number of toilets. He also has a vehicle to move around. Therefore he cannot be compared to a person who has nothing . . . We from Abahlali are living

*at the grassroots level. There is no one below us . . . Some of our people are doing cleaning at this university. They also have important things to say.*

— S'bu Zikode, 'Sekwanel! Sekwanele!'

In a paper presented at the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in March 2005,<sup>37</sup> Zikode (2008a) explained that the shack dwellers' conception of politics is not about political office; it is a politics of the poor in the language of the people. Participation is based on shared experience, and their political practice is dependent on democratic meetings in the settlements: 'Our politics is a traditional home politics which is understood very well by all the old mamas and gogos [grandmothers] because it affects their lives and gives them a home.' It is a language which all can speak and understand; it is simple and transparent and thus creates a situation which is consciously collective and inclusive.<sup>38</sup> In Zikode's words, 'we look after each other and think about the situation and plan our fight together' (2008a: 115). Zikode's notion is a challenge to the elite politics that has characterised the post-apartheid transition and its corporate and technicist aftermath. It is not a question of empowerment or inclusion in terms of having a seat at the policy table, nor is it simply a question of being consulted, although that would be an important beginning; it is a challenge to the alienation inherent in the attitudes and proposals of the housing policy experts, an alienation that arises out of their attitude towards the poor, and the poor's systemic exclusion from the policy decisions made about them.

Thus, at first, the Kennedy Road movement saw itself as a movement unto itself, local and immediate, utterly divorced from liberal NGO or left anti-globalisation discourses. A year later, in his 2006 presentation, Zikode directly linked the self-activity of the shack dwellers, not only to housing politics, but also to national politics:

We believe that the housing policy does not only require housing specialists, rich consultants and government. We believe that housing policy requires most importantly, the people who need the houses. *But* we also know, as poor communities and as shack dwellers, that the broader poor have no choice but to play a role in shaping and reshaping this country into an anti-capitalist system (Zikode 2008a: 115, my emphasis).

And this alternative, he added, comes out of ‘the thinking that we do in communities’. The challenge to academics and intellectuals in the university setting is quite clear; their work requires listening to, and taking seriously, the thinking that is done in the communities. In other words, it requires shifting the geography of reason, and challenging preconceived ideas of who does the thinking and where it is done. This is not simply about territoriality, but about restoring agency to the people who know the situation, who can and should do the thinking so that they can demand, in a Fanonian sense, a more reality-based and a more rational<sup>39</sup> and effective mode of operation that will lead to a self-conscious realisation that they are ‘equal to the problems that confront them’ (Fanon 1968: 193). In practice, this has meant that Abahlali’s meetings, its finances and its organisational structures are open to all.

#### HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Thinking about ‘alternatives’ in a radically open way doesn’t come from the ANC tradition, which has always been an elite and often dogmatic organisation, but it certainly was part of the populist urban movements and the incipient shopfloor trade union democracy of the late 1970s and 1980s. Today people come to Abahlali with different political histories and traditions. There are those who consider themselves part of the ANC tradition, and there are those who have connections with trade union and urban movements, as well as other anti-apartheid organisations. In the beginning many people came out of the IFP<sup>40</sup> and it was only after 2008 that people in formerly IFP areas began to join. There are those with no political identification or with links to grassroots struggles outside of formal political organisations. While many members were too young to be politically active against apartheid, some can trace a link to the squatter rebellions of the 1950s and even to the 1906 anti-colonial revolt, the Bambatha rebellion (see Pithouse 2009a).<sup>41</sup> Even though the Kennedy Road movement had initially supported the ANC,<sup>42</sup> the language of struggle still used by the ANC to legitimise the ANC’s policies had no resonance with life in the settlements. Zikode (2009b) explains:

We did not start with a plan – the movement has always been shaped by the daily activities of the people that make it, by their

daily thinking, by their daily influence. This togetherness is what has shaped the movement. I am not too sure where our ideas would come from if there was no daily lives of people, a living movement can only be shaped by the daily lives of its members . . . This is where we formulate our debates and then our demands.

In addition, because people in the settlements came from different political backgrounds, there was an added incentive to make sure that the movement remained focused on the lived experience of shack life common to all, and that the building of the movement remained open to all. Abahlali, therefore, purposefully avoided identifying with any one political organisation.

At each stage, there was discussion. For example, the shack dwellers didn't know what would happen after the road blockade; they only knew that they would discuss options as they went along. What was important was that the development of a new politics could only be maintained by a rigorous, grassroots, democratic culture, and it is indeed this that remains central as the movement grows, incorporating and reappropriating other languages of struggle, even anti-capitalist discourses.<sup>43</sup> And as Abahlali has developed, its discontinuity with the earlier anti-apartheid struggle has morphed into a sense of continuity with that struggle's unfinished character. As Sibusiso Mzimela put it, 'we're still on the road; we're still . . . struggling' because 'the struggle against apartheid has been a little achieved . . . That's why we're still in the struggle, to make sure things are done right' (quoted in Bryant 2008: 57).

In the 1999 election, the ANC increased the size of its parliamentary majority and seemed increasingly beyond reproach, disorienting and silencing oppositional voices. Post-apartheid South Africa was a success. Yet, it was exactly at this moment that local, community-based movements organising around basic needs began to spring up, giving voice to the human cost of the government's homegrown structural adjustments discussed earlier. These movements began to be heard alongside established organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which challenged the government's HIV/AIDS policies. Where the TAC positioned itself as part of the ANC tradition, other new movements, like the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), were formed by left critics of the



ANC, while the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF), formed by ANC and some left critics (Desai 2002a), found backing in areas with relatively thin ANC support that were easier to organise (see Siwisa 2008). Mosoetsa (2005: 871) notes that although the Concerned Citizens group in Durban's Mpumalanga township was led by 'prominent IFP leaders', both IFP and ANC followers supported the community response, arguing that it was issues, not political parties, that motivated support. While the APF and CCF reacted to privatisation and retrenchment, other movements like the Landless People's Movement (see Greenberg 2006) and the Anti-Eviction Campaign in the Western Cape, which supported 'land invasions' by the landless and homeless, disputed the government's inactivity in relation to land redistribution, and challenged the increasing costs of basic necessities such as rent, bond repayments, water and electricity (see Desai and Pithouse 2004; Oldfield and Stokke 2006; Pointer 2004). Although these movements were new in the sense that they emerged in response to the post-apartheid ANC government, they also trace a lineage to the militant township 'civics', which, as argued in Chapter 2, pitted some of the most sustained and active challenges against late-apartheid regimes and policies.

Built around issues of basic services, many of these new movements have been aided by middle-class activists and NGOs, and have often been seen as part of a larger umbrella movement demanding access to, or making demands on, the state. Often providing money and resources, these NGOs and activists did help the loosely structured movements' campaigns to grow. Yet, far from being simply beneficial, this relationship often became problematic. As Peter Dwyer (2006) points out, large events and demonstrations often ended up taking precedence over the painstaking work of building grassroots democratic structures and processes. Instead, decisions were often made in informal meetings and by an 'informal leadership' frequently based on patronage. Writing about the CCF in Durban's Mpumalanga township, Buntu Siwisa (2008) notes that young activists were considered simply as 'the troops' to be mobilised for marches, but were never involved in decision making. He adds that there was 'a clear schism between intellectuals-cum-leaders, who are mainly White and Indian and hold nearly all, if not all, the executive positions and the youth activists in African townships, who are mainly responsible for activist

work on the ground, and who have no positions in the CCF leadership “structure” (Siwisa 2008: 931).

In the long run, the divisions between leaders and activists aided the process of demobilisation, and fractured many of the movements and forums, suggesting that these movements were simply a type of ‘popcorn’ organisation (Dwyer 2006: 107) that emerged every time there was a crisis, but quickly died off either when key leaders of the movements ‘[e]ft community politics to work for the government’ (Mosoetsa 2005: 871), or when the movement was simply suppressed and its leaders criminalised. On the other hand, the more a social movement is focused on gaining access to the state, the more it subjects its autonomy and independence to the threat of co-option and professionalisation. As social movements become professionalised, they become elite and hierarchical in form. Problems then tend to be considered from a managerial and bureaucratic standpoint, so that human problems are addressed as technical issues, resulting in a gap between the organisers and members. As such, social movements can entrench existing paternalistic relations between the organisation and the people. Even if it appreciates and recognises cultural differences, and even if it is open to discussion, a social movement in no way guarantees democratic processes.

In fact, professionalisation is not uncommon among social movements, and is often rationalised on the basis of pragmatism and instrumentalism. Members who are increasingly full-time (rather than voluntary) have to get things done and can’t wait for drawn-out dialogue, explanation and training. Moreover, often fixated on narrowly defined ideas about what constitutes ‘success’ (Gamson 2003),<sup>44</sup> an increasing gap between full-timers, activists and the rank and file occurs, producing a spirit of discouragement among its own rank and file. This problem necessitates a reconsideration of the notion of judging ‘success’ solely by material outcomes. The very practice of involving common people in the process of decision making must be part of a vision of rethinking what constitutes ‘success’. Though it is difficult to sustain a movement without tangible victories, it is harder to maintain a movement once it ‘succeeds’ and becomes professionalised. Indeed, the enemy is not so much ‘professionalisation’ as it is the mechanical, rigid structure and thinking that reifies the poor, reducing them to problems to be solved. Thus, the goal of a

new movement may be its own praxis and working existence, humanised and empowered by its own acts of solidarity and the process of self-determination. This type of autonomy is in direct contrast to the goal of the majority of social movements. As Oldfield and Stokke (2006: 130) put it: 'In simplified terms, the South African political field is marked by a competition over the right to be the legitimate representatives of "poor people's struggle".' This quest to be the legitimate representatives, they add, is shared by 'old' and 'new' social movements. But what is truly new about the post-apartheid movements is that, in their quest to speak for and represent themselves, they are articulating a new social consciousness where the very localised and marginalised struggles of poor people are reverberating nationally.

Although many of the millennium movements faded, the dramatic rise of local, often spontaneous revolts across the country after the 2004 national elections was phenomenal.<sup>45</sup> The rapid growth of the shack dwellers' movement in 2005 indicates that this was no mere local expression that could be reduced to a demand for 'service delivery', only to be lost in the day-to-day struggle for survival. Rather than a 'popcorn' movement, Abahlali was different. It did not want to be represented but instead insisted on building deep democratic structures in all the shack settlements. For example, before Abahlali was formally established, Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis's film, *The Take*, was shown in the Kennedy Road Community Hall (the only building with electricity in the settlement).

The three young women, including a 16-year-old who had been incarcerated, selected to welcome Klein and Lewis, all made the point that so much had been won and achieved by the whole process leading up to the march on [councillor] Baig. Nothing tangible had been won but these young women were pointing to the radical change in the community's collective sense of self and the incredible expansion of spaces of political agency within the community (Pithouse 2005b).

Indeed, the concreteness of this radical mutation in self-consciousness is also expressed by Abahlali's expansion beyond the shack settlements, coming to include formal housing estates and street traders among its members, and later becoming part of the national Poor People's Alliance.<sup>46</sup>

## THE LAZINESS OF THE INTELLECTUALS?

*Labor produces marvels for the rich . . . it produces palaces, but hovels for the worker . . . The worker feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions – eating, drinking and procreating, or at most also in his dwelling and personal adornment – while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal.*

— Karl Marx, ‘Estranged Labour’

Shack dwellers’ revolts are often considered to be inherently spontaneous, fragmented and disorganised. According to some Marxists, shack dwellers are individualistic and reactionary, living in a world of scarcity, a Hobbesian ‘natural’ world of all against all, and their revolts are highly combusive, energetic, violent and short.<sup>47</sup>

Because shack dwellers are poor, they spend an inordinate amount of time taking care of basic needs, which many non-poor take for granted. Consequently, it is argued that they have no time for building organisations. The point is not to primitivise or romanticise shack life: certainly the settlements are not primordial or ideal places.<sup>48</sup> The problem with Mike Davis’s popular *Planet of Slums*, for example, is not that it paints a gloomy account of the exponential growth of informal settlements globally, but that these settlements are by their nature supposedly devoid of human subjectivity. Those who live in the ‘slums’<sup>49</sup> are uniformly defined as either a ‘lumpen’<sup>50</sup> or reactionary mass, produced by an economics of survival, where the slum is posited as the solution to twenty-first-century capitalism’s need to warehouse its ‘surplus humanity’ (Davis 2006: 28). The position is deterministic, in part because Davis collapses quite different social situations and communities into a monolithic category, ‘the planet of the slums’; urban shack settlements, which can offer inhabitants a degree of autonomy, are thrown together with razor-wired transit camps, detention centres and rural ghettos. The result is not only a writing off of any differences, but moreover the writing off of any possibility of solidarity emerging from any of this. It is not surprising, therefore, that Davis sees only one life in the ‘slum’: a ‘self-consuming violence’ spawned by a social Darwinian world of the survival of the fittest – an old recapitulation of a previous stereotype and a very narrow

idea of the working class. While we might debate whether the growth of urban shanty towns allows for the development of a social community or produces only a violent struggle of all against all for scraps, there should be no doubt that the 'surplus population' – those who live in the 'informal' settlements, whether they work in the formal economy or not – is very much part of Marx's notion of the working class;<sup>51</sup> it is not a dispossessed population without the possibility of access to 'the culture of collective labour or large-scale class struggle'. Indeed, in Davis's 'apocalyptic anti-urbanism', there are no progressive forces capable of challenging the social order.<sup>52</sup> And, as Tom Angotti points out, alongside this economic idea of subjectivity, Davis's fixation on a small group of conservative NGOs further blinds him 'to the large grassroots networks of active, militant, community-based organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America' (Angotti 2006: 965).<sup>53</sup> The result is a pessimistic vision. It maps the human cost of neoliberalism but more importantly denies any progressive agency to those living in 'slums'.<sup>54</sup>

If Davis's theoretical pessimism is built on a narrow conception of class and framed by the UN-Habitat report 'The Challenge of the Slums', which draws uncritically on World Bank research (see Pithouse 2005b),<sup>55</sup> Slavoj Žižek's, perhaps romantic, optimism is based on another series of generalisations. Žižek (2004) argues that the slum dwellers like Marx's proletariat are 'free' in the sense that they have nothing. While Žižek does actually recognise that they have something, namely a degree of autonomy outside the state, he celebrates rather than investigates this autonomy<sup>56</sup> and thus paints a rather homogeneous picture of this relative *autonomy without power*. In other words, those autonomous from formal economic discipline as well as state welfare (education, social services, state grants, etc.) become more, not less, subject to heightened state authoritarianism. What is missing from Žižek's concept that would give concreteness and life to this abstract picture is the thinking of the shack dwellers. Indeed, it is as subject, not substance, that the shack dwellers' movement develops a positive autonomy, 'creat[ing] a space of true freedom beyond the control of the state and through their struggles for freedom' (Mark Butler 2009).

While Davis's idea of warehousing, and Žižek's notion of autonomy, are rooted in privileging the exclusionary movement of capitalism, Žižek's

gesture towards the logic of Marx's 'absolute law' of capitalist accumulation, for example, has the advantage of enabling an idea that a new 'mode of being together' will develop. And while Davis's conception of slums denies the possibility of a self-acting movement, Žižek's conception opens up the possibility of thinking about shack dweller autonomy in two ways: an autonomy created in the very act of setting up settlements outside the gaze of the state, and an autonomy, consciously developed, in defiance of the state, blossoming within these interstitial spaces, giving rise to expressions of freedom and the collective commons, and the development of systems of governance based on ongoing collective democratic practices and open to innovation from below. These life-affirming actions find a resonance with the democratic character of contemporary grassroots movements around the world,<sup>57</sup> which are in principle open to all, encouraging the participation of marginalised people and the articulation of their needs.

To be sure, many squatter settlements develop under the radar in marginal spaces, and thus outside the gaze of the authorities. These settlements develop by necessity and in time become permanent, with established working rules. And one cannot be cavalier about necessity. Indeed, the existence of a settlement does not guarantee the development of democratic self-governing structures, and in fact the possibilities are multiple.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, self-governance, or autonomy from the state, is not necessarily a threat to the state's legitimacy, as Žižek might think. Since shack settlements are often 'illegal' occupations, their continued existence depends on remaining subterranean and outside the gaze of the state. Thus, while it is important to stress that autonomous practices do develop out of necessity and in dire situations, it is also in these autonomous spaces that both potentially radical and quite reactionary social and cultural practices can develop and be contested. So while autonomy may be contingent on a settlement's marginalisation, such marginalisation is a form of freedom that is contingent on the actions of the 'other'. Žižek's (2004) conception of the settlement's freedom from the state can seem like freedom only from a distance, from on 'high', where shack dwellers remain an abstraction, wilfully ignored by the state, although, in truth, the post-apartheid shack settlements are coming under more and more state surveillance and force. In short, the struggle to establish democratic accountability is crucial to political mobilisation.

In the late apartheid period, shack settlements were celebrated by the ANC and other anti-apartheid organisations because they transgressed the apartheid geography of control. But political life in the shanty towns was often far more complicated than the anti-apartheid movement understood. Local anti-apartheid leaders were uncritical of authoritarian shanty town political figures that they considered to be anti-apartheid, and at Crossroads in Cape Town, for example, this led to disaster. Crossroads, one of the larger 'informal settlements' or 'squatter camps' on the outskirts of Cape Town, was first settled in 1975. By the mid-1980s, Crossroads and its neighbouring settlements had a population of over 100 000. There was an ongoing struggle between the militant youth and the authoritarian Crossroads executive, led by Johnson Ngxobongwana, essentially a local gang leader cum warlord who was also the leader of the Western Cape Civic Association. In the early 1980s, the UDF 'turned a blind eye' to Ngxobongwana's political practices and his suppression of any political opposition, including progressive organisations in Crossroads. This was a bad political miscalculation, according to Cole (1987), and between 25 May and 12 June 1986, the police were able to forcibly remove about 60 000 people from the area, killing eighteen people in the process.

But political contestation does not always run along party lines, and we should also note that political actions in the history of shanty towns in South Africa have often been at the vanguard of the anti-apartheid struggle, but are not necessarily given space in the ANC's romanticised version of history, which as Iain Edwards (1996: 103) argues, 'ignored very real gender struggles within society and its own organization'.

In the autonomous spaces of the shack lands, there exist not only patriarchal power structures but revolt against them that transgressed apartheid rules in numerous ways. For example, homosexual marriage was pioneered in South Africa in the Umkumbane settlement in the 1950s (Edwards 1996; see also Edwards 2000). In Cato Manor, homosexual relations were expressed in language by secret Zulu words and phrases that were used among homosexuals to describe their own views of themselves and the society in which they lived. And, in a great struggle for women's economic autonomy, women contested patriarchal power in Cato Manor and, in 1959, fought a triple struggle against the local

patriarchal power and its alliance with the ANC (including the ANC's Women's League) and the apartheid state. Indeed, the ANC as an elite organisation has always been more Victorian when it comes to social mores than many shack dwellers, though the latter are often perceived as inevitably reactionary with regard to contested politics such as questions of gender and sexuality. Thus, despite a measure of autonomy for women, the governance of the shack lands was patriarchal, and Cato Manor women were in the end defeated by a 'male deal' expressed in the 'man to man' discussion between Durban's manager of Bantu administration and the shack leaders (Edwards 1996).

In the post-apartheid period, settlements were brought under the control of local ANC governance and party structures. Indeed, the shack dwellers' movement is a struggle against marginalisation and a rejection of what are essentially patronage structures of ANC governance; this struggle requires that shack dwellers develop their own voice and organisation. The struggle is always risky because it potentially endangers the settlement's autonomy, which is vital to its survival.<sup>59</sup> Organising against the hierarchical, and often patriarchal, patronage structures in the settlement, and making demands outside these structures on the state, leads to greater state surveillance and scrutiny of the shack settlement (leading to more police harassment, more checks on electricity connections and the 'legality' of shack buildings). Once the movement begins to pressure the state (through mass mobilisation, the courts, the media, etc.), the movement threatens the hegemony of the local administrations and local powers, and becomes subject to increased violence. Carrying out their threat to boycott local elections, for example, results in further banishment, criminalisation and political harassment. As a consciously organised, democratic, material struggle, the movement attempts to extend control over day-to-day life in the shacks. And it is such collective decision making and collective actions that have allowed the shack dwellers to move from being 'on their own' to *becoming* a political movement, capable of challenging the political business-as-usual, and becoming a grassroots poor people's organisation based on transparent democratic principles that demand the same practices from the state and local authorities. This is a form of positive autonomy, and since Abahlali has gained an element of recognition in civil society, not only through their marches and appeals



to the Constitutional Court, but also in their day-to-day work, they have been considered a viable organisation to which government, non-government and international NGOs<sup>60</sup> want to speak, albeit as junior partners.

Though Abahlali has faced repression, criminalisation and charges of being a counter-revolutionary third force, it has proved to be far more than a 'popcorn' movement. Where other movements die off after the first wave of collective euphoria wanes and difficulties emerge, Abahlali as a democratic organisation has continued to weather attacks, including from the state (and its supporters on the 'left') as well as from NGOs. It has vigilantly insisted not only that the voices of the poor be heard but that the poor be respected as thinking and actional human beings who take part in decisions about their lives. This has helped engender a profoundly democratic spirit in the Abahlali branches and settlements. (Of course, in some areas this democratic project has encountered various challenges but because Abahlalism is defined, and constantly collectively reaffirmed as a democratic politics, the movement's legitimacy cannot be successfully misused as a cover for undemocratic practices.) Despite all the manoeuvrings against it, attempts at division, as well as the criminalisation and smearing of the movement as a counter-revolutionary force, Abahlali has grown in stature and in numbers. It is clearly a movement whose time has come. The content of its demands is inseparable from their form. The Abahlali shack dwellers don't simply want houses. They do not want to be administered from above, nor do they want political power, which would subject them to such administrative power from above. They want to change how things are done. In other words, they are struggling not merely for 'delivery', but for a vision of a different kind of politics.<sup>61</sup> My point here is that the importance of Abahlali as a challenge to the post-apartheid elite, local government functionaries, NGO paternalism, as well as the strongmen in the shanty towns is based on its self-organisation and its participatory democratic practices.

So, what is the meaning of the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo? As mentioned, the movement began with an understanding that they were on their own. Fragmented, alienated and cut off, they discovered a tremendous solidarity among themselves, across Durban and beyond. They have made connections with the larger struggle, and

spoken with activists and shack dwellers across the country, the African continent and indeed the world. They are still 'on their own', but their autonomy is understood as positively constructive, grounded in a belief that change will come from their own actions, that they are their own agents of liberation. The shack dwellers' struggle is not simply a fight for inclusion, but a struggle to change the terms of inclusion.<sup>62</sup> And Abahlali have developed a culture of democracy that has spread among Abahlali-affiliated settlements; they have made democratic governance a condition of settlement affiliation, thus proving their ability to decide their own future and to govern themselves.

Yet, as I have also been suggesting, the situation is ambiguous. Abahlali demands services and insists on being subject to no one. Its members want to remain in the cities; they demand a right to the city and all its services. They want protection and security but they also understand that the police will continue to harass them, and that the only real security is produced in the shack communities themselves. In other words, the shack dwellers' movement is built on the reason of the poor who, as Fanon puts it (1967a: 224), 'cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger'; it is through this struggle that a fighting culture and principles emerge. The shack dwellers' idea of politics is thus not focused on the state, which, with its bureaucratic and technicist language and administrative mentality, acts to depoliticise politics, but this does not mean that Abahlali refuses to engage with the state.<sup>63</sup> By encouraging their own and other poor people's voices to speak, to be heard, and to be part of the discussion, they have not only opened up new spaces for alternative political thinking,<sup>64</sup> but also affirmed their *raison-d'être*.

In the early days of the movement, the struggle's discourse centred on ideas of dignity and self-respect. The declaration that 'we are human beings' was echoed in the shack dwellers' outrage at the politicians who ignored their plight. This affirmation has been the one constant feature that has linked all the various forms of revolt that have emerged after apartheid and is not unique to Abahlali (Pithouse 2009b). What is unique to Abahlali is that they have stuck with this rather than allow someone to interpret their politics for them. Thus, from its beginnings the struggle was not over a technical issue about the redistribution of resources (though

it includes that) but a most concrete reflection on being human, about the fact that human beings should live in homes fit for human beings. The shack dwellers don't only demand recognition as human beings.<sup>65</sup> Their demand for recognition has been consistent and goes beyond the liberal tradition of 'inclusion' in a political or legal system. They take the freedom won in the struggles against apartheid seriously, and thus reject the equation of freedom with neoliberal ideas as 'unfreedom' since for them those ideas only amount to absence of freedom. They want freedom to be truly equal. Thus, while fighting for what is guaranteed by the South African Constitution is important,<sup>66</sup> what is at stake is the need to address deep-rooted structures of economic inequality that are legacies of apartheid and colonialism, reproduced in contemporary neoliberal South Africa. In that sense, the demand for 'redistribution' is a real and urgent one, but it is also a critique of elite-driven politics (or the anti-politics discourse of 'service delivery'), be that right-wing, top-down technocracy, NGO paternalism, vanguardism,<sup>67</sup> or left-wing technocratism. The latter describes a situation in which too much attention is paid to technical instruments, and too little to popular participation. In contrast to reforms developed by scholars and NGO staff 'while the poor and their grassroots organisations play only a very secondary role in terms of strategy building and intellectual elaboration' (De Souza 2006: 337), the shack dwellers seek to be an essential part of decision making and thus agents of refashioning democracy.

NO LONGER ON THEIR OWN: A MOVEMENT WHOSE TIME HAS COME

*The people stagnate deplorably in unbearable poverty; slowly they awaken to the unutterable treason of their leaders.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

*Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs.*

— Karl Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Program'

At its birth, the shack dwellers' movement appeared to be spontaneous, but the democratic organisation in Kennedy Road had long been talked about. What allowed the Kennedy Road actions to develop from a

demonstration into a living movement was the fact that the democratic organisation had already been in the making. In contrast to other shack dwellers' revolts occurring at the same time, the revolt at Kennedy Road was the product of an organised community that was able, for example, to support those who were arrested and thus to articulate the beginnings of a new self-sustaining movement. The shack dwellers' movement began as a struggle not only to defend what they had, but to also fight for what they *should* have – indeed, what had been promised to them – which helps to explain the ethical dimension of their argument. Indeed, the Kennedy Road settlement's initial demand, that the council not renege on its promises, did not threaten the interests of commercial banks. These were not radical demands; but what made the movement effective, and also what allowed it to develop a more radical position over time, was that it had made a central and uncompromising principle of democracy. Of course, the movement is defined by more than its 'founding' event, but the founding event has now become a story oft retold. Indeed, that event became the nodal point. My interest is in how it became a moment, philosophically speaking, and how it transcended the particular event. The movement cannot be explained by issues of resource mobilisation, or the aid of outside forces or even the event's material success. What was expressed through the shack settlement's initial self-mobilisation was its insistence on open meetings where all could speak and hash out issues, coupled with the straightforwardness and moral suasion of their demands. The growth of the movement came about through word-of-mouth and personal communication, which, by the end of the year, had engendered a new organisation, Abahlali baseMjondolo. One factor that has tempered the movement's growth is its investment in the principle of discussing things openly and thoroughly in meetings and making decisions with the commitment of all. Each shack settlement that joins, each new branch that forms, has to follow the democratic principles of Abahlali.<sup>68</sup> This means that each demonstration or march requires a number of meetings, then meetings of subcommittees, as well as communication among settlements. Press releases are discussed, written and distributed. And each settlement and branch, through its own autonomous committees, sends delegates to Abahlali.<sup>69</sup> The Abahlali meetings rotate among all the affiliated settlements, are usually attended by about 30 to 40 elected

representatives from the various committees and are open to all residents from the local settlements (Beresford 2006).<sup>70</sup> It is worth noting that, though the democratic culture of the organisation has spread across the settlements, it doesn't always overcome authoritarianism or conservative ideas. Even where settlements have strong Abahlali activists, it has been difficult, at times, to get beyond the armed authoritarianism of 'leaders' who trade votes for private deals with the state.

Governed on such a grassroots democratic basis, with meetings open to all adults (regardless of age, gender,<sup>71</sup> ethnicity, origin and length of time in residence), each settlement has at least one weekly meeting, and elected representatives from each of the settlements meet as Abahlali baseMjondolo every Saturday. Every day there are a number of meetings of various subcommittees. The meetings are very formal, with decisions arrived at by consensus and with an emphasis on the inclusive process of 'listening to others' ideas' and 'being together' (Bryant 2008: 48).

Through these processes, the movement has consistently rejected offers of money, proffered mostly by NGOs and parties attempting to buy political credibility. It has remained very suspicious of outsiders who try to speak for it or take control and, over time, it has come to understand who its real friends and enemies are. At its inception, three 'outsiders' – activist academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Fazel Khan, Raj Patel and Richard Pithouse – were directly involved with the movement on a daily basis. Committed to the Fanonian belief that a movement of the poor should speak for itself, these activist academics had put themselves in the school of the people; they not only helped put the shack dwellers' organisation in touch with committed lawyers, typed up press releases and developed a website, but took the thinking being done in the communities seriously.

#### HONEST INTELLECTUALS?

*There almost always exists a small number of upstanding intellectuals . . . who instinctively distrust the race for jobs and handouts that is symptomatic of the aftermath of independence.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

When Fanon wrote in *The Wretched* that intellectuals needed to put themselves in the school of the people, he had in mind the grounding of new concepts in what Zikode calls ‘thinking that is done in the communities’. This thinking, which emerges from experience, is at once pragmatic and critical. Ideas and formulas repeated at meetings help generate new ways of knowing in the communities and, in the case of Abahlali, the movement’s intellectuals are truly organic to it. They live in the settlements and this goes a long way towards overcoming the separation of intellectuals from the masses that so preoccupied Fanon. Richard Pithouse, for example, a philosopher by training who taught at the University of Durban-Westville in the late 1990s before becoming a research fellow at the Centre for Civil Society and later a lecturer at Rhodes University, has been a member of Abahlali since its founding. Since there have been absurd accusations that he is the White man behind the movement acting as a ‘gatekeeper’,<sup>72</sup> one needs to be careful that in reaction to such provocations the actual role of this committed middle-class activist is not understated. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid the pitfalls of social movement ‘resource-mobilisation’ literature that overstates the role of outsiders. Such a position is exemplified by the vanguardist left, but also prevails among decentralised, anti-establishment NGO and paternalistic liberals, and leads (especially in the South African situation) to racist and classist thinking that poor and marginalised people can’t organise and think for themselves. This attitude brings to mind Biko’s critique of White liberalism discussed in Chapter 1. Speaking of this situation in 2007, Zikode (quoted in Abahlali 2007) remarked that despite all that the movement has accomplished, ‘NGOs and some academics still believe that social change cannot come from the bottom, and still believe that democracy is all about being loyal to their authority’ when to work with the movement depends, in fact, on working with the movement’s democratic structures.

For Fanon, the intellectual who enrolls in the ‘school of the people’ – marvellously articulated on the movement’s banners as the ‘University of Kennedy Road’ or the ‘University of Abahlali’ – does not come empty-handed. He insists that to appreciate the creativity of the damned of the earth does not mean becoming a mindless cheerleader. Indeed, what Fanon calls ‘honest’ (1968: 177) or ‘upstanding’ (2004: 140) intellectuals

must come to the school, clear their thinking about the ‘backwardness’ of the masses, and take, as Zikode put it, ‘the minds of the poor’ seriously as providing the starting point for working out the ‘new concepts’ that Fanon calls for in his conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*. This does not mean that intellectuals must come without ideas. The point is not to praise the masses, but to engage with them. For one of the most important challenges facing the nation after independence, as Fanon argues, is to overcome the discouragement and alienation that the people feel when realising that little has changed, and that the promises of change are empty, by promoting people’s confidence and self-understanding. To do this, they must self-consciously bring ideas, concepts and learning that can participate in the people’s own self-understanding. Yet, this is exactly where the problem begins. For the danger lies not only in overvaluing the role of ‘honest’ middle-class activists who can put their expertise in the service of the people, but also in a reactive way undervaluing and underestimating that role.

Pithouse himself has addressed this point, articulating the Fanonian position that the militant’s task is to overcome the spirit of discouragement marginal people feel,<sup>73</sup> and to help them build confidence through discussions that explore viable modes of resistance. Having worked with and written about movements in post-apartheid South Africa,<sup>74</sup> Pithouse has brought to Abahlali a practical knowledge of the kinds of movements that have been successful and those that have not. Turning the anthropological gaze on itself, he became an informant, sharing knowledge<sup>75</sup> about how to engage with the state, how to express opposition and how to navigate the donor/NGO terrain, including the problematic of accountability.<sup>76</sup> But he stresses that while he was an active participant in the discussions that shaped Abahlali baseMjondolo, he was one of many, each of whom brought particular experiences and skills to the table. Similarly, Raj Patel and Fazel Khan have stood alongside Pithouse as Fanon’s ‘honest intellectuals’, actively participating in a people’s democracy.

Yet it is precisely when activist academics make such a commitment that they run up against university administrations and state security forces. This is exactly what happened at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. All three academics who worked closely with Abahlali in the first year of the struggle came under enormous pressure from various interests in the

university, resulting in all three leaving.<sup>77</sup> This should not come as a surprise, since the university's mission is grounded in the idea of becoming an exclusive world-class public institution, which means looking to Northern donors for legitimisation. In this context, the praxis of academics who work with Abahlali is seen as a threat to the university's goals. Moreover, insofar as committed intellectuals use knowledge snatched from elite universities to help the 'damned's' self-government, they are, from the perspective of the institutional elite university, subverting its property rights. Universities, after all, accredited through technical language and designed in Fanon's terms to 'cheat the people' (1968: 189), can only consider this use of knowledge a breach of their intellectual property; and they are particularly unhappy when researchers share their knowledge with those who will use it to challenge the establishment and shift the ground of reason, critiquing the university itself. For these universities, knowledge, and therefore power, must flow the other way: it is the researchers' role to bring back the ideas and practices snatched from the subalterns to empower the university and reinforce its walls and elevate its standing. In this Manichaean situation, the work of Fanon's honest intellectual cannot but be ridiculed as romantic, her or his work marginalised as unscholarly and even criminal.<sup>78</sup>

Abahlali's former deputy president, Philani Zungu, understands the class politics and simple materiality of the university's actions against sympathetic academics in a series of rhetorical questions:

Why are we not allowed to work with academics at the university? Why are academics at the university not allowed to work with the poor? The answer is clear. This democracy is not for us. We must stay silent so that this truth can be kept hidden. This democracy is for the rich who will build and then enjoy themselves at uShaka, King Senzagakhona Stadium and King Shaka Airport. We will only go to these places to protect and clean up for the rich (Zungu 2006).

Zungu understands that the university's actions against academics who work with Abahlali are not the product of a conspiracy, but the reality of a class society. The university has corporate interests; but South Africa's



elite universities, built in the image of Oxbridge, continue to harbour the desire to become 'world-class' institutions, looking Northward for recognition.

Thus, Zikode's challenge to radical academics to bring 'our university' (Abahlali) to 'your university' reflects the importance the movement puts on the power of thought, and on theory that elucidates the 'objective situation'. As Marx put it, 'minds are always connected by invisible threads with the body of the people' (quoted in Hudis 1983: 30), and the role of practice-based theory is not just to develop solidarity but to bring about a meeting of minds. This idea, also articulated by Fanon, was taken seriously by the three activists who initially worked with the Kennedy Road movement, and it has found acknowledgement and support among the movements of the urban poor. As Zungu (2006) put it, 'Fazel Khan, a sociologist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, is facing charges for speaking to the media . . . With other academics, academics who are already gone from the university, he has spoken to the poor instead of for the poor. He has worked with the poor instead of with the rich in the name of the poor.'

The result was the birth of a movement and a nuancing of attitudes. Voices began to be heard that were once silent, and voices of the poor could be heard in spaces where they do not usually speak, such as in newspapers and on the Internet, on radio and on television,<sup>79</sup> not to mention academic journals. Instead of an isolated struggle, new connections were forged, and Abahlali developed and expanded because other shack settlements across the city and, later, elsewhere in the province and then the country recognised their affinity with the Kennedy Road struggle. A struggle that began locally, with people seeing the councillor as the major problem, has become global, with people understanding that the problems they face are systemic.

There was, in other words, a radical mutation of ideas. For example, in May 2005, the shack dwellers' experiences of working in and living next to a middle- and upper-class Indian community on the Clare Estate could have been linked to anti-Indian racism, and indeed the risk of such a reaction was high. Yet, by September 2005, shack dwellers were collecting hard-earned cash to pay for taxis to travel to give support to people in the predominantly Indian working-class suburb of Bayview (Pithouse 2006c).<sup>80</sup>

Over time, some NGOs and other individuals have given practical support, but Abahlali is not dependent on any external funds. It remains particularly concerned about its ability to maintain political autonomy within the democratic structure of the organisation. 'It's quite interesting because sometimes we are aware that these organisations have got money but they don't have constituents, you know, *people*,' argued Zikode. 'Abahlali is the poor struggle - struggle of the poor - therefore money will not tempt us . . . we cannot therefore be bought' (Zikode quoted in Pithouse 2006b). In other words, Abahlali became aware of the potentially disastrous effects of external funding on a poor people's movement, that it may not only broker a movement but also potentially destroy it.

Again, Zikode (2008d: 122) reminds us that human beings do not live on bread alone. 'We are poor', he says, 'we know that, and we might be poor in life, but we are not poor in mind', recognising that, as Marx put it, the real wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of real social and intellectual connections.

# 5

## Xenophobia or a new humanism?

### *Fanon in the shacks*

*The shanty town sanctions the native's biological decision to invade, at whatever cost and if necessary by the most cryptic methods, the enemy fortress . . . It is within this mass of humanity, the people of the shanty towns . . . that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead.*

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

*Before the expression exceeded the content; now, the content exceeds the expression.*

— Karl Marx, quoted by Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Just as Fanon took Algiers as the paradigmatic zoned colonial city from his observations and experiences of that city, Algiers was the source of his remarks about the revolutionary importance of the shanty town. As in other settler colonies, the expropriation of the best rural land and the pauperisation of the peasantry from the early years of the twentieth century in Algeria helped speed up rural migration and with it the growth of settlements, often out of sight on the edges of the city or in the valleys. By the 1950s, the growth of *bidonvilles* or shack settlements 'added a third element' (Çelik 1997: 110) to the Manichaean colonial city that Fanon famously described. This third element formed the core of Fanon's lumpenproletariat, who by 1954, on the eve of the Algerian revolution, made up over 40 per cent of Algiers' native population. Working during the day at Blida-Joinville hospital and at night in the FLN (National

Liberation Front) underground during the battle of Algiers, Fanon observed how the *bidonvilles* began to take on a more important role, not only as manifestations of the material/spatial divide between Europeans and Algerians, but also as centres for the resistance fighters. In retaliation, Çelik argues (1997: 112), ‘and as part of the war strategy . . . military forces bulldozed many squatter settlements, and army trucks transported the residents to dispersed locations to be rehoused’.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the development of shack settlements in South Africa was the result of the contradictory forces of the colonisers’ need for cheap labour and fear of Blacks on the one hand, and the people’s over-determined desire for an urban life on the other.<sup>2</sup> From the start, Africans have been actively excluded from South Africa’s cities, and were expected to be available only to work in them. Shack settlements were a response to the rural crisis, the desire for urbanisation and a place to live in the city. They were also a way for women and families to access the city unrelated to work. Shack settlements, in short, were a consequence not only of structural forces (the rural crisis, urban employment), but also of innovative popular responses to these forces.

Wars, taxes and the expropriation of land, formalised by the 1913 South African Natives Land Act, created debilitating poverty in the rural areas and helped produce a class of landless labourers who wanted an urban life and developed ways to circumvent the state to obtain one.<sup>3</sup> The first shack settlements in Durban emerged after ‘the destruction of the Zulu kingdom’ and the loss of land in the late nineteenth century (Pithouse 2008a: 20–1). As Durban became a major port in the twentieth century, the African urban population grew and, with it, White fears of contagion that resulted in the implementation of urban segregation. As Jean Comaroff (1993: 322) argues, South Africa’s ‘multiracial cities’ were already ‘being transformed in response to contagion and medical emergency’, including the bubonic plague in 1900. This notion of contagion was embedded in earlier attitudes like those of Henry Mayhew and other British urban reformers who, though sympathetic to London’s poor, wrote of the London ‘slums’ as unknown and ‘unexplored’, a dark other world, inhabited by a grimy and dirty ‘savage race’, ‘any colour but white’ (Wohl 1986: xix), in the geographic heart of the Empire (see also Nayak 2003; Walkowitz 1992). Thus, it was logical that the imperial/

class assumptions of British reformers, who depicted urban areas as dangerous zones comparable to those found in Africa, would extend their analysis back to the 'heart of darkness', with missionaries playing an important role in the discourse of pollution and health.

In South Africa, urban planning and the practices and discourses of public health have always been vehicles for controlling African populations. By the early 1900s, it became clear that the long-term solution to the purported 'medical crisis' articulated by colonial public health officials was going to involve nothing less than the mass removal of the Black population. In 1919, 'in the name of medical crisis, a radical plan of racial segregation was passed under the emergency provisions of the Public Health Act' (Comaroff 1993: 322). What Fanon calls the 'native's biological decision' to move to the citadel was countered by the colonialist's attempt to stem the tide of Africans moving to the cities by legislating 'influx control' and 'pass laws'. In the 1930s, White public health concerns, manifested via the 1934 Slums Acts, systematically destroyed African housing. All the while, the growth of shanty towns continued on the margins of the urban areas and was further encouraged by the demand for labour power during the Second World War.

Once the war ended, however, the socio-economic/political threat, and the White fear of Blacks flooding into the cities, found a new expression in the early 1950s, providing a basis for apartheid's popularity, along with a new period of forced removal of urban Blacks. With its detailed planning and implementation, apartheid South Africa became one of the largest builders of housing in the world (Huchzermeyer 2004: 104), forcing Blacks to relocate from the city centres to townships on the urban peripheries or simply removing them to far-off homelands.<sup>4</sup> But as much as planners developed a convincing version of an apartheid dystopia, they could not halt a process full of its own contradictions. By the 1980s, millions of people had decided to transgress the narrow world of apartheid prohibitions despite the risks and dangers, and surge into the 'forbidden quarters' of apartheid's cities, creating vast shack settlements (see Fanon 1968: 37, 40), thus helping to bring to a head the crisis that eventually brought down the apartheid government.<sup>5</sup> Now, as the post-apartheid cities continue to develop, and more and more areas that were once considered marginal to 'development' have become marketable, the very

spaces that shack dwellers occupy are under threat. For example, the eviction of 20 000 residents of the Joe Slovo settlement next to the N2 highway outside Cape Town was upheld by the Constitutional Court in 2009 (see Tissington 2009). The government argued that the dangerous and unhygienic conditions in the settlement justified its 'eradication', yet it is clear that it is the desirability of the space that determined the government's action, especially in the context of the preparations that were being made for the 2010 World Cup.<sup>6</sup> The plan was to use the land occupied by the poor to provide housing far beyond the means of the poor, and the decision by the Constitutional Court meant that the relocation could be upheld, forcing thousands of people to move out of the city to the relatively isolated Delft Temporary Relocation Area.<sup>7</sup> There, government-built tin shacks, intended as emergency housing for disaster relief, are being used to provide temporary housing.<sup>8</sup> In practice, this emergency housing has become permanent for the relocated urban poor. Post-apartheid South Africa has once again become a 'narrow world, strewn with prohibitions' (Fanon 1968: 37) reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. Built on such deep, structural, capitalist-colonial contradictions, the issues of space, housing and people's livelihoods have become key areas of contestation in post-apartheid society, despite the end of apartheid's formal laws.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, since colonial and apartheid South Africa was built on the spatial exclusion of Blacks from 'White South Africa', the struggle against it was also a struggle for the right to the city. Thus, it is not surprising that 'the antinomy of right against right', as Marx puts it (1873/1976a: 344), of one conception of the city against another in post-apartheid South Africa, contains fundamentally different visions of the city, with political control often trumping economic interests and the profit motive. There are times when the land on which a settlement has developed has no commercial value, and eviction and relocation is simply an expense for the state, but the idea of a world-class city is not simply about investment and tourism; it is about controlling the uncontrolled character of informal settlements. As Huchzermeyer (2003) argues, much of post-apartheid urban planning has been a project of control. Thus, while the post-apartheid city can be considered cosmopolitan when compared to

the segregated apartheid city, it is a one-sided cosmopolitanism – a cosmopolitanism based on money – which systematically denies the poor access to the city.<sup>10</sup> The post-apartheid ‘world city’ also mimics the imperialist city: just as the imperial city was based on the expropriation of the colonial ‘others’ hidden by discourses of racism and empire, the cosmopolitan post-apartheid city and its citadelisation (including the flight from the inner city) is based on exclusion and fears of expropriation, discourses of crime and invasion. Yet a deep, if only implicit, critique of the post-apartheid city and post-apartheid society, as well as a radical cosmopolitanism, is beginning to emerge from those often denied rights to the city.

It is therefore not surprising that major contestations in post-apartheid South Africa are around space and land, and the struggles of the poor to remain in the cities. Given this context, it should not come as a revelation that a new shack dwellers’ movement has emerged,<sup>11</sup> especially in the light of the post-apartheid government’s attempt to shift the constitutionally promised ‘human rights’ to land and housing on to the contradictory discourses of service delivery and political control, backed by the state’s force. After all, poor people in South Africa do not routinely have access to legal representation, and if they do, it usually entails a long process that does not protect them against illegal eviction. For them, regular unlawful and illegal acts by local government, such as violent evictions, demolitions, forced removals and repression of their organisations, are increasingly the rule; illegal actions against the poor are open, flaunted and sanctioned by ‘legal’ authorities so much that the illegal has become ‘legal’. As David Harvey maintains (2008: 23), the ‘right to the city’ is ‘one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights’, and this struggle over rights, namely the right of the damned to live in the city, against the rights of corporations and private property, has become evermore acute in the present period of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>12</sup> As Thomas Frank puts it, post-apartheid South Africa has indeed ‘embarked on one of the most ambitious deregulatory schemes in the world . . . [and] is again a one-party state. But money – thank God – is free at last’ (Frank 2008: 121).

## RACIAL/SPATIAL ORDERINGS

*When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers etc?*

— Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

In contrast to the apartheid period, the dialectic of Black consciousness takes on a different spatial/class dynamic in postcolonial South Africa. These differences were suggested by Fanon in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where the division of the colonial city is starkly drawn between the rich, brightly lit expanses of the ‘European’ town and the dark confined spaces of the ‘native’ quarters. The racial Manichaeism is expressed in the simple economic formula: you are rich because you are White, and you are White because you are rich. Fanon argues that the nationalist elites look on the European spaces with envy. They desire to take the place of the European. In the postcolonial city described in *Black Skin*, this same desire is expressed as the wish to become rich by living on the hill where the Whites live, looking down on the urban sprawl. Fanon calls it an expression of the dialectic of being and having (1967a), where being is reduced to having in the most crudely materialist way. Because it is these values embodied by the acquisitive, huckstering postcolonial elite that have become the scourge of postcolonial Africa, Fanon calls for a working out of a new humanism that necessarily begins by rejecting ‘the West’, which is synonymous with hyper-accumulation, and thinking, instead, in terms of a humanist notion of wealth.

In this Fanonian vein, Michael Neocosmos (2008: 587) writes of the degeneration of South Africa’s liberation into a ‘politics of grabbing and enrichment among the post-apartheid elite’:

So-called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has enabled the development of a new class of ‘black diamonds’ whose newfound wealth is not particularly geared towards national accumulation and development but primarily towards short-term, quick profits in a country where estimates put the poor at half the total population. Reports of corruption among state personnel, from the national to the local levels, abound. Few get prosecuted, let



alone convicted, in a hegemonic culture that extols the virtues of free-market capitalism, equating private enrichment with the public good and quick profit with development.

Furthermore, Ato Sekyi-Otu's reading of Fanon's 'stretched Marxism' emphasises how the 'absolute difference and radical irreciprocity' (Sekyi-Otu 1996: 72–3) of the coloniser–colonised relationship manifests spatially. In *The Wretched*, Fanon argues that colonialism is totalitarian. There is no space outside it; there is no colonisation of the land without the colonisation of the people. The 'native's' every movement in space is constrained. Colonisation, he argues, follows the 'native' home, invades the 'native's' space, body and motion. In *Black Skin*, Fanon says that the Black is walled in; in *The Wretched*, he says that the 'native' is hemmed in, pressed from all sides – oppressed – able to find freedom of movement only in dreams of muscular prowess.

Fanon's (1968: 39) description of the open and strongly built colonial city (a town of light and plenty on the one hand, and a cramped, oppressive hungry 'native town' on the other), and which finds its apogee in apartheid, clearly expresses spatial realities. In the colonial world, as Lefebvre (2003: 15) put it, 'space and the politics of space "express" social relationships and react against them'. Because the socio-economic spatial reality of the compartmentalised, divided colonial world can never mask human realities, an examination of this division, according to Fanon, 'will allow us to *mark out the lines* on which a decolonized society will be reorganized' (1968: 38–40, my emphasis). In other words, since social relations are manifested in space, *one Fanonian test of post-apartheid society is to what extent South Africa has been spatially reorganised*. On this score, it is quite clear that the 'colonial world's ordering and its geographical layout' have been reinscribed in post-apartheid urban spaces, with full membership and rights to South Africa's cities now accessible only to those with money.

While apartheid's neat dividing lines have broken down, the emergence of fortified enclaves and gated communities filled with surveillance and security are another expression of Fanon's notion of Manichaeism. The fortified enclaves, writes Teresa Caldeira, represent a new alternative for the urban life of the middle and upper classes, away from the 'dirty', 'noisy' city streets which are pervaded by social heterogeneity. The gated

community is advertised as offering a secure and “total way of life” . . . away from the deteriorating city’ (Caldeira 1996: 304). It is the architecture of the new apartheid in which ‘heterogeneous contacts diminish . . . and proximity to different groups is considered dangerous’ (1996: 324). In other words, just as segregated fortified enclaves corrode citizenship (Caldeira 1996), the enclaved rich are the true xenophobes. They don’t really experience a messy cosmopolitan urban environment, but a malled one in which their only cosmopolitan practice is the consumption of ethnic products. Full membership of this world, with rights to access the increasingly privatised spaces of the city, is contingent on money; consequentially urban policy, a policy of gentrification (see Smith 2002), exists alongside the promise of providing ‘housing’ to the poor, or, in other words, policies geared mainly towards the *removal* of the poor from urban areas.

As mentioned, post-apartheid urban settlements had allowed the urban poor some measure of control over their lives. With plans to remove these settlements, post-apartheid policy has in effect returned to the Manichaeism of the earlier period.<sup>13</sup> Since 1994, the government, fixated on creating ‘formal’ structures, has built around two million housing units, but these frightfully small and poorly built structures called houses<sup>14</sup> are very often created in exchange for the removal of the poor from city centres. They are usually built far away from bourgeois eyes and fears, outside urban spaces. Post-apartheid housing policy reinforces spatial segregation. It encourages private and gated developments for the rich, and state-led removals to temporary relocation camps for the poor.<sup>15</sup> In the minds of city planners, urban policy technicians, real-estate speculators and FIFA (World Cup) administrators, a world-class city, branded to be attractive and safe for capital, cannot contain shack settlements within the line of bourgeois sight. Considered ‘dangerous’ and ‘threatening’ by definition, shack settlements cannot exist side by side with middle-class housing. Just as with other gentrification schemes, the poor are thus removed from the city under the guise of ‘upgrades’. These ‘forced removals’ – to use the language of apartheid – are also justified by the ANC’s promotion of ‘slum clearance’, which threatens millions of people who live in urban shack settlements with removal to ‘transit camps’ and other so-called ‘temporary’ tin-shack housing.<sup>16</sup> They are removed from

the city and the right to the city is removed from them. In other words, their removal constitutes a method of control – the removal of their political rights and agency. So what is at stake in Fanonian practices is a critique not simply of government failures and the state's inability to keep up with housing needs in terms of sheer numbers, but of the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa remaps the 'ordering and geographical layout' of apartheid.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly one cannot talk about contemporary South Africa without thinking about the 'geographical layout' of post-apartheid society as an expression of what Fanon calls an 'incomplete liberation'. For Fanon, challenging the 'geographical layout' was interconnected with the problematic of national consciousness. The whole question of 'who is South African' turns on the *creation* of a political subject – the coming to be of subjectivity – in the struggle against colonialism and the process of decolonisation. This coming to be of a political subject is an experience that is at one and the same time a liberation of space, a destruction of the confines of apartheid and a solidarity born of radical commitment. It includes the development of new ideas of citizenship, which address not only the right to the city and its services but also autonomy and community control from below. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon's idea of citizenship is based on the 'radical mutation' that has come about through the struggle. The new society, he proclaims, is being built and its citizenship includes everyone who is living in it: 'From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian. In tomorrow's independent Algeria it will be up to every Algerian to assume Algerian citizenship or to reject it in favor of another' (Fanon 1967c: 152, original emphasis).

This quote, taken from the chapter 'Algeria's European Minority', makes it clear that citizenship is based on the active solidarities born of the struggle, not on indigeneity. Yet, on the morrow of independence, Fanon (1968) argues, the new leaders clearly do 'reject' this notion of citizenship and find another defined by claims to indigeneity. For Fanon, the radical mutation in consciousness born of revolution has to be continuous, and he warns that decolonisation is incomplete if it is not waged on all levels: political, socio, economic, geographical, psychological, objective and subjective. One symptom of this incompleteness – of the literal exclusion of people from full citizenship of the city – is the rise of

ethnic chauvinism and nativism, which is legitimised via claims of indigeneity, while simultaneously reproducing a politics of political, social and spatial exclusion rooted in apartheid racial classifications. This incompleteness marks postcolonial society, turning the project of decolonisation backwards so that, rather than creating a new history, it marks time in *neoapartheid*. Ideas of South African exclusivity – a modern democratic (White) bulwark against the ‘black danger’ – are now recapitulated. The ‘opening’ of the continent to South African corporate capital has its flip side: apparently ‘every African’ wants to live in South Africa.

Thus, the incomplete liberation that Fanon writes of was expressed in the outbreak of xenophobic violence (or pogroms)<sup>18</sup> that quickly spread across South Africa’s urban shack lands in May 2008, leaving over 60 people dead and thousands homeless and destitute. In newspaper opinion pieces and blogs of the time, many critics of government were quick to link the xenophobic violence to neoliberal economic policies and the lack of service delivery to the poor (see Amisi 2008). In some sense, these opinions were right. The specific conditions for anti-foreigner attacks might be unemployment and/or lack of housing, electricity, garbage removal, etc., compounded by frustration with failed government policies and perceived corruption and favouritism. But as John Sharp (2008: 3) argues, this is far from being an issue of ‘foreigners’ as ‘other’, but the narcissism of minor differences: unable to attack the sources of oppression (such as the government and the employers) poor ‘foreigners’ simply ‘became victims of this struggle because they were close at hand’ (HSRC 2008: 45). Certainly, studies indicate that there is a wide range of attitudes towards refugees and foreign-born Africans in the shack settlements, and it is absurd to suggest that the relationship is chronically hostile (see Sichone 2008).

Other critics noted that the violence did not occur ‘out of the blue’, but was a crisis of citizenship that had been brewing ever since the birth of a ‘new’ South Africa. Frank Wilderson, for example, author of *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid*, considers the politics of xenophobia a result of the ANC’s failure to follow through on the Freedom Charter.<sup>19</sup> Instead of taking over the Reserve Bank, he argues, Mandela appointed Mangosuthu Buthelezi as Minister of Home Affairs. Advocating draconian immigration reform, Buthelezi’s role was to reinvent a South

African 'siege mentality' by redirecting people's disappointments, frustrations and aggression towards African foreigners. Violence against 'aliens' has thus not only been encouraged by politicians but actually organised by them (see Thaw 2010), while the government conducted its own 'crackdowns' on 'illegal immigrants', compounding the pressure (COHRE 2008; Neocosmos 2008). Indeed, every year, the South African Human Rights Commission reports on state agencies harassing and detaining so-called 'illegal aliens': people being apprehended by the police for being 'too dark' or 'walking like a black foreigner'; people rounded up and sent to deportation centres, such as Lindela on the outskirts of Johannesburg, where the 'undocumented' are 'systematically' denied basic rights (IRIN 2008). Neocosmos (2008: 588-9) notes that the government and recent legal decisions have been reinforcing a xenophobic discourse, accusing foreigners of taking 'our jobs', 'our houses' and 'our women', while African migrants are made 'fair game for those in power to make a quick buck'. The result, argues Neocosmos, has been the overempowering of officials now capable of lauding excessive control over 'extremely vulnerable people' so that 'bribery, extortion and corruption become not only possible but regular practices'. So one could argue along with Fanon that xenophobia is not simply an elemental expression of mass rage, but a politics, which, in 'rainbow' South Africa, is promoted, or at least channelled, by factions of the government elite and its civil servants, with 'politics' becoming a zero-sum game among the elites. At the same time, it would be reductive to think that post-apartheid South African politics is narrowly economic. The economic structure of South Africa has not been fundamentally changed and, conditioned by unemployment, landlessness, spatial exclusion, inferior education and violence, the life of the Black poor has remained the same. This economic situation and its glaring inequalities do not mask the racialised and spatialised human reality.

The rhetoric of Black empowerment and the hollow mask of Africanness do not fundamentally undermine Fanon's thesis that the Black bourgeoisie is essentially a neocolonial comprador class, and that the new class of 'Black diamonds', donning a hollow mask of African nationalism and looking for quick profit, has a 'White soul'. We cannot assume that being Black, or living the Black experience of suffering and rebellion, insulates Black people from desiring or taking advantage of the social mobility

afforded by living, and being socialised, in a capitalist society. Indeed, like other capitalist nations, the media reinforces this ideology, blasting out images of the gleam and the high life; and in this context, it would be extraordinary if well-educated and well-placed Blacks did not take advantage of class mobility (see Moodley 2008).<sup>20</sup> Thus, encouraged by the government's pro-business Black Economic Empowerment marketing policies, South Africa's new Black middle class asserts its Africanity, often privileging a narrowly ethnicised politics – that is, 'achieving power in the name of narrow nationalism, in the name of race' (Fanon 2004: 109), while adhering to an Anglo-American culture of neoliberal economics and individualism. It is another expression of 'schizophrenia'<sup>21</sup> – a schizophrenia rooted in a discourse of exceptionalism that posits 'that the country is not really in Africa, and that its intellectual and cultural frame of reference is the USA and Europe' (Neocosmos 2008: 590). This exceptionalism also maintains that, because South Africa is democratic and 'developed' vis-à-vis other African countries, the ethnic cleansing that happened in Rwanda and Kenya cannot happen here; yet at the same time, its discourse is based on a superiority complex inherited from colonialism, along with notions of cultural, political and economic exceptionalism. The question is to what degree does post-apartheid South Africa remain a victim of 'White South Africa's' Afrophobia, and to what degree is that Afrophobia expressed in the violence against African 'foreigners'?

As mentioned, post-apartheid South Africa has not seen a redistribution of land or wealth, nor has it seen the development of social programmes based on basic human needs. Instead, it has seen some redistribution of wealth to a new Black elite and an increasing pauperisation of the Black masses. For Fanon, this race to take the place of the European (1968: 39) also occasions the degeneration of national consciousness into various chauvinisms based on a narrowed, indeed nativised, concept of nationalism. In South Africa, the national solidarities and ideas of national liberation being open to everyone have all but fragmented and, on the one hand, this discourse of South Africa – the narrative of a South African miracle, personalised by Mandela's story – is almost a marketing gimmick for the benefit of the media and tourists. Underneath the miracle is a politics of fear,<sup>22</sup> chauvinism and xenophobia – the hallmark of the

apartheid mentality – reproduced by a fear of politics and manifest in the mass movements of the damned.

Because the apartheid system was based on White power and privilege, Whites, who seriously wanted to uproot apartheid, had to totally reject the system and its values. And in the 1970s and 1980s, many White youth did reject the regime to embrace radical politics. But, as it turned out, that challenge to ‘White values’ (including colonial and apartheid concepts of race) has, by and large, been superficial, and the consciousness of White South Africa did not radically change. White negrophobia expressed itself in the mass emigration of Whites to White-dominant countries and in the boom in gated communities inside South Africa. Yet, the new Black middle class is not immune to negrophobia either.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, negrophobia has taken on a class character.<sup>24</sup> During the xenophobic violence of 2008, for example, those who were not singled out for attack were the rich – both White and Black (African and Indian) – who were by definition not ‘foreigners’ in South Africa. (And indeed, we should remember that Whites were the only ‘real’ [that is ‘indigenous’] South Africans in apartheid South Africa; Africans were portrayed as ‘temporary sojourners’ who had to carry a pass proclaiming their ethnic [homeland] identity, while Indians and Coloureds, though living in segregated enclaves in the cities, were not considered ‘sojourners’ from a ‘foreign homeland’.) So while the specificity of the conditions might be the growing inequality between the Black poor versus prosperous White and Black upper classes, it was in fact the poor, not the rich, who were singled out for their skin color and stopped on the streets for being ‘too Black’, their accents deemed inauthentic or their knowledge of formal linguistic terms inadequate.<sup>25</sup> Even if the spatial divisions between urban centres and peripheries that characterised apartheid have shifted, gated communities and fortified residences inscribe the dividing lines between the rich and the poor in the post-apartheid city.

John Sharp (2008: 2) has also questioned the assumption that the violence was xenophobic. He argues that this presumes that the perpetrators of the violence had made a distinction between foreigners and South Africans, even though a third of the people killed were locals. Along the same lines, and writing at the same time, Zimbabwean refugee Mavuso Dingani (2008) asks why the ‘rightful anger of the poor’ was not

directed towards big supermarket chains or even at small White or Indian traders. And Neocosmos (2008) wonders why the rich, or for that matter White foreigners, were not targeted. Dingani claims that economic reductionism cannot explain it; xenophobia, as he puts it, 'is too empty a term that says much and explains little'.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Andile Mngxitama (2008) notes that 'xenophobia is the hatred of foreigners, but in South Africa, there are no white foreigners', just tourists, investors and professionals who live in quite different spaces relative to the mass of people, who can't be 'illegal': unlike Africans, Whites are not stopped in the street and asked for identification. These elites do not experience xenophobia; they do not *go down* to the shack settlements where the so-called illegals live. Indeed, in 'polite' (civil) society, there has been a shift from the open racism of apartheid to a more nuanced class position and a 'camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence of forms of racism' (Fanon 1967b: 35). And BEE has simply become the legitimating veneer that masks the presence of multinational (meaning White) capital investors and corporations; the 'foreigners' are now simply the poor. And since there are, by definition, no poor whites,<sup>27</sup> the targets are poor Africans. Just as 'the poor in Africa have replaced the Dark Continent as the symbolic conceptual definition of the obstacle to civilization' (Depelchin 2005: 134), in the 'new' South Africa, the dehumanising and derogatory attitudes formerly projected towards all Blacks are now channelled towards the Black poor. Yet, one should also be wary of simply applying a new notion of 'class' because the legacy of apartheid consists in the fact that class has 'come to describe a spatial relation - a measure of proximity to or distance from colonial privilege' (Sekyi-Otu 1996: 159). From a Fanonian standpoint, alongside the psychospatial divide between the cultured, colonised elite and the poor masses that characterises post-apartheid South Africa is the legacy of the internalisation of colonial values, one that includes 'negrophobia'.<sup>28</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, in post-apartheid South Africa, there is a new concreteness to Biko's assessment that White liberals were a major barrier to Black liberation because they created the 'fragmentation of Black resistance' (1978: 33-9). Indeed, as the indirect beneficiaries of racism and apartheid, White liberals have not been asked to explain their complicity with the apartheid state, and this has led Grant Farred (2004a:



113) to contend that one of the ANC's greatest failures was that it did not call White South Africa to account for its hand in the atrocities, exploitations, violence and suffering of the disenfranchised during apartheid. For Farred, this was a consequence of what he calls the ANC's 'appeasement with the apartheid state' on the one hand, and the reconciliation ideology of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the other hand. As a result, White liberals and the Black elites have gotten their wish: 'white (capital and cultural privilege) is protected and black (enfranchisement) is celebrated' (Farred 2004a: 115), and 'more rigorous racist practices [are] rationalized by the emergence of a small black elite while a large black majority sank into deeper squalor and despair' (Gordon and Gordon 2009: 155). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, post-apartheid South Africa has not really transformed the racial lexicon of apartheid or of South Africa's 'exceptionalism' – its so-called difference from the rest of the African continent. Integrated into a global cosmopolitanism and a neoliberal capitalist economy, post-apartheid South Africa has been financialised, and the poor have become increasingly excluded and criminalised.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the discourse of money has replaced the confines of the discourse of race with the rhetoric of a multicultural paradise, translating South African 'exceptionalism' and the apartheid fear of the 'Black peril' into the threat of being overrun by the poor, while at the same time, the political patronage discourse has become increasingly nativist and competitive.

In the new South Africa, one cannot escape this double process, 'primarily, economic; subsequently the internalization – or rather epidermalization – of this inferiority' (Fanon 1967c: 11), where the poor are continually told that African 'aliens' are to blame for their situation and the ruin of their country. Xenophobic violence thus repeats the psychological economy of violence and poverty around which Fanon structured his analysis of colonial and postcolonial repression. Deflected from the *real* sources and channelled inwards, the poor's frustration at their daily, lived experience of violence must find an outlet. As Fanon warns, if such frustration is not channelled to the real source of the violence, it will find expression in the restricted spaces where the damned are allowed to live, in the form of 'black on black' violence. The speed with which the violence spread across the shack lands of South African

cities in May 2008 indicates that however much the violence was decried, this kind of violence if contained is acceptable to the elites.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Fanon's assertion that one is White 'beyond a certain financial level' is expressed spatially in the desire to get away from the poor, to live in a gated community or a well-lit, well-policed, 'safe' space away from criminal (read poor) neighbourhoods.

Fanon's notion that exploitation can wear a 'Black mask', and the emphasis he places on the rise of xenophobia, have an ideological as well as a material dimension. In *Black Skin*, Fanon argues that middle-class white society is suffocating and sterile, and the guiding point in *The Wretched* is to warn against mimicking a bourgeois society, a society that is fundamentally racist, where everything is judged in terms of having, taking, owning and controlling. But where that society is able to mask its racism, which allows it to preserve its humanist pretensions, the sole motto of the national bourgeoisie becomes 'Replace the foreigner' (1968: 158). Lacking a liberatory alternative, he adds, 'the working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, the small artisans and craftsmen for their part line up behind this [ultra] nationalist attitude; but in all justice let it be said, they only follow in the steps of their bourgeoisie' (1968: 156).<sup>31</sup> Against this, what is needed, he argues, is to develop a new society and a whole new way of life and value system.<sup>32</sup> The ground of such a society will not be furnished by the African nationalist elites, but must be based on those excluded from civil society, namely the damned of the earth.

#### THE RADICAL HUMANISM OF THE SHACK DWELLERS' MOVEMENT

*The democracy to be built should be . . . participatory, uncomplicated, and in permanent motion.*

— Jean Bertrand Aristide, *Aristide: An Autobiography*

Since colonialism is about the expropriation of space, it is immediately political. Addressing the politics of space, Fanon challenged the newly independent nations to deal with the legacies of colonialism by redistributing land and decentralising political power, vertically and horizontally. This move seems counter-intuitive in the context of Fanon's critique of regionalism and chauvinism, and the threat of xenophobia,

but the point is that the degeneration of national liberation arises in part from the race to take over the seats of power, leaving intact the privileges located at the centre of the colonial administration and expropriation. For South Africa, Fanon's critique is also an important challenge to the centralist and hierarchical culture of the ANC. As Fanon argues, decentralisation is not simply an administrative or technical issue; it is connected with the goal of involving the damned of the earth in what Abahlali baseMjondolo call a 'living politics'.<sup>33</sup> And explaining to the formerly excluded but newly politicised people that the future belongs to them, that they cannot rely on an imaginary leader, prophet or anybody else (Fanon 1968), necessitates a decentralisation and democratisation of politics.

Considered 'temporary' – even though families have lived in the settlements for generations – shack dwellers are often not served by city services such as refuse removal, which means that garbage mounts up and rats are a constant threat. Shack dwellers are also often denied the electricity connections promised at the end of apartheid, and with only a few accessible taps and toilets, shack settlements are cramped and polluted spaces. Because cooking is mainly done using paraffin stoves, and candles are used for lighting, death, injury and the destruction of property by fire are constant threats. And there is a need for vigilance: living in a shack is made more difficult by the constant threat and fact of forced removal to far-off, badly built 'houses', razor-wire fenced 'transit camps' or temporary government shacks. These camps are dumping grounds that herald the destruction of communities and social life – in short, they presage the future if there is no resistance. Thus, shack dwellers fight against the government's desire to move them out of the city into small, poor-quality houses in peripheral ghettos that have entrenched the spatial logic of apartheid – miles from their lives, away from their communities, jobs, schools, hospitals, parks, libraries, churches and the cultural life of cities. They want more than a barren life far from town. 'It has not been unusual', writes Pithouse (2009c: 8), 'for people to simply abandon relocation houses and move back to better located shacks or to refuse to leave shacks for relocation houses'.<sup>34</sup>

By 2009, Abahlali had become the largest autonomous grassroots organisation in post-apartheid South Africa with members across KwaZulu-

Natal and Cape Town.<sup>35</sup> Propelled by those who have almost nothing, the shack dwellers' movement, which lives in a daily state of emergency and contingency, represents a truth of postcoloniality and offers a critique of its ethics in the most Fanonian sense. The organisation emerged from an earlier period of revolt that has been ebbing and flowing since 2004 (see Alexander 2010). These revolts have emerged from necessity, both daily and historical, and pose a challenge to thought about the post-apartheid city, forcing a shift towards humanist geographies based on people's needs. Abahlali represents tens of thousands of people.<sup>36</sup> Although this is only a small fraction of the 800 000 people who live in Durban's shack lands, Abahlali has, nevertheless, come to articulate a new politics of the poor which it began to articulate as a 'living politics' (Abahlali 2010b):

Our living politics was founded on a rejection of many ways of controlling the poor and one of those was what we first called the 'zim zims' – people that come to the poor and pretend to be the experts on our struggles by talking about neo-liberalism, socialism and all the other isms and schisms without ever talking to us about our lives, our struggles, what we really want, what we can really do and how we can really do it. We always felt that this way of doing politics is just another way for another elite to keep us in our place.

Thus, while Abahlali does not speak in terms of a metacritique of the state, or in terms of a critique of the political economy, it does address the politics of the state and the spatial political economy of postcolonialism that concerned Fanon. As Abahlali shack dwellers voice their right to live in the city, and insist on an active, inclusive and democratic polity, they contest the idea of citizenship and challenge policy makers 'up there' to come down to the settlements and listen to the poorest of the poor, encouraging a new language of dialogue. In this sense, Abahlali is expressing a new kind of inclusive politics from the ground up, one that appears local and reformist, such as the life-saving need to electrify the settlements, but is also radical and national. From the lived reality of life in South Africa's shack communities and in the context of 'liberation's'

broken promises, a wholly democratic and thoughtful new political movement has evolved, and its politics express Fanon's warning that the newly independent nation must destroy the geography of colonialism and develop a politics and social awareness that he called a new humanism. The shack dwellers' movement represents a clear and emergent case that makes explicit the intertwining scales of household and community with national politics, and responds to Fanon's critique and call to realise the radically humanist, decentralised, national scale of postcolonial struggle.

The question is, therefore, not simply whether Abahlali is reasonable, or whether its practical demands can be met within the current South African political order. The question is one of 'reason' – that is, from whose standpoint does Abahlali upset the rational and spatial order on which modern South African society rests, and fundamentally challenge its 'governmentality'?

Yet, demonstrating the political self-education acquired in the shack settlements, Abahlali insists that the issue is not about educating the poor about xenophobia. Instead, their idea of membership – that all who live in the shacks are eligible, without reference to where they are from, their past, their culture, their language, their family, etc. – is radically cosmopolitan. It is an expression of Fanon's concept of an active citizenship that poses a challenge to society to educate itself about the real situation in the settlements, and thus challenges 'civil society's' implicitly elitist and truly xenophobic attitudes towards the poor:

Always the solution is to 'educate the poor'. When we get cholera we must be educated about washing our hands when in fact we need clean water. When we get burnt we must be educated about fire when in fact we need electricity. This is just a way of blaming the poor for our suffering. We want land and housing in the cities, we want to go to university, we want water and electricity – we don't want to be educated to be good at surviving poverty on our own. The solution is not to educate the poor about xenophobia. The solution is to give the poor what they need to survive so that it becomes easier to be welcoming and generous. The solution is to stop the xenophobia at all levels of our society. It is time to ask serious questions about why it is that money and

rich people can move freely around the world while everywhere the poor must confront razor wire, corrupt and violent police, queues and relocation or deportation . . . Let us all educate ourselves on these questions so that we can all take action (Abahlali 2008c).

Abahlali's philosophy is as simple as it is practical. Its view is that no one is illegal: 'a person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they find themselves.' Abahlali say, 'let us educate ourselves so that we can take action', and part of their education includes the reappropriation of struggle history by organising around 'unfreedom day' and 'Soweto day', offering proof that '15 years into our so-called democracy . . . the struggle for liberation [is] still being fought by the poor' (Poor People's Alliance 2009). So, while Abahlali did not win its 2008 appeal against the removal of the Joe Slovo settlement in the Constitutional Court, it was still able to intervene politically to pressurise the government to rescind the removal, and the organisation continues to intervene in local and national politics in important and significant ways. When the pogroms first began in Johannesburg, for example, while the state denied it was happening, Abahlali immediately responded with effective practical action: Abahlali's press statement, 'Xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg' (2008c), confirmed what was taking place, and highlighted the important principle of the solidarity and unity of the oppressed in their organisation. This principle also reflects notions of 'community' rooted in what Biko called African cultural concepts of collectivity and sharing.<sup>37</sup> And because shack dwellers are from many different backgrounds, come from different places, hold different religious beliefs and speak in different languages, Abahlali represents a profound opening, one that ensures that 'the spirit of humanity is everyone' (Zikode 2009b). As Zikode notes:

The collective culture that we have built within the movement, that pride of belonging to this collective force that was not spoken about before, becomes a new concept, a new belief – especially as Abahlali in its own nature, on its own, is different to other politics. It requires a *different style of membership and leadership*. It requires a lot of thinking, not only on what is read, but also on what is

common to all the areas. Therefore learning Abahlalism demands, in its nature, the form that it takes. It doesn't require one to adopt some ideas and approach from outside . . . it requires a different approach from normal politics . . . We did not start with a plan - the movement has always been shaped by the daily activities of the people that make it, by their daily thinking, by their daily influence. This togetherness is what has shaped the movement (Zikode 2009b, my emphasis).

Zikode goes on to add that the 'common sense that all are equal comes from the very *new spirit of ubuntu*' (my emphasis). Firmly grounded in the common lived experience of the poor, manifesting the idea that respect and dignity are the provenance of every human person, this is an expression of a shared code of ethical behavior that is reinvented by the praxis of the shack dwellers. Fashioned in the everyday lifeworld of the shack dwellers, this is not a concept that needs to be imported from outside the shack settlement. Personhood, in other words, is not dependent on who your ancestors were or where you are from. The concept draws from the notion of *ubuntu*, yet since *ubuntu* has become overdetermined in post-apartheid South Africa - it can be a source of humanistic critique and can justify age and gender hierarchies; it can be used to justify Africanisation and BEE as well to advertise commodities - Abahlali's spirit of *ubuntu* expresses the idea of respect and dignity of every human person, but it is also firmly grounded in the common, lived experience of the poor in the cities. Rather than becoming reified, *ubuntu* is refashioned in the everyday lifeworld of the shack dwellers' movement and thus not narrowly conceived in terms of language, ethnicity, age or gender. Grounded in a radically democratic practice, Abahlali reconfigures *ubuntu* by consistently refusing to use ethnic, national or age grade as a basis for leadership. Indeed, the inclusion among the Abahlali leadership of young people in their twenties, of Indian as well as Pondo and Xhosa descent, reflects Abahlali's vision of a politics of *ubuntu* based on the diversity of the material and cosmopolitan realities of urban shack settlements. This 'fact of shackness' becomes the basis for rethinking the politics of space and scale from both a genuinely grassroots and democratic standpoint. Thus, like Fanon, Abahlali by definition resists essentialist

concepts of humanism; humanism is something that has to be created and nurtured collectively through dignity and reciprocity. And theirs is truly a politics of the lived experience of scale that begins at the bottom. It insists that everyone who lives in a shack settlement has an equal voice irrespective of their origins. This is not mere rhetoric. Emphasising the importance of maintaining a strong political self-organisation, and with undocumented migrants in key positions within the movement, the shack dwellers' political leadership is indeed eloquent, direct and self-conscious:

We have been warning for years that the anger of the poor can go in many directions. That warning, like our warnings about the rats and the fires and the lack of toilets, the human dumping grounds called relocation sites, the new concentration camps called transit camps and corrupt, cruel, violent and racist police, has gone unheeded (Abahlali 2008c).

So while such things as land and housing are essential elements of the struggle for a decolonised society, shack dwellers understand that the struggle is ultimately about building democratic spaces open to all, and creating a society that recognises the humanity of all. Indeed, Abahlali's brilliance lies in its grassroots democracy and 'living politics' that is its 'own working existence'.<sup>38</sup>

While one can debate Joel Kovel's remarks that the shack dwellers of Abahlali have opted 'to recreate Commons . . . [and] have organized themselves into a modern simulacrum of the Paris Commune' (2007: 251), in its participatory democratic, decentralised and inclusive form arising out of the material conditions of life,<sup>39</sup> Abahlali gestures to a different idea of politics.<sup>40</sup> Following Fanon's revolutionary theory, 'the fact of shackness' necessitates that space is reasoned and produced differently. For example, if the shack dwellers' demand for housing in the city is won – and, at the time of writing, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been developed between Abahlali and the eThekweni Municipality – and if, in contrast to the city of Johannesburg's 'formalisation' of the 'informal settlements' in 2009, as well as the policies articulated in the Elimination of Slums Act, a new housing policy is based on fully democratic and open discussions with the poor, the spatial



and political economy of the city could be radically altered; a fundamental shift in post-apartheid social consciousness and a decisive intervention in its spatial economy could occur. Certainly Abahlali thought that the MOU with the municipality opened up new possibilities, believing that it was a strategic breakthrough with national significance: 'It commits the city to developing settlements in the city instead of forcing people out to rural human dumping grounds. [And] it is a major breakthrough for the country because if followed up it would be the first time that the BNG [Breaking New Ground] policy would actually have been implemented' (Kennedy Road Development Committee et al. 2009, my emphasis).<sup>41</sup>

The memorandum was not only an agreement on policy but also an agreement that the poorest of the poor could have a say in the city's housing policy. In concrete terms, central to what Lefebvre (2003: 15) calls the shift towards the 'reconceptualisation of the urban' would be a shift in cognition, from technocratic state planning towards 'grassroots urban planning' (De Souza 2006). Such a radical change of space, that is to say, of *consciousness*, where 'the last would be first and the first last' (quoted in Fanon 1968: 37), would encourage a shift in the geography of reason, from the elitist and technical discussion of service delivery - mediated 'between those who decide on behalf of "private" interests and those who decide on behalf of higher institutions and power' (Lefebvre 2003: 157) - to people's needs, mediated by the minds of those who were so recently reified as dirty, uneducated, poor, violent, criminal, not fully human and as the damned of the earth. This double movement - the decommodification of the city and 'the new rights of the citizen, tied in to the demands of everyday life' (Lefebvre 2006: 250) - could become part of a defetishisation of the city,<sup>42</sup> a shift away from the 'world-class' discourse manifested by segregated gated communities.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, this movement from the praxis 'of the underside' of humanity (see Williams 1993) will not be at all easy, and nor will it come all at once. Fully aware of the possible cost of negotiations, Abahlali discussed how to avoid a demobilisation of the movement (see Figlan et al. 2009). Moreover, there is the question of the political cost of negotiations about upgrades and 'development' that entails an accounting and demarcation of the community, and who its beneficiaries are. Beneath this process of inclusion and exclusion are the political questions of who

decides and how, which works almost seamlessly with the quite normal party (and often ethnicised) patronage and 'biryani' systems in place in many poor communities. In other words, does Abahlali want to take over state functions and act like a state?<sup>44</sup> Marx argues (1844a) that even with its best intentions, the state cannot transcend the contradiction between the 'aims of administration' on the one hand and its resources on the other hand 'without transcending itself' – that is, without ceasing to exist as a state. In other words, Abahlali's attitude towards NGOs could just as easily be extended toward the state, with participatory democracy from the bottom up being the real measure.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, for Marx, the state is based on exclusion, and its accountancy is just one expression of its legitimation – a legitimation that is based finally on force. Already a new period of violent repression has begun. For example, 2008 saw a rash of violence that was a product of pauperisation but also a consequence of the state's and the NGOs' silencing of alternatives.<sup>46</sup> This is exactly what Fanon would consider a suppression of politics and oppositional discourses that allow the poor to organise and make their own demands. In July 2009, alongside mass arrests, a number of people were actually shot dead. In South Africa, writes Richard Pithouse (2009b), 'the lives of the black poor count for something between very little and nothing. When the fate of protesters killed or wounded by the police makes it into the elite public sphere, they are generally not even named.' Instead, they are criminalised and repressed by the police and government authorities. As the executive mayor of Johannesburg put it a year after the countrywide outbreak of xenophobic violence in 2008, the problem is the 'in-migration to Johannesburg. People from all over the country and beyond its borders streaming into Johannesburg seeking a better life, further straining City resources' (quoted in Dlamini 2009). And the solution? The formalisation of informal settlements – a concept that sounds reasonable, except for the fact that it is not actually about upgrading the settlements, but about controlling populations and 'policing [the] mushrooming of informal settlements' (Dlamini 2009). Once controlled, the 'problem' is then eventually depoliticised and reduced to an issue of 'service delivery' on the one hand, while evictions and forced removals recreate the cycle on the other hand.

LIVING POLITICS

*True reflection leads to action but that action will only be a genuine praxis if there is a critical reflection on its consequences. To achieve this praxis it is necessary to trust the oppressed and their ability to reason.*

— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

*As much as all debates are good, fighting only by talking does not take us much further. Sometimes we need to strengthen our muscles for an action debate, that is, a living debate that does not only end on theories.*

— S'bu Zikode, University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, Seminar

As I have argued, Abahlali is a new kind of organisation: it is not a political party, it is not an NGO, it is not outside, above or separate from the shack dwellers, it is the self-organised shack communities committed to decentralisation, autonomy, grassroots democracy and accountability. It appreciates acts of solidarity but shuns money and political power from government and non-governmental groups. It is, as Fanon understood it, a 'living organism'. Indeed, Abahlali itself calls it a 'living politics' that represents the kind of challenge to committed intellectuals and activists mapped out by Fanon in *The Wretched*. As mentioned, Abahlali had no illusions about left-leaning intellectuals since it had no experience of them, and after experiencing the elitism of some of the left and middle-class intellectuals who deny that poor people can think their own politics, Abahlali has become very aware of how intellectuals can undermine a movement. Thus, they demand that intellectuals who really want to dialogue and work with them come to the settlements and listen to what they have to say, becoming a part of the 'University of Abahlali':

We have always thought that the work of the intellectual was to think and to struggle with the poor. It is clear that for [some] the work of the intellectual is to determine our intelligence by trying to undermine our intelligence. This is their politics. Its result is clear. We are shown to the world to not be competent to think or speak for ourselves (Zikode 2008b).<sup>47</sup>

Zikode's clarity of expression here comes from experience, and such thinking about these experiences intrinsically and profoundly challenges anyone interested in genuine liberation. From the beginning, the organised shack dwellers developed an infrastructure for self-organisation in the 'University of Abahlali'. It was a practical, not a theoretical, endeavour that began by shifting the geography of reason – that is to say, by putting 'the worst off' at the centre. Abahlali was also seriously committed to discussing liberatory ideas in terms of what they considered a 'living debate'. Thus, the 'University of Abahlali baseMjondolo' was born as a concrete example of Fanon's conception that the damned can think for themselves, and that by thinking for themselves, they open up new avenues for thought. The education at the 'University of Abahlali' occurs where people live and struggle, through ongoing collective reflection, in the languages that they speak, on their experiences of oppression and resistance. Much of the intellectual work done in Abahlali is undertaken in and through discussions, conversations and meetings, which include formal discussions about such topics as globalisation and the elimination of the Slums Act; rather than an 'educational' directive that privileges the specialist, the discussions value group thinking.

Fanon, in *The Wretched*, argued that 'political education' must not be a directive given to the masses. He rejected the 'banking' notion of political education, to use Paulo Freire's term, and argued against the elite politics of the party of national liberation, which aims to use the mass movements to win state power. This kind of party, he argued, 'is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous, and cynical' (1968: 165). As such, 'political education' is often thought to be a hierarchical and one-way process. Even among the postmodern radical left, critical of vanguardist politics, political education often takes place in spaces that are not accessible to the masses of poor people. So, for Fanon, political education is undertaken by the movement, to put it in Georg Lukács' words, to 'explain their own actions' (Lukács 1971).<sup>48</sup> If political education fails to do this, organisations tend to become dogmatic and sclerotic. Like Freire's notion of pedagogy, Fanon's conception of political education must be dialogic and ongoing, and intimates that the idea of educating the masses politically also means shifting the ground of reason:

In fact, we often believe with criminal superficiality that to educate the masses politically is to deliver a long political harangue from time to time . . . To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. In order to put all this into practice, in order really to incarnate the people, we must repeat that there must be decentralization in the extreme (Fanon 1968: 197–8).

The importance of subjectivity in Fanon's dialectic does not mean that Fanon operates under a romantic illusion that there will be an immediate understanding of complicated problems. For Fanon, as I have argued, dialectical praxis is something that has to be painstakingly worked through. There are no *a priori* answers and no easy solutions. Self-consciousness that breaks the bonds of Manichaeism does not and cannot come about all at once. And the intellectual's role is not to mechanically impute consciousness, but to help destroy all the ideologies that see 'the damned' as 'out of order' and backward. Yet Fanon's faith in the ability of the masses to understand everything does not mean the end of intellectual work. Indeed, Abahlali understands this. After all, practice enlivens contradictions and makes clearer the necessity to work out new concepts.

Thus, decentralised horizontally, the 'University of Abahlali' is a concrete example of Fanon's conception that the damned can think for themselves, reflect on their own experiences of oppression, and open up new avenues for thought, action and resistance as they collectively do so. The 'university's' medium is mainly oral, its curriculum is the struggle, its campus is the shack settlements and its meetings are the seminars of dialogic learning. Like other movements in the country, its conclusions are anti-capitalist, but they are also profoundly democratic and humanist.

In late 2007, an offer was made by the Church Land Programme (CLP) to Abahlali and the Rural Network (an alliance of rural community organisations founded in 2006) to each elect two members to attend a course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. It was a chance for what Abahlali calls 'living learning'. But since there was concern that attending the course at the university would create division in the organisation, a monthly discussion, entitled Living Learning, was set up at the CLP offices in Pietermaritzburg. Abahlali was determined to make sure that the value of whatever was learnt outside the shacks in schools and university courses is judged against the lived experiences of the people in the shacks. This is quite a contrast to the dominant ideas of individual benefit, where knowledge is considered private property or a means for personal advancement. Knowledge for the shack dwellers is the property of the organised shack dwellers, something not to be hoarded, but shared. This practice complicates the idea as to what constitutes 'knowledge' and what the sources of such knowledge are; and it arises from Abahlali's awareness that the formal university has not been a space conducive to their movement, but is in fact often detrimental to it. At the same time, rather than simply retaining an 'insider/outsider' perspective, the participants in Living Learning, all from shack settlements and poor rural communities, are aware that divisions are not simply those between 'insider' and 'outsider' but can emerge within the movement itself, between the active and inactive, as well as over strategies and goals. But they also recognise that everyone thinks, and must be encouraged to express themselves.<sup>49</sup> As one of the participants of Living Learning puts it:

We should think about this question whether Living Learning is in any way taking us away from action? As a space outside the academy, it should be our space to think about this question; to question when some of the things we 'learn' at university do not connect with what's needed or with necessary action. So finding ways to make sure we have this connection to action is very important. And it is from our action and struggle that we have these questions anyway – so, . . . maybe what can emerge is . . . *a new language that supports movements and action*. To keep this alive is to work in the tension that a comrade described at the beginning

of our session *between courage and the loss of hope*. Perhaps at our next session we can give special attention to thinking about how to ensure our work in the Living Learning is really for better action in struggles of the movements (Mark Butler 2009: 5, my emphasis).

The idea of developing a new language of struggle runs counter to the academic discourse of the formal university, where the emphasis is on learning a field's specialised scholarly language. Living Learning participants are aware of the ways in which the academic university, in its language and concepts, encourages alienation from the movement and promotes alienating theorisation of poor struggling people, naturalised as objects rather than as agents and protagonists of the struggle. In the context of anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Fanon spoke about intellectuals who had broken with colonial elitism, 'snatching' skills from the colonial and European universities and putting these ideas and practices in the 'school of the people'.<sup>50</sup> This is not simply 'resource mobilisation', since it requires a complete change in attitude and in relationship to the ongoing movement. Living Learning echoes this by insisting on accountability and the need to bring back to the communities (literally and metaphorically) whatever has been discussed. And it develops this concept further, implying that one can challenge the academic university and critique its Manichaeian assumption that one cannot simultaneously be part of two universities, the university of *emijondolo* and *eplasini*<sup>51</sup> and the academic 'world-class' University of KwaZulu-Natal. Based on the principle of opening new spaces for discussions of freedom by challenging intellectuals to break from their 'value-neutral' position, Living Learning offers a different conceptualisation and a different language:

Now [is it] because I have been to the university, that I know everything – NO! We must not allow for the ordinary people to be made to feel discouraged. For us who have been at the course, what is important is the relation with the ordinary people . . . We have not learned to use aggressive, bombastic, or fancy English words to make the people feel like they are less. Rather, we want to practice what we preach and to connect all the things we are

learning with the real struggles and issues of the people here (Figlan et al. 2009: 43).

It is only by ‘continuous[ly] try[ing] to open spaces for our thinking and learning and teaching’ (quoted in Figlan et al. 2009: 84), that is to say, by continuously making connections on a human level, that real alternatives can develop. If nothing else, this is the challenge to ‘honest intellectuals’ that Fanon mapped out in *The Wretched*, as well as a challenge to keep Living Learning alive, guarding it against reification, keeping it from becoming merely a slogan or rhetoric to use against the people.

#### MIND-FORGED MANACLES OF UNFREEDOM

*The most important weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.*

— Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*

*In every cry of every man,  
In every infant’s cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear*

— William Blake, ‘London’

Whatever challenges Abahlali faces in the future, the strength of the shack dwellers’ movement must be judged on the basis of its commitment to freedom and liberation. The idea of freedom is central to Living Learning. The shack dwellers’ situation, and their response, namely the quest for freedom from it, is uncomplicated and absolute in the Fanonian sense of life and death – the world as it is, is unviable; people must rebel. This absoluteness is expressed in the movement’s uncompromising language of change: ‘Our world is burning and so we need another world . . . There is a difference when the poor say another world is necessary and when civil society says that another world is possible. We conclude to say that it is the formations of the poor and the grassroots that are the agency to make this other world come – not civil society’ (Figlan et al. 2009: 49). The emphasis on the concrete condition of the shack dwellers



highlights the fact that the fundamental difference between possibility and necessity turns on their own agency. In other words, the necessity of another world in the here and now is something that demands their own thought and their own action. On this point, there is another philosophical issue about necessity and freedom that Marx makes in *Capital* which has a resonance with the Living Learning discussion. Marx argues that freedom is not about imagining the possible, but begins from necessity. Freedom only begins where necessity ends: 'The true realm of freedom, the development of human power as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis' (Marx 1894/1976b: 959). Of course, Marx wrote this in reference to a different context, but it does show the pedigree of the Living Learning discussion, which also finds a connection with Marx's famous thesis on Feuerbach: that understanding the world is essential to changing it. Both are needed; in fact, changing the world presupposes a 'living debate'.

The nature of freedom is also a complicated question. The emancipation of the working class must be an act of self-emancipation, as Marx famously put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, and the answer developed here is that freedom must be based on the self-organisation of the shack dweller and rural dweller struggles. Indeed, it is their insistence on their own agency and intelligence as force and reason for the reconstruction of society (see Dunayevskaya 1985: 19–29) that gives content to freedom. Freedom is not an abstraction. Its content is generated out of the reality of 'unfreedom'. In other words, Abahlali do not need to hear a philosophic discourse on freedom because they are already 'professors of our own poverty', and freedom 'will come from becoming masters of our own history . . . and from making our own paths out of unfreedom' (Figlan et al. 2009: 29–30). It is this vision of freedom as collective empowerment that transforms the struggle into one for a new society. The struggle does not demand greater technical efficiency from the state, nor a change in the relationship between a community and the state, but rejects 'the state's logic of freedom' which is limited to voting in exchange for 'bits and pieces of service delivery':

We also see that our ideas about freedom go much further and deeper than the way our struggles are presented when they are

described as ‘service delivery protests’. If the heart of our struggle was just for houses and services to be delivered, we would be just like beggars with our hands out, waiting for someone to help us. No, what we are struggling for, a real freedom, goes much further than that! (Figlan et al. 2009: 25–6).

‘Against the stunted and anti-political language of the NGOs and human rights organisations’, Abahlali are indeed insisting on ‘the right to define their own struggle and do so in explicitly political terms’ (Gibson, Harley and Pithouse 2009: 89). Freedom is not only the goal, but must also be something that is practised now, in the day-to-day critical, democratic, open-ended and praxis-based vision that Fanon believed was necessary to counter the degeneration of liberation: ‘We don’t say that we in the movements are perfect, but at least we are opening these gates; at least we are on a right path to search for the truth. We have a deep responsibility to make sure that no-one can shut the gates’ (quoted in Figlan et al. 2009: 18). They stress that collective reflection on the experience of oppression and resistance is essential to that praxis: ‘Our experience in life and in the movement means that we must always remain open to debate, question and new learning from and with the people’ (Figlan et al. 2009: 18). The point is not to tell the people what to think, but to create spaces that can enable people to discuss how and why they are not free. The notion is dialogic rather than hierarchical and relies on the ‘damned of the earth’ thinking for themselves. As Fanon reminds us, the struggle for freedom aims for a fundamental change in social relations. After the conflict, there must be the disappearance not only of the unfreedom but also of the unfree person (see 1968: 246). It is praxis that enables the transcending of unfreedom and the transformation of the system and individuals. That transcendence depends on breaking what Raya Dunayevskaya called the mind-forged manacles of unfreedom.

Fanon’s visionary critique of postcolonial elite politics mapped out a ‘living politics’ based on a decentralised and democratic form of self-governing that opens up new spaces for the politics of the excluded from the ground up. This is exactly what is being practised in Living Learning. It is only a small beginning towards building a counter-hegemony from below that would fundamentally challenge the political status quo and

contest the moral and intellectual narcissism of the ruling elites. In fact, just recently, Fanon's conclusion to *The Wretched* – with its challenge to Europe and its call to work out a 'new humanism' based on the inclusion, indeed centrality, of the damned of the earth, in the 'enlightening and fruitful work' of nation building (1968: 204) – was concretely rearticulated by S'bu Zikode: 'It is one thing if we are beneficiaries who need delivery. It is another thing if we are citizens who want to shape the future of our cities, even our country. It is another thing if we are human beings who have decided that *it is our duty to humanize the world*' (2009a, my emphasis).

## In place of a conclusion

*One may recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to be standing still – pour encourager les autres.*

– Karl Marx, *Capital*

*He who glorifies theory and genius but fails to recognize the limits of a theoretical work, fails likewise to recognize the indispensability of the theoretician. All of history is the history of the struggle for freedom. If, as a theoretician, one's ears are attuned to the new impulse from the workers, new 'categories' will be created, a new way of thinking, a new step forward in philosophic cognition.*

– Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*

### FANONIAN PRACTICES AND AN OLD SAW

The relationship between intellectuals and grassroots movements is central to *The Wretched of the Earth* and to *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*. Since there are many pitfalls in this relationship, let me revisit the categories of intellectuals and grassroots movements. By intellectuals, I am speaking of those radicals who have broken with the ruling paradigms – not only those of the World Bank or Northern development agencies, but all forms of managerial, technical or developmentalist elitism. By a grassroots movement, I mean a genuine, democratically constituted movement created by the oppressed.

I am also thinking of an intellectual in a Gramscian sense, recognising that movements give birth to their own intellectuals. I consider the intellectual to be an activist who expresses at least two possible philosophic

standpoints. First, that of a pragmatic liberal who assumes it is his or her job to uplift or empower the poor so that they become stakeholders in the system (and thus responsible for their continued poverty); second, that of a fundamentally anti-systemic dialectician, who begins by engaging with a poor people's movement and thereby challenges the research community's assumptions and practices. The former considers the poor as a sociological fact to be studied; the latter considers work with a poor people's movement as a process and a praxis. For the former, work with the poor is about applying ideas that are already conceived; for the latter, work with a poor people's movement is an intellectual challenge. The former do not conceive that the poor can think their own thoughts or create their own politics; for the latter, the ability of a poor people's movement to think is a point of departure for a new kind of politics. The first challenge for radical intellectuals is to listen, and from this standpoint it is clear that for the former, the poor (as a group) is and remains an object, while for the latter, the poor's self-determined movement is a subjectivity that has absorbed objectivity. In other words, the movement expresses both force and reason. Yet, such a moment is not guaranteed. Indeed, it is almost impossible to know beforehand and often the gulf between radical intellectuals and a grassroots movement is not bridged.

Though a majority of intellectuals quickly align themselves with the new regime, Fanon argues that a small group of 'honest' intellectuals and militants resist the rush to take over positions in the party/patronage system.<sup>1</sup> What should honest intellectuals – those dedicated to social transformation – do? Many of these intellectuals work in or are found on the peripheries of NGOs or academic settings and even those connected with the most progressive and allegedly non-hierarchical institutions are constantly negotiating subtle contradictions and conflicts. Because working with these institutions also includes material rewards (such as job security or payment for research), their agendas are often unconsciously internalised. Working in these spaces is, as a group of activist academics put it, 'extremely messy and politically challenging' (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010: 246). Wary that even the most radical and 'empowering' practices often end up repeating the hegemonic structures and their hierarchical and professionalised systems of thought, these intellectuals understand that decolonising the mind is a continuous process.

Indeed, this is the story that emerges in the following examples from intellectuals working in two different sites: rural women working as grassroots organisers for an NGO and activist academics connected with the university.

*Playing with Fire* is the title of a book written by a group of rural women – the Sangtin Writers – who worked for an internationally famous progressive NGO as grassroots-level activists.<sup>2</sup> After a number of years of activism, the women (with the help of an activist academic) collectively wrote of their experiences. In short, the women worked for an NGO whose mission was to ‘empower’ poor women, but the women often found themselves undermined by the organisation’s elitism and classism. It is a story often repeated by those working at the bottom of NGO structures as organisers, informants, data collectors and employees. The women’s employers were outraged by the publication of *Playing with Fire*. They viewed it as a betrayal, threatened the women with disciplinary action and called on them to publicly apologise and disassociate themselves from their own book.

The Sangtin Writers began to recognise that their involvement in the NGO was ‘a confusing vicious cycle’ (2006: 145) highlighted by the fact that the same spaces where their ‘efforts were praised’, their ‘voices were muffled’ (2006: 113–14). The NGO, the women concluded, was ‘guided by an impulse . . . to claim ownership of the experiences and ideas of the grassroots activists’ (2006: 137). Behind the appearance and rhetoric of equality, the NGO viewed these women as their property. Their words and work as ‘rural activists’ (2006: 138) were only valued insofar as it validated the NGO’s mission. As the women became more aware of their position and more critical of the NGO’s paternalism and elitism, they began to transgress the NGO’s property lines and think about their work in a larger context. With the help of Richa Nagar, an activist academic, they began discussions that led them towards a critique of the alternative visions of the world created by the anti-globalisation movement, which they argue were ‘generated and disseminated from above’ down to people working at the local level (2006: 148). Instead, they advocate a shift in the geography of reason, namely, a view – in contrast to a UN-style global feminist agenda – that ‘place-based specificities of local processes and struggles can help us articulate transnational feminist alternatives to “global sisterhood” and “global feminisms” . . . to challenge the feminist

intellectual in the northern (wherever that North might be geographically situated) academy to immerse herself in the complex and contradictory realities of the activists' milieu' (2006: 149).

From the spaces of the Northern neoliberal academy, activist scholars Chatterton, Hodkinson and Pickerill have similarly carried out an 'honest reflexive account' of the complex and contradictory realities of scholar activism often 'caught between two worlds' (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010: 245, 248). Frequently they found themselves in Manichaean situations where 'research' associated with the needs of a movement was considered by funding authorities, NGOs, university managers and academic publishing corporations, bad research – subjective, tendentious and not 'neutral', certainly not research suitable for job security.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, they argue, a choice has to be made:

[I]f we accept and understand that academics and educators have the power to either help or harm movements for social change, then this leads logically to the need to think and act *strategically* as scholar activists. Central to this is being accountable to the movements we claim to support and belong to. At its core, this is a rejection of the university as a privileged site of knowledge production, and of Research Councils as the privileged generator of research priorities. We need to collaborate with those on the frontline about what research is needed and on what solutions we are seeking. Making strategic interventions means orienting our educational and research agendas in ways that will decisively help those on the frontline of campaigns and struggles. Submerging ourselves in the messy world of political organising where we don't call the shots is a brave move to make. This kind of strategic research planning involves longer-term commitments which can be very mundane and painstaking and whose benefits might not become apparent for years. This is often the timescale and reality of winning social struggles (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010: 265).

Though critically aware of the politics of funded research – research should not only interpret the world but 'organise its transformation' – they fear

that 'without more critical reflectivity scholar activism may undermine its own intentions by creating a cadre of professionalised, institutionalised activists whose potential is incorporated into the neo-liberal university' (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010: 266).

It is not surprising that many local, grassroots movements rightly view academic researchers parachuting into their communities with suspicion and are also skeptical of 'scholar-activism'. With resources far beyond any individual in the movement, these scholars have to be aware of unconsciously reflecting social hierarchies, which can also be reproduced by attitudes in the movements who think that the professional outsider's resources can deliver short-term gains. This critical consciousness is all part of the 'messy', uncertain and shifting situation.

For Fanon, the goal is never simply 'research' but a commitment to explaining 'to the masses that everything depends on them', that bread, land and freedom cannot be brought by anybody else but by the people themselves (1968: 197). Fanon's insistence that this explanation encourages the development of a 'chain of reasoning' that cannot be developed in one fell swoop is repeated by the Sangtin Writers and the Autonomous Geographies Collective. But in the context of the constant threat that poor people face, there is always an impulse to take a shortcut and get the job at hand done. Fanon advises, however, that the continued work of discussion and organisation, of thinking and talking, of including everyone in the process of decision making, of including everyone's muscles and brains is not time wasted but the only way to hasten the end of the crisis. The committed intellectual's work, wherever it is, is to put to work those skills 'snatched' (Fanon 1968: 150) from universities and also to create the mental links that include the constant connections with and recoveries of histories of struggle and philosophies of liberation.

Since the first challenge for radical intellectuals often puts them in conflict not only with local political and economic powers but also with the trajectory of academic research (often directly or indirectly framed by NGOs and international NGOs), the second task of the radical intellectual is to avoid abandoning intellectual work, but instead to redirect it away from being mainly a discussion among intellectuals (and policy makers, etc.) towards more radical purposes. For the radical intellectual, the division between mental and manual labour, which Marx argued was the



hallmark of capitalist society, is not broken down by sheer will. To surrender to the division would in fact be bad faith. A much more critical, engaged and 'untidy' dialectic is required to undermine alienation (Fanon 1968: 41, 227; see also Gibson 2003: 189). To listen truthfully does not mean to listen uncritically; rather it is to listen socially, relationally and collectively along with the movement as it builds democratic spaces and challenges itself, and the philosopher, to catch itself thinking. The idea that radical intellectuals should abandon critical intellectual work to become 'one with the masses' is just as unrealistic and detrimental to a grassroots movement as to think that to really be critical the intellectual must become 'autonomous' from all grassroots movements.<sup>4</sup> While critical self-reflexive political/philosophical work, unconnected to grassroots movements, can be important to that movement's intellectual development, and while there is no doubt that intellectual work can be done in a library, the intellectual envisioned by Fanon, and the type I'm interested in here (whether in a meeting or in the library), begins from the idea that 'the masses' can think but at the same time realises that that understanding is not the end of thinking. The committed intellectual, like Gramsci's philosopher, is willing to engage awkward facts and articulate a consciousness full of contradictions; and, as such, is an example of an intellectual practitioner who honestly posits him- or herself, qua intellectual, 'as an element of the contradiction and elevat[ing] this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action' (Gramsci 1971: 404–5). It is an often dangerous, unstable but potentially fertile zone. As Fanon puts it, it is through this conscious action that new meanings and new contradictions are uncovered (1968: 147). This work is particularly vital, not only in the context of apartheid South Africa, but also in post-apartheid South Africa, where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid are reconfigured in the neoliberal present.

In the colonised world, and indeed the postcolonial one, the division between mental and manual labour takes a particularly dehumanised hue, which makes indisputably clear the absolute break that intellectuals have to make from all forms of elitism, a process that must begin with a shifting in the geography of reason. 'Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions? Who will carry it out?' (Smith 1999: 10). These are the

kinds of questions that express a critique of elitism. But Fanonian practice is not simply an alternative research model. Shifting the 'geography of reason' is not simply a critical move *away* from the positivism of the powerful, but a critical move *towards* the often hidden praxis and thinking of the damned of the earth. This process is ongoing, and is never guaranteed, but must be grasped in the same way that Marx understood his philosophy of liberation. Such a move requires a philosophy of liberation that is itself liberatory, that is, one that becomes concrete in those moments of historical interruption when the damned, in an awareness of their own sudden act of consciousness (what Fanon calls 'radical mutation'), take possession of their own reason. In other words, Marx's philosophy is not an *a priori* that can be applied to politics; it is not a system, and its recreation is a process that arises out of the constant dialogue between theory and praxis.

Fanon's notion of the political education of the masses included the political education of intellectuals. His conception of politics was quite different from party politics. For Fanon, the anti-colonial nationalist political party is a problem, and particularly so because it is Janus-faced. After gaining power, it becomes quite simply a means of advancement for the elite and a means to control the inconvenient and unruly masses. It gradually transforms into an intelligence agency, gathering information and spreading disinformation, eventually using any means to suppress grassroots opposition that threatens it. Thus, political education is not about echoing the speeches made by political leaders, which either harangue the people or whip them into a frenzy using songs from the struggle, but about doing the very thing that the political parties fear, namely, seeking to undermine party politics and all the patronage and corruption that go along with it. Political education is dialogical, in part because the search for truth must, in the end, be a common responsibility. As Fanon puts it, the 'living organisation' that emerges from this dialogue is what encourages the 'free exchange of ideas', which begins from the bottom up, from the real needs, the lived experience, of the most oppressed (1968: 170).

In this sense, struggles for freedom produce notable theoreticians. But it must also be remembered that in the quest for freedom, theoreticians return to ideas of liberation, and in times of apparent quiescence and

even retrogression, they grasp the historic moment. Steve Biko's development of Black Consciousness indicates how intellectuals are also created at nodal points through a dialogue of ideas and the discovery of a generation's historic mission. On the other hand, Fanon's philosophy was deeply influenced by his experience of the Algerian revolution. His mission was clearly laid out in front of him. Indeed, his commitment to the revolution is reflected in three of his four books, *A Dying Colonialism*, *The Wretched of the Earth* and the posthumously published *Toward the African Revolution*. From his experience of the revolution, Fanon developed a notion of national liberation, or what he called the 'living nation', which was synonymous with 'the enlightened action of men and women'. Indeed, without this historical and collective responsibility of *everyone* in the building of the new nation, he saw the new ruling elites bringing 'anarchy, repression, and the resurgence of tribal parties' (1968: 204–5). Declaring that he was fighting for an Algeria as 'open to all' in which 'every kind of genius may grow' (1967c: 32), he argued, 'In the new society being built there are only Algerians' (1967c: 152). In other words, in his essay 'Algeria's European Minority', he was arguing that the new Algeria would be created in the ongoing struggle for liberation, rather than based on any claim to indigeneity or authenticity.<sup>5</sup>

Echoing Fanon, one might have said at its birth that in the new society built in South Africa there are only South Africans. But this now seems an illusion, and the concept of the 'rainbow nation' an abstraction. Indeed, alongside a mosaic of juxtaposed difference in South Africa, which in the context of neoliberal globalisation promotes an establishment multiculturalism alongside what Epifanio San Juan calls 'the ethnocentric paradigm of commodity relations' (see San Juan 2007: 18–20), indigeneity and ethnicity remain the key principles of political organisation.

#### TOWARDS NEW BEGINNINGS

*We shall refuse to accept the present as definitive.*

— Barney Pitjana, 'Power and Social Change in South Africa'

From its beginnings, Abahlali baseMjondolo refused ethnic and patronage politics. But rather than denying the existence of racial and nativist

attitudes among poor people, it understood these attitudes as the *real* legacies of apartheid and post-apartheid poverty and oppression, as dangerously divisive and potentially retrograde responses to injustice that, in a Gramscian sense, had to be worked through and aired in meetings and discussions, with an idea of active solidarity being encouraged.

In September 2009, hundreds of Abahlali members were violently removed from the Kennedy Road settlement.<sup>6</sup> Supported by the ANC, with the tacit agreement of the police, the settlement's democratically elected governing body and hundreds of Abahlali activists were forcibly expelled and public death threats against a number of key leaders were made during and after the attacks. Since Abahlali traces its beginnings to the Kennedy Road struggle over promised land in 2005, the expulsion of Abahlali from Kennedy Road represented the end of the period when the spirit of Abahlali could be identified with the active solidarity at Kennedy Road. On a more immediate level the repression closed spaces for discussion.<sup>7</sup> For a time the movement was fragmented and many of its leaders scattered and forced underground. Though it later opened an office in Durban, organised a citywide march and has continued to support struggles in the settlements, the repression of Abahlali and other political mobilisations, as well as pending curbs on freedom of expression, bodes badly for the future of political freedom in South Africa.

At the same time Abahlali's strength should not be overestimated. It represents only tens of thousands of the millions of shack dwellers; but like the schoolchildren of Soweto in 1976, the greatness of the shack dwellers' movement is that it has dared to keep struggling against all odds. For them it is necessary to do so – they have no choice. The organised shack dwellers, the 'dead wood' of society, began to dance, and continued to dance, when much of post-apartheid civil society appeared to be standing still. Thus, Abahlali represents a new stage of poor people's politics marked by the principle that the poor can think critically. This standpoint, certainly contested at its birth by competing vanguardisms in the state and in the left, has become an incontrovertible fact, and it is this, the thinking actions of some of contemporary South Africa's poorest of the poor, that provided the impetus for *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*. The shack dwellers' movement underscored the importance of spatial politics in post-apartheid South Africa, and also helped to refocus

the importance of space in Fanon's thought. Indeed, this book could not have been written without the shack dwellers' movement; it was born out of, and borne by, Abahlalism as a concrete expression of Fanonian practices. The shack dwellers' 'living politics' and 'living learning' brought Fanon alive, and profoundly challenged anyone interested in genuine liberation.

When the shack dwellers' movement burst on to the scene in 2005, the issue of presence became a philosophical one, and there were certainly some liberals and leftists who were far too quick to dismiss the movement or label its thinking incoherent. The situation reminds me of Fanon's criticism of Sartre's *Orphée Noir*. What I want to reiterate here is that a dialectic of liberation cannot be imposed *a priori*. When Fanon accused Sartre of not understanding the embodiment of Black experience, and thereby subsuming Black consciousness under an *a priori* proletarian consciousness that was already mapped out, he was making two related points that are essential to Fanonian practices: first, when he said that Sartre had forgotten that the Black suffers in their body quite differently from the White (1967a: 138), he was not simply saying that Sartre had to literally experience that suffering. Indeed, when he argued that *Orphée Noir* is the date of Sartre's *intellectualisation* of the experience of being Black, the point was not to denigrate Sartre's attempt to think through the issue, but to trace the problem of the way in which Sartre was thinking it through, namely Sartre's dialectic. Thus, when Fanon said that Sartre – that 'born Hegelian' – had misunderstood dialectical negativity (that is, that Sartre had not understood the movement of the Hegelian dialectic), it was connected to the second point: that Sartre, who Fanon had thought was a 'friend' to Blacks, had betrayed him. Of course, betrayal is an especially strong rebuke towards a committed intellectual like Sartre, who genuinely wanted a socialist revolution; but for Fanon, this was a betrayal because Sartre's misunderstanding had led him to dismiss Black consciousness as a minor stage in the larger anti-capitalist struggle. This logic can be applied to the shack dwellers' movement, and what I have called 'the fact of shackness'. Rather than considering the movement a 'minor' or a 'local' stage in a global anti-capitalist movement, a dialectical praxis appreciates its specificity (as a particularisation of the universal) but does not view it uncritically. Fanonian practices insist that while an ethical

move towards experience is a useful foundation, intellectual labour applies itself to a search for new beginnings, and to critical engagement with grassroots movements, thereby creating a 'fighting culture', as Fanon put it (1968: 223; see also Gibson 2003: 127–56), where radical changes can take place. It is a space of action grounded by thinking, a place where, potentially, the reflecting 'consciousness full of contradictions' can help articulate its philosophic principles and its notion of what Zikode (2009b) calls a 'living communism'.

Fanon warns that all progressive organisations, parties and social movements can degenerate. Just as organisations of national liberation can become chauvinistic, so too can democratic movements become professionalised and authoritarian. The dialectic of transformation into its opposite is, however, neither an iron law nor simply the result of external pressure. In fact, inasmuch as Fanon believes that it is the subjective powers – namely, the hands and brains – of Africans that will create new beginnings on the continent, Fanon's idea of a new humanism insists on absolute vigilance. The achievements of liberation movements become part of the struggle's history; they are never lost, even if the movements later degenerate. But rather than simply moving from one historical high point to another, 'the new is in the daily struggle' (Dunayevskaya 2002: 24).

For Fanon, the poor, the unemployed, the excluded, in short the 'damned of the earth', were 'the truth' because they expressed the truth of the 'national cause', namely promised land, promised bread and promised freedom. In the colonial context, Fanon argues, there is no truthful behaviour. Just as the coloniser paints the colonised as the quintessence of evil, the colonised return in kind. What is good is simply what hurts the colonist. But beyond good and evil, truth is whatever fosters the end of the living death of colonialism. Truth is what puts Africa in motion behind revolutionary principles (1967b: 177). Indeed, Fanon argues that this is his life's work, adding in words reminiscent of the quote from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* that he took as the epigraph to the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, that it is not the poet's Africa that harkens back to a glorious past, but living, breathing, creating Africa of the everyday, 'the Africa to come' (1967b: 179).

Aware of the counter-revolution that lurks inside as well as outside the movement – its transformation into the opposite – Fanon's notion

of dialectical negativity means that a new humanism draws itself not simply in reaction to postcolonial realities in their neoliberal form, but also as a resumption of an interrupted history. 'True decolonisation, the post-apartheid', argues Sekyi-Otu (2003: 26), 'would be signalled by a re-awakening of the inward eye.' Authentic liberation in Africa is also a collective enterprise, Fanon argues, that rediscovers the extraordinary power of the grassroots 'people's commissions', and transforms indigenous local democratic forms where the community triumphs and 'spreads its own light and its own reason' (1968: 48). Thus, when Fanon (1968: 49) states the the unemployed, the poor, don't *represent* the truth but are the truth *in their being*, he contrasts this to the inventory of 'true representations' created by the intellectual. These representations, always external to the people's real movement, are 'reminiscent of death rather than life', he argues, because they reflect the legacies of colonialism. The need to break with such assumptions and establish a decolonial and dialectical praxis is intimately connected with Fanon's critique of the idea of an objective Truth that towers above human society. And, Fanon adds, 'we have every right to ask ourselves whether this truth is real' (2004: 162; 1968: 218). Fanon is not arguing that reactionary and xenophobic attitudes are not found and do not germinate among the poor. Of course they do, but these are encouraged, indeed channelled, to use a Fanonian term, from above. Whether in sophisticated and technical political talk, in the columns of the opinion makers or in the patronage systems of local governance, 'illegals' and 'immigrants' become blamed for the people's poverty and other attitudes are drowned out in the xenophobia nativism. Fanon saw it early in West Africa and noted it in *The Wretched* and it has reappeared throughout Africa's postcolonial history. While 'civil society' can offer a defence of freedoms won in the struggle against colonialism, this defence cannot be separated from movements of the nation's oppressed, where, from Fanon's point of view, new sources of resistance to repression must come, if they are to come at all.

Rather than a series of representations then, Fanon was concerned with how subject and subjective will become historical 'objective truth'. Since Fanon would agree with Hegel that error is a dimension of truth, the point is not to uncritically praise Abahlali's every decision. What is

essential is not simply Abahlali's activism but that its activism, even when it is a reaction to external pressures and events, must remain connected to its thinking, its open discussion and its living politics. As Cooper-Knock (2009b) puts it: 'Abahlali is . . . as dignified, beautiful and flawed as the humanity from which it is drawn. But it is neurotically democratic, impressively diverse and steadfastly self-critical.' It can only remain alive and be true to itself on this basis. What is essential about Abahlali is the way its thinking is implicitly connected to a critique of the geographies of force that demarcate post-apartheid South Africa and the 'unspeakable treason' of its leaders. Such thinking is one expression of the force of reason that, if allowed to blossom, may offer at least a conceptual shift not only to the political geography of post-apartheid South Africa but also to its ethical *raison d'être*. The quest for a new humanity as Biko puts it, the duty to humanise the world as Fanon argues, the importance in other words of realising what might also be called a decolonial, new humanism remains the goal of Fanonian practices.



# Notes

## PREFACE

1. To distinguish Biko's conception of Black Consciousness or the specific Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, I use a capital C and M, while references to Black consciousness in general or Fanon's engagement with Sartre, in particular, take a lower-case c. Similarly, references to the general concept of communism take a lower-case c, while specific Communist parties, manifestos, etc., take a capital C.
2. The individual understood socially or what Fanon calls 'sociodiagnostically' (1967a: 13).
3. It is an absolute in the same way as Fanon reads Hegel's master/slave dialectic: it is only through risking a life of 'living death' that freedom is obtained (1967a: 218).
4. For the World Bank, the important paradigm for popular participation is through micro-financing and micro-saving. Jockim Arputham, the founder of the National Slum Dwellers Federation and president of Slum Dwellers International (SDI) considers savings as 'the salvation of the poor' (Neuwirth 2005: 132). Robert Neuwirth adds, SDI is a top-down organisation that 'involves no threat to local or national governments' (Neuwirth 2005: 138).
5. This more depoliticised version of the 'right to the city' is becoming dominant, used widely by NGOs, donor organisations as well as governments, government departments and the World Bank. All were represented at the World Urban Forum 5: 'The Right to the City', held in 2010. The most radical use of the discourse or slogan 'right to the city' includes working people in urban planning, but mostly 'right to the city' is synonymous with top-down 'pro-poor public-private partnerships for service delivery' (see UN-Habitat 2010). Among the South African participants at the Forum was the newly named Department of Human Settlements, which, like most government departments, considers adequate shelter as synonymous with the right to the city. The department is mainly concerned about controlling the 'mushrooming' of informal settlements

by removing people from cities. In other words, while speaking of creating places where people can ‘stay, pray and play, live, learn and leisure’ (Department of Human Settlements 2010: 9), the post-apartheid Department of Human Settlements follows apartheid’s spatial logic of forced removals. For the World Urban Forum, the right to the city was reduced to either more responsive delivery or helping poor people access home loans. Both can be considered examples of depoliticised ideas of the right to the city. What is missing, of course, from the Forum and its concept are grassroots movements that are struggling for a more radical transformation of the city, based on deeply democratic practices. (On the ‘right to the city’ slogan, see Mayer 2009 and De Souza 2010.)

6. The Poor People’s Alliance includes Abahlali baseMjondolo (KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape); the Landless People’s Movement (Gauteng); the Rural Network (KwaZulu-Natal); and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign.
7. See Dingani’s (2004) review of the lecture.

## INTRODUCTION

1. *Amandla*, a cry for power, and *awethu*, a response meaning ‘to the people’, popular during the anti-apartheid struggles, is still used in current post-apartheid struggles. The phrase ‘Amandla is still awethu’ was used by S’bu Zikode in a press release on 27 January 2009 about the judgment handed down in the Durban High Court on Abahlali baseMjondolo’s application to declare unconstitutional KwaZulu-Natal’s provincial Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act of 2007.
2. Frank Wilderson (2008) paints a useful picture of this period that emphasises the importance of the death of Chris Hani.
3. When Homi Bhabha asks ‘is Fanon relevant?’ in his foreword to the 2004 translation of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, the question is not disinterested. Already in his foreword to the 1986 British edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, he contended that Fanon’s politics, indeed Fanon’s humanism and existential philosophy, should be dismissed, or at least bracketed off to privilege the insights into the ambivalence of colonial desire. For a critique of Bhabha’s 2004 foreword, see Gibson (2007).
4. On Africa and globalisation, see Gibson (2004a).
5. I use the phrase ‘the damned’ rather than ‘the wretched’ because I think it better emphasises the philosophical, existential and material being of those people who are damned, disappeared and silenced. However, when referring to the title of Fanon’s book, *Les damnés de la terre*, I use the usual English translation of its title, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
6. For an analysis of xenophobia in Fanonian terms, see Neocosmos (2006).

7. 'Shifting the geography of reason' has been the motto of the Caribbean Philosophical Association since its founding in 2004, and is also the title of its annual conference.
8. Humanist practice needs not just a concrete grounding in the lived experience of the people, but also a more rigorous philosophical, rather than pragmatic, basis. Indeed, that was the mission that C.L.R. James rearticulated after his experiences in Ghana. Over 50 years ago, James had embraced Nkrumah and Nkrumahism (Ghana became independent in 1957) almost uncritically. But, by the early 1960s, he realised that he had 'been fooled'. Nkrumah had been one of the best of the new African leaders, James said, but had become increasingly separated from the masses. Overly concerned with technological 'backwardness', he became increasingly authoritarian. James summed up the situation as follows: 'Africa will go crashing from precipice to precipice unless the plans for economic development are part of a deep philosophical concept of what the mass of the African people need.' James grounded his critique of Nkrumah in humanism: 'The African builders of a humanist society show that today all humanism finds itself in close harmony with the original conceptions and aims of Marxism' (James 1978: 223).
9. According to the Freedom of Expression Institute (Delaney 2007), over 6 000 protests were officially recorded during 2004-5. This almost doubled to 10 000 the following year. Journalist John Pilger (2008) has said that South Africa is 'the most protest rich country in the world'.
10. Though I refer mainly to the ANC because they are in power, the Democratic Alliance (DA) implement exactly the same repressive policies towards the poor and homeless in areas where it controls the local councils. Both the ANC and the DA respond violently and illegally to 'unlawful land occupations' (including the building of new shacks) in flagrant disregard of the Prevention of Illegal Eviction From and the Unlawful Occupation of Land Act of 1998, which states that a court order is necessary for evictions to be legal and that (despite a subsequent Constitutional Court decision to the contrary) the courts are required 'to infuse elements of grace and compassion into the formal structures of law', bearing in mind that the history and experience of colonialism and apartheid have created 'lasting and enduring effects on the distribution of land and access to housing today'.
11. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been viewed as an extensive reply to *The Wretched*. Freire's relationship with Africa, specifically with post-independence Guinea-Bissau, should also be mentioned (see Freire 1978).
12. Fanon's influence on African novelists and critics should also be noted. Early critics of 'independence', like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah, read Fanon in the mid-1960s, the latter coming across Fanon while studying in the US, where Fanon became essential reading for the American Black Power movement. Additionally, Fanon influenced the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih and the Ugandan poet Taban Lo Liyong.

13. This is certainly not to downplay the significant influence of Fanon on the revolutionary theorist Amílcar Cabral (1969) or on African political theorists and philosophers, beginning perhaps with Emmanuel Hansen (1977).
14. The grounding of philosophy in experience can also be called phenomenology. Since this volume's focus is on Fanonian practices, there is neither a discussion of Fanon's intellectual sources nor a discussion of postcolonial Fanon studies. For a discussion of Fanon studies, see Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting and White (1996), Alessandrini (1999) and Gibson (1999a).
15. I have two things in mind here. First, Hegel's advice posited in his preface to *Phenomenology of Mind* that 'everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance but as Subject as well' (1967: 80). Hegel writes this in the context of what he calls the revolution in thought in which 'the spirit of man has broken with the old order of things hitherto prevailing, and with the old ways of thinking'. And second, Peter Hallward's (2004: 4) remark that 'the Haitian revolution is a particularly dramatic example of the way in which historical "necessity" emerges only retrospectively'.
16. Of course, such an event also has a long prehistory of resistance involving thought, memory and activity.
17. For in-depth discussions of Fanon's dialectic see Gibson (2003), Gordon (1995b), McCulloch (1983) and Sekyi-Otu (1996).
18. For a fuller discussion of Fanon's dialectic and its relation to Hegel, see Gibson (2002) and Turner (1996).
19. One should not forget that *The Wretched* was written before Algeria's independence from France.
20. The term 'development' is understood dialectically here, that is, as a process that can be both progressive and retrogressive.
21. The best discussion of the issue of ethics and 'bad faith' in Fanon's thought can be found in Gordon (1995a).
22. I am also gesturing to Raya Dunayevskaya's *Political/Philosophic Letters* published in the late 1970s.
23. One cannot but notice a Hegelian resonance here, namely the dictum that the 'real is rational, the rational is real'. Insofar as Enlightenment rationality is also the logic of imperialism and colonialism, Fanon turns the Hegelian notion of 'the rational is real' on its head, which far from being 'irrational' is actually quite 'rational'. And, for Fanon, the 'rational' is also radically humanist, and any society that acts in an inhuman way is 'irrational' and must be changed. As he writes, 'No pseudo-national mystification can prevail against the requirement of reason.' And, he continues, 'the decision to punish the workers who went out on strike on July 5th, 1956, is a measure which literally strikes me as irrational' (1967b: 54). On the difference between reason and rationality, see Gordon (2005a, 2006) and Horkheimer (1974). Gordon argues that reason 'sets the basis for evaluation and self reflection', while rationality is more conducive to instrumental concerns of control and predictability (2006: 127).

24. A tradition that includes Marx himself, and such twentieth-century figures as Raya Dunayevskaya, Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James.
25. On discussions of Fanon, violence and national liberation, see Gibson (2003).
26. In the introduction to *Black Skin*, Fanon announces that he is leaving the question of method to the botanists, arguing that 'there is a point at which methods devour themselves' (1967a: 12). I am thinking of method dialectically rather than analytically, as subject to its own method of ceaseless negativity.
27. In *Fanonian Practices*, I use the 1968 Constance Farrington translation of *Les damnés de la terre* since it is still popular and generally available. For an exploration of the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity in Fanon's dialectic, see Gibson (1999a).
28. The United Democratic Front (UDF) and the smaller Black Consciousness and Trotskyist allied National Forum were formed in response to the apartheid regime's proposal to create a tricameral parliament with Indian and Coloured representatives.
29. For an ultra-critical ex-insider's view of SDI see Podlashuc (2010).
30. This chapter was first published in *Esprit* in 1951 as '*L'expérience vécue du Noir*'. For *Black Skin*, Charles Lam Markmann translated the title as 'The Fact of Blackness', emphasising the facticity of Black lived experience. The Richard Philcox translation (Fanon 2008) uses the more literal translation, 'The lived experience of the Black'.
31. For example, see Ferguson (2006). Ferguson argues that activist-intellectuals have for far too long held on to the categories of 'local', 'grassroots' and 'resistance from below' (he uses the scare quotes to highlight his own displeasure with the terms) when what is needed is a conception of the 'grassroots' that is 'worldly, well-connected and opportunistic'. In place of social movements that fight 'from below', he posits movements that fight 'across, using their "foreign policy" to fight struggles not against "the state" but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies, and market institutions through which contemporary capitalist domination functions' (Ferguson 2006: 106–7). Implicit in Ferguson's notion is a 'media savvy', 'opportunistic' and multiscale global-justice movement. Yet, this technologically (Internet) connected horizontalism excludes those masses of people in the global South who are not connected. And while transnational banks, international agencies and market institutions might well be behind political decisions to remove 'illegal' settlements from a South African city, it is local politicians, city officials, local-government technocrats, the police, and so on, who, with private security companies, carry out the evictions. Thus a movement that forms to stop evictions begins in reaction. Movements can develop on a number of different scales (for an academic discussion of multiscale approaches, see Sassen 2005). Furthermore, rather than entering into a dialogue with the movements, Ferguson's view of intellectual work remains on a different scale.

32. 'Fanon is more concerned about the death of the slave than about his own death', argues Maldonado-Torres (2008: 156) and 'lives his life, not anticipating his own death, but rather, finding in life the time to respond to the other'.
33. 'Critical globalisation' theorists suggest in almost a Fanonian tone that the global city is a 'dual city' (see Castells 2002: 307; Friedman 1987), with the concentration of wealth in the hands of cosmopolitan elites networked into global financial and multinational corporations on one side, and mirrored by the increasing concentration of pauperisation among the masses of the people on the other – from the unemployed industrial working class of the old formal economy to the poor of the new, informal economies. While the former leap across national boundaries, feeling at home in any global citadel, the latter are stuck in areas that are increasingly insecure and often under threat from real-estate speculation. Neoliberal globalisation, in other words, creates increasing inequality and quite different experiences of space. Critical of globalisation, some theorists are nevertheless dismissive of what they consider place-based political activity, arguing instead for the development of a globally conscious civil society. Manuel Castells (1993: 566–7), for example, splits the 'local' between diversified and information-networked 'civil society' and a 'defensive tribalism' of people 'retrenched' in their places as they attempt to take a last stand against the 'macro forces that are out of their reach'. In other words, the first is positive, the latter regressive.
34. With the World Cup only a year away, one could not help but think of the timing of the 2009 Constitutional Court hearing that upheld the removal of 4 000 people from the Joe Slovo settlement in Cape Town as anything but coincidental. Since the settlement was on land next to the N2 highway, a route that dignitaries and visitors to the Soccer World Cup would take from the airport into the city, it was perceived as an 'embarrassment' for the world-class city of Cape Town. But the continuing struggle meant that, in reality, the city of Cape Town was not able to carry out the court's decision.
35. The liberal/radical response to the rebellions of 2009 – called the 'season of the disgruntled' – repeats this, reinforcing the idea that the masses destroy things. 'The bucket toilet system, lack of housing, no access to clean water, unserviced roads, under-resourced clinics and corrupt officials – this is old news', writes Lucas Ntyinyane (2009), but 'what is the point of destroying your country and soiling its international image?'
36. There is a resonance here with the Lukácsian conception of the 'standpoint of the proletariat' developed in the early 1920s after the defeat of the 1919 German revolution (Lukács 1971). Lukács solves the 'subject/object' dialectic and the problem of the reification of consciousness through the Communist Party. In other words, the Communist Party stands in as the 'standpoint of the proletariat'. Though I recognise that this remains a problem that is not solved by simply shifting the responsibility for revolutionary theory on to the 'backs of the

proletariat' or by taking the Adornian route of 'permanent critique', I hope to make it clear that Fanonian practices – shifting the ground and space of reason to the damned as a point of departure for philosophic engagement – offer a different trajectory. It is a critique, argues Maldonado-Torres, that takes into account the geopolitical division of intellectual production between centre and periphery. 'Criticism', he argues, 'must transgress the boundaries of geopolitical space and class formation . . . criticism must be, in short, interspatial' (2008: 250–1).

37. This is not to say that individuals don't desire all the shining commodities that are promoted as part of being in post-apartheid South Africa; it is to say that the movement articulates another reason, one based on values of sharing. If one cannot be middle class and be a shack dweller, can one be an educated professional and be a shack dweller? Of course one cannot escape the gaze of the other, the valuation of melanin – Fanon, for example, bristled at introductions like 'meet my black friend', 'the black doctor', etc. – but one can escape the shacks. My point here is not to criticise those who want to get out of the shacks for a better life, but rather to take on the idea of the damned, the social consciousness of 'shackness' – giving content to a better life for all – as a critique of post-apartheid society.
38. One example of the twists and turns of 'Fanon studies' is found in my collection *Rethinking Fanon* (1999c).
39. Paid-up membership is about 10 000 and annual membership in 2010 was R7. The number of paid-up members always increases before the annual general meeting since only paid-up members can delegate representatives to vote at the meeting. As in any organisation, there are varying levels of commitment. Regular active support in terms of people who will turn out for a big protest or event has always been in the thousands. Active support fluctuates enormously according to local dynamics such as a struggle against an eviction and may decline as a threat of eviction recedes, and with national dynamics such as local or national elections. For example, active support for Abahlali was very high at the time of the 2006 local government elections but receded considerably in some areas at the time of the 2009 national government elections that brought President Jacob Zuma to power.
40. When Raya Dunayevskaya (1958/1988: 281) maintained that the greatness of the organisation of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the US in 1955 lay in the fact that it was its 'own working existence' (a phrase Marx uses when referring to the Paris Commune) and 'contains our future', the claim was considered outrageous, because, as was argued, a bus boycott could not possibly be put on the same level as the Paris Commune. To say the same about the shack dwellers' organisation today might be similarly dismissed. Yet, in retrospect, Dunayevskaya's claim seems quite reasonable.
41. Georges-Eugène Haussmann was hired by Napoleon III after the 1848 revolution to 'modernise' Paris and make it fully accessible to the military through its wide

- boulevards. It was Haussmann's plans that allowed the quick suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871.
42. It is noteworthy that the academic literature on 'global cities' in the main elides Lefebvre's critique of the fetishised character of the production of space. Lefebvre's Marxist humanist point is that the fetish can only be stripped away and humanised by the struggle for the right to the city.
  43. This is especially true in the contemporary context of the realities of torture, which Fanon sees as the apogee of absolute depersonalisation.
  44. Transgressing boundaries by entering the European city of Algiers, the Algerian woman 'relearns her body' in a phenomenological sense. No longer hemmed in by the veil, she takes on the attitude of 'unveiled-woman-outside'. For Fanon, this transformation of the body in space expresses a radical mutation; since women are the heart of the struggle, relations between men and women, father and daughter, and the gendering of domestic and public space cannot go back to the way it had been before the war of liberation.
  45. Fanon writes of all these scales in the chapter titled 'Algeria Unveiled' (*L'Algérie se dévoile*), which by emphasising the active element of its unveiling might be more accurately translated as 'Algeria unveils itself' (1967c: 35–67).
  46. I reference Richard Turner here to remind people that it appeared utopian to many that apartheid would end. Turner, of course, would be disappointed with the outcome, but that does not discount his point that it is human beings and human action that change society. Tony Morphet (1990: 92–5) has an interesting Benjaminian discussion of Turner's notion of utopian thinking, situating it in the fantastic intellectual ferment of the 'Durban moment' of the early 1970s.
  47. Gillian Hart maintains that the government's embrace of the 'second economy' (or informal economy), which was introduced with a 'searing critique of the Washington Consensus . . . needs to be understood in relation to pressures from the first round of social movements' (2008: 685).
  48. The idea of rags to riches is of course central to the ideology of capitalism, but the 'productive' revolutionising bourgeoisie (of which Marx and Fanon speak) cannot, in fact, be characterised as a 'nation of shopkeepers'. In this hyper-globalised world, the idea that poor people can become bourgeois (by opening stalls, selling cheap goods in tuck shops or providing services as car guards, gardeners, cleaners or recyclers) is patently absurd. But it does serve a crucial ideological purpose, and is at the root of the neoliberal stakeholder analysis, namely that the problem with 'development' is that the poor have not been encouraged; what they need is to be encouraged to take responsibility – there is an echo of Victorian morality in this, namely, the importance of learning the worth of thrift and hard work!
  49. The NGO 'scramble for Africa', which began in the 1980s with structural adjustment programmes, has not ceased. Most NGOs continue to be created by donors, and in response to 'external' demand and aid flows. Despite also being



- 'non-governmental', many NGOs are well connected to government and powerful patrons. For a contemporary comparative study of NGOs in Africa, see Holmen (2010) and the invaluable work of Hearn (2007).
50. The connection between neoliberalism, political containment and the importance of NGOs is nowhere more apparent than in Haiti. Peter Hallward (2007: 177–8) notes that there are more NGOs in Haiti than in any other country, with NGOs undertaking the provision of 80 per cent of public services. They are the recipients of the bulk of monies promised to the regime, with budgets far larger than government departments.
  51. Jacques Rancière (2001) argues, for example, that 'the "poor" . . . does not designate an economically disadvantaged part of the population; it simply designates the category of peoples who do not count, those who have no qualifications to part-take . . . no qualification for being taken into account'.
  52. McDonald and Pape (2002: 1–2) point out that there were few dissenters to Operation Masakhane ('Let's build together') when it was rolled out in 1995. But it soon became 'the lodestar in the building of a hegemonic framework of cost recovery', simply understood as meaning 'black communities must pay up'. Expectations of genuine empowerment in the communities were stillborn, as decision making 'gravitated upward' and service delivery became the dominant paradigm in a neoliberal frame.
  53. Since 1996, cut-offs from electricity have exceeded new connections. The culture of non-payment, argues Desai (2002a: 17), was replaced by an 'economics of non-payment'.
  54. In a 2009 speech celebrating the 'fighting years' of the South African Communist Party, SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande decried any struggles that were violent or destroyed private property, as illegitimate and reactionary.
  55. I am indebted to Marie Huchzermeyer for this information. It reminds me of a wonderful scene in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, where he writes of the city council providing receptacles for waste on which is written 'Keep your country clean by keeping your city clean'. Ideologists had proclaimed how important this latest campaign was, and bins were provided, but they were never emptied. They became lost beneath the mound of growing garbage (1968: 7–8).
  56. While remaining wary of the very limiting discourse of the courts, it must be acknowledged they remain an important avenue for the legitimacy of struggle. As Desai (2002a: 72) argues, 'a lot more creative litigating could be done in conjunction with mass struggles'.
  57. We should remember that in *Black Skin*, culture, magazines, stories, and so on, play the role of 'collective catharsis' (1967a: 145).
  58. Indeed, based on his Second World War experiences, Fanon certainly had the ability to fire a gun, but that was not the work he chose in the Algerian revolution. On the issue of violence, see Gibson (2003: Chapter 5).

## CHAPTER 1

1. Thus Biko, in reading Fanon, Aimé Césaire, James Cone, Paulo Freire and others, and discussing these ideas with his comrades in the emergent Black Consciousness organisations like the South African Student Movement and the Black People's Convention, derived many of his 'Frank Talk' columns from listening to and talking with people on trains, buses, in shebeens and on street corners. Mark Sanders (2002) suggests that Biko's nom de plume, Frank Talk, invokes Frantz Fanon.
2. Recent discussions of Fanon and Biko in a South African context include Ahluwalia and Zegeye (2001), Hook (2003, 2004a, 2004b), More (2004, 2008), Pithouse (2001, 2003b) and Turner (2008).
3. Cone's book *Black Theology and Black Power* (first published in 1969) was an important source for Biko and his colleague Barney Pityana. The University Christian Movement (UCM) sent a delegation of three to meet Cone. One was Basil Moore, the compiler of a book of essays on Black Consciousness that included writings by Biko, Cone and Pityana; the second was Manana Kgwane, who was later killed in a car accident; and the third was a Special Branch spy.
4. Submitted to Moore's (1973) volume, *Black Theology: The South African View*.
5. In 1956, Césaire wrote: 'We Coloured men, in this specific moment of historical evolution, have consciously grasped in its full breadth, the notion of our own peculiar uniqueness, the notion of just who we are and what, and that we are ready, on every plane and in every department, to assume the responsibilities which proceed from this coming into consciousness. The peculiarity of our place in the world is not to be confused with anyone else's. The peculiarity of our problems, which aren't to be reduced to subordinate forms of any other problem. The peculiarity of our history, laced with terrible misfortunes which belong to no other history. The peculiarity of our culture, which we intend to live and make live in an ever realer manner' (quoted in Biko 1978: 66-7). See Césaire (2010) for the full text of the letter.
6. As in the ANC's alliance with the White Congress of Democrats and the South African Indian Congress.
7. Pityana became SASO president after Biko in 1972. After a decade of political activity and bannings he left the country and, for a short while, became the leader of the Black Consciousness movement's external wing before joining the ANC. He was ordained as a minister in England and returned to South Africa to head the Human Rights Commission and later the University of South Africa (UNISA).
8. Pityana writes this sentence as 'My negro consciousness does not hold itself out as black'. I am not sure that this makes sense, especially in the context of Pityana's explanation. I assume it is a typo.

9. Fanon (1967a: 135) as quoted in Pityana (1972: 180). In a more Sartrean vein, Temba Sono (1971) argues, 'Being cannot be non-being. Black cannot be White, only in South Africa does a group of people become the negative of another.'
10. Since the quote marks are not closed after Fanon's quote in Pityana's article, it appears that it is Fanon, not Pityana, who is making this point.
11. In Cone's theology, the quest to be somebody required a break with the *nobodyness* experienced by Blacks in a racist society.
12. In this sense one can understand that rather than counterposing the individual to collective solidarity, the individual is, as Marx argued, the social entity.
13. In this context, Pityana's revision in his 1992 retrospective is interesting. He declared that Black Consciousness 'was not a political philosophy or ideology but a strategy for action' (Pityana et al. 1992: 212).
14. Fanon argues that during colonialism, 'the mass of people maintain intact traditions which are completely different from those of the colonial situation'. In contrast, the native intellectual 'throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture' during the anti-colonial period (1968: 236-7).
15. Cone argued that the Christian message of liberation of the poor in America must be a Black theology.
16. He would probably agree with European economists like Karl Polanyi that starvation and malnutrition did not exist in communal societies in Africa, where assistance to the destitute was given unquestioningly (Polanyi 1957: 163-4).
17. Here I am referring widely to Black consciousness rather than specifically to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). I use an upper-case C to refer to Biko's concept and practices of Black Consciousness and a lower-case c to refer to Black consciousness generally and to Fanon's concept in particular.
18. Biko noted that Black Consciousness was a 'sequel' to the continental anti-colonial struggle that was making its way south (1978: 69). This is not to downplay the international importance of the Black movement in the US. Indeed, in contrast to the hegemony of the apartheid state and the apparent quiescence of the political opposition during the 1960s, the Black revolution in the US resonated powerfully across the Black world.
19. This is James Cone's term.
20. In fact, in 'Some African Cultural Concepts', Biko does approvingly quote Kenneth Kaunda (then the president of Zambia) about Africans being pre-scientific people (in Biko 1978). Ousmane Sembene (see Ghali 1987) argues that Negritude underpins Africa's situation of poverty and economic disarray. While Europe is considered technological and rational, Africa is perceived as happy 'just being'.
21. 1948 was the year that Senghor's groundbreaking anthology of Negritude poetry was published; the volume contained an introduction by Sartre entitled *Orphée*

- Noir*, which was subsequently criticised by Fanon in *Black Skin*. See Gibson (2003: 61–83).
22. Veriava and Naidoo (2008) make a case for Biko taking a third position which is neither Senghor's nor Fanon's.
  23. Though Biko might well have thought that authentic precolonial histories can be recovered, it is in the context of making history in the present that histories of past resistance and revolt to colonial oppression are rediscovered.
  24. Fanon does not theorise culture and 'customary rule'. Fanon writes in 'Racism and Culture' (1956/1967: 34) that 'the Kabyle *djemaas* named by the French authority are not recognised by the natives. They are matched by another *djemaas* democratically elected.' For a discussion of the importance of customary rule in late colonial Africa, see Mamdani (1996). For an analysis of this in post-apartheid South Africa, see Ntsebeza (2005).
  25. Fanon introduces two ideas of hegemony in his work. Speaking of the situation of the 'évolué' in France, in *Black Skin*, Fanon writes of what we might understand as a quite 'normal' system of cultural hegemony. The Black, he writes, 'is a product of [the] cultural situation' which 'slowly and subtly – with the help of newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio – work their way into one's mind' (1967a: 152). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he argues that the system is not legitimated by 'moral teachers' and 'bewilderers' but is based on brute force: 'Colonialism is not a thinking machine . . . it is violence in its natural state' (1968: 106). These two concepts of hegemony are central to Biko's idea of Black Consciousness and the idea of a liberated Azania. The first is essential to Biko's critique of White liberals. For though colonialism and late colonialism (and apartheid) is most certainly a system based on separation and force, Biko argues that educated Blacks in particular too easily took the grounds of their opposition to apartheid from White liberals and leftists.
  26. Fanon argues that during the freedom struggle, 'the native discovers reality and transforms it', laying hold of the violence, which was previously held in check, and changing its direction towards the colonial regime (1968: 58).
  27. Fanon says in *The Wretched* that political education means teaching 'the masses that everything depends on them . . . the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people' (1968: 197).
  28. Imraan Buccus (2008a) reminds us not to forget the connection between Thabo Mbeki's support for Mugabe, as he stole a third election, and the xenophobic violence in South Africa that occurred in May 2008. He adds that in contrast to the talk among elites about African unity, it was in the 'magnificent work done by poor people's movements to stop the attacks, and the incredible work undertaken by the Treatment Action Campaign in Cape Town to shelter and care for people in those attacks . . . that real Pan-African solidarity has been built'.
  29. The feeling of powerlessness is encouraged by practices that selectively provide services to some over others and by the lack of safety and police response to

- crimes that are blamed on 'outsiders'. For an analysis of the violence in Alexandra, see Allan and Heese (2008).
30. For example, from February 2004 to February 2005 there were 900 protests across South Africa's urban areas. See Booysen (2007: 21–2).
  31. According to Mbeki, a quarter of the population receives a social grant (2009a: 87). Even the populist Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) adopted by the ANC in 1994 can be counted as one of these schemes. Given that a good deal of the more economic academic literature points to the abandonment of the RDP as the moment of betrayal, it is worth noting here that the ANC acted to demobilise popular semi-autonomous political organisations very soon after it was unbanned in 1990. In other words, the people 'were sent back to their caves' long before the RDP was adopted. This fact may explain the ease with which the ANC was later able to abandon the RDP.
  32. For an excellent critique of the World Bank's discourse about the poor, see Richard Pithouse (2003a). Pithouse argues that the discourse is based on the assumption that 'poverty is ultimately an ontological condition that can be transcended via transformation at the level of being' (2003a: 120).
  33. Thatcher said this in an interview with *Woman's Own*, on 23 September 1987, while she was still resisting sanctions and promoting 'constructive engagement' with P.W. Botha's apartheid regime.
  34. I am using this in Foucault's sense (Foucault 1988).
  35. As seen, for example, in the campaign in support of Jacob Zuma's accession to the presidency – although Zuma distanced himself from the May 2008 pogroms, his mixture of autocratic populism and ethnic demagoguery was clearly expressed in the mobs' singing of Zuma's controversial trademark song 'Bring me my machine gun' as they attacked African 'foreigners'.
  36. For example, this is a position shared by Fanon biographer David Macey (2000) and Fanon critic Jock McCulloch (1983).
  37. Or 'the enfranchised slaves', as Fanon calls the nationalist bourgeoisie in *The Wretched*.
  38. On the importance of Sartre's idea of 'bad faith' in Biko's thought, see More (2008); for a discussion of Fanon and bad faith, see Gordon (1995b).
  39. For Fanon, the accumulation of capital is synonymous with colonialism. As he puts it both in *Black Skin* and in *The Wretched*, you are 'white above a certain financial level' (Fanon 1967a: 44; Fanon 1968: 40).
  40. Indeed, at the time of writing, at least half of those 70 per cent were unemployed.

## CHAPTER 2

1. Approximately 57 per cent of individuals in South Africa were living below the poverty income line in 2001, unchanged from 1996. By 2008 this line was R322

per month (Appel 2008; Schwabe 2004). Limpopo and the Eastern Cape had the highest proportion of poor people, with 77 per cent and 72 per cent of their populations living below the poverty income line, respectively. The Western Cape had the lowest proportion of poverty (32 per cent), followed by Gauteng (42 per cent). These figures have remained fairly steady, even though government grants have increased from 2.5 million beneficiaries in 1999 to just over 12 million in 2007. The UNDP (2009) reports that 43 per cent of South Africa's population lives on under \$2 per day.

2. Stats SA (2010) report that access to a flush toilet had increased to 55.1 per cent of households by 2007. They add that 80 per cent of households use electricity for lighting. According to Hattingh (2009), there have been 10 million instances in which people have had their water and electricity suspended for non-payment since 1996 (see also McDonald and Pape 2003).
3. The Gini coefficient (a measurement of inequality with 1 as absolutely unequal and 0 as equal) has in fact grown since the end of apartheid from 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 in 2006 and is comparable to the most unequal societies in the world (see Schwabe 2004). So, inequality in South Africa has become increasingly defined as inequality within population groups as defined by the apartheid categories of African, Coloured, Indian and White (and the fact that these terms are still in use speaks volumes about South Africa's rainbow nation). But also, since the Gini coefficient for the African population has risen, the percentage of African poor vis-à-vis other population groups is also higher. While the number of middle-class and rich Blacks has grown, the Gini coefficient indicates how much further poor Black households have sunk into poverty since the transition from apartheid, and that they have continued to do so throughout the period of ANC rule, while the government has reported an economic growth rate of about 5 per cent. The table below shows South Africa's population as of 2007 and its Gini coefficients by 'group' in 1991, 1996 and 2001.

Population		Gini coefficient		
		1991	1996	2001
(2007)				
African	38.0 million	0.62	0.66	0.72
White	4.3 million	0.46	0.50	0.60
Coloured	4.2 million	0.52	0.56	0.64
Asian	1.2 million	0.49	0.52	0.60
Total	47.7 million	0.68	0.69	0.77

Sources: Stats SA (2010); HSRC (2004).

4. Unemployment among Black South Africans has actually increased since the end of apartheid, with close to 50 per cent of the economically active population falling into that category and a higher percentage in the Eastern Cape. Wages

remain low, with most people earning less than R30 000 (\$5 000). Education remains unequal. Schools lack basic resources (such as running water and electricity). Overall, more than 50 per cent of students do not finish high school, and in poorer neighbourhoods the percentage is disproportionately even larger (Department of Education 2009: 44).

5. Water and electricity services are based on a 'cost-recovery model', which simply means no subsidies for poor communities. The whip of the free market broke the lingering culture of non-payment for services that developed under apartheid, with those who cannot pay being subject to the suspension of water and electricity services followed by eviction.
6. Statistics indicate that the percentage of people living in shacks has increased from 12.7 per cent in 2002 to 15.4 per cent in 2007. Naomi Klein (2007: 215) notes that by 2006 the number of shack dwellers had grown by 50 per cent since 1994, with a quarter of South Africa's population living in shack settlements.
7. Racial/spatial/class divisions are not unique to South Africa (for the US, see Denton and Massey 1994); they have a very long structural history which pre-dates 1948. Fanon (1968) famously spoke of the division of the colonial town in Manichaean terms. What is unique in South Africa is that the colonial world of compartments, described by Fanon, found its logical conclusion in apartheid. Apartheid has an even deeper legacy in the 'rural' areas where the systematic appropriation of African land, beginning in 1913, was developed into a process of forced removals and the creation of native homelands or Bantustans. Often dirt poor, with various 'tribal' divisions as enforced by apartheid segregation still in place, rural South Africa confronts the post-apartheid government as an enormous problem. The fact is, the ANC's programme of land redistribution is a low priority and has not fundamentally challenged the old power structures, including the so-called traditional leaders and Mangosuthu Buthelezi's IFP. In many cases the ANC has subsumed, rather than challenged, symbols and systems of rural rule, thereby making fundamental changes problematic. South Africa is reproducing what Mahmood Mamdani (1996: 32) calls a 'bifurcated state', reforming only urban areas (though even these not completely) and expanding civil society to urbanised subjects, while the rural areas remain under despotic rule.
8. Vishnu Padayachee notes that up until late 1993 'we were still buoyant, because, my God, this was a revolutionary struggle; at least there'd be *something* to come out of it'. Once he learnt that the central bank would be autonomous from government he realised that 'everything would be lost in terms of economic transformation' (quoted in Klein 2007: 202).
9. See also Friedman (1993a). While the mass action and stay-aways in June 1992 'may have been a triumph of solidarity', they were simply strategic and limited to reopening talks. What was planned as indefinite action became one week and then two days. And COSATU, which had earlier argued for a general strike,

- 'sought to achieve its aims through negotiated agreement and then settled for symbolic action' (Friedman 1993b: 150–8).
10. Terreblanche (2003) and Marais (1998) indicate that even by the early 1990s the ANC was channelling South African capitalists' demands for a political system to serve structural adjustment.
  11. That is to say that in 1915, in the darkest moment for revolutionary socialism – when it was confronted by imperialist war and the transformation of the largest of the Marxist parties into its opposite by its support for the war – Lenin (synonymous in our minds with materialism and vanguardism) looked to the power of the mind, to liberatory ideas, to make the leap that would change reality.
  12. When confronted by the chauvinism of the English trade union leaders in the 1860s vis-à-vis Irish freedom, Marx broke with the English leaders, appealing to the masses, in whom the trade unions had no interest. The unskilled workers, peasants newly arrived to the cities, and others were written off as unorganisable by the bourgeoisified unions.
  13. It should not be forgotten that in 1917, Lenin argued that the masses outside the party were far more revolutionary than the party leadership, and against the dithering Bolshevik leadership, he would 'go to the sailors'.
  14. Through its alliance with the SACP, the ANC was able to dominate the ideological debate, playing one side off against the other. Against the workers' movement (especially the Federation of South African Trade Unions [FOSATU], which, with the help of White intellectuals, was developing independent positions by the early 1980s), the SACP and ANC railed against workerism, economism and reformism, and accused it of lacking concern for the popular struggle in the townships. This vitriolic and sectarian debate harked back to Lenin's 1902 polemic 'What Is To Be Done', which argued that the worker could only attain an economic consciousness, and is represented by a number of articles in the SACP journals such as *African Communist* and *Sechaba* (see Nhere 1984 and Toussaint 1983). The debate about workerism can be found in the *South African Labour Bulletin* (Vol. 12, 1987). At the same time, it called Black Consciousness a middle-class movement. Yet this debate was purely polemical and disappointingly orthodox, with no critical engagement over terms or problematisation of the varying positions.
  15. In *The Wretched*, Fanon was prepared to criticise Engels to make this point clear (Fanon 1968: 63–4).
  16. For more on this problem of ideology, see Gibson (1999c).
  17. Adam Przeworski was probably the most optimistic, arguing that 'the typical democratizing coalition is likely to adopt a Keynesian economic project' (quoted in O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986b: 62).
  18. The political hegemony of the transition scenario allowed for a social-democratic opposition. Like O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986a, 1986b), Linz



and Stepan (1996) warned that democracy consolidation can only take place if governments address economic inequalities, such as health and education. In South Africa such views are articulated in terms of a critique of GEAR and neoliberal policies.

19. Trade unions were legalised under apartheid in 1979. The further institutionalisation of trade unions under the ANC government has meant the co-optation of COSATU leadership as junior partners in government. The incorporation of the trade union and social movement leaderships into the new regime weakened worker organisations as a whole layer of experienced organisers were seconded to government, creating new pressures and a significant gap between rank-and-file sentiments and union leadership. The democratic linkages between the shopfloor and government have also been weakened, thus dissipating the culture of shopfloor participation once held sacrosanct by union workerists. Unions have become increasingly stratified and sectional, reflecting the divisions in the South African economy. The institutionalisation of the trade unions as representatives of the working class involves the 'governing of their members', as O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead so aptly put it (1986b: 41). Trade union involvement in government has not resulted in economic redistribution or in a fundamental challenge to the economic inequalities inherited from apartheid. In fact, the apparent benefits of institutionalisation (having the ear of the government) have obscured the processes of ideological subservience and the loss of trade union autonomy (see Buhlungu 2010).
20. On populism in African political thought, see Idahosa (2004).
21. Like Mbeki, however, Zuma criticises the so-called service-delivery revolts and focuses his criticism of service-delivery failures on the performance of local officials. Yet, also like Mbeki, he has not been able to limit the revolts and the anger of the poor may move in a critical direction. As Barry Bearak (2009) reports in the *New York Times*: 'The crowd fights back shouting "azikhwelwa", meaning that everything must shut down: no one goes to work, no one attends school. "People knew how to act from the days of the liberation struggle," said Mr. Maya, the protest leader. "We sang the songs, telling those who are scared to step aside so the brave can move ahead and advance the struggle. In South Africa, the struggle is not yet over."'
22. The land question, which has recently had profound consequences for post-colonial Zimbabwe, may have even deeper social consequences for South Africa where it pre-dates apartheid by 35 years (i.e., the 1913 Land Act). If democracy is to develop, and if it is to be rooted in property, addressing the issue of land redistribution and the power of the chiefs over land remains crucial. At the most basic level, the ANC government has transferred, at most, only 3 per cent of White-owned land to Blacks, despite its promise to redistribute 30 per cent of White-owned land to the landless.
23. As we will see, shack dwellers are a prime example since they live in supposed temporary and informal settlements. Many are thought to be from rural South

- Africa or from other African countries. As we shall also see, it is not surprising that xenophobic violence occurs in these spaces.
24. As David Harvey (2008: 36) remarks, the distinction between rural and urban populations is fading into 'a set of porous spaces of uneven geographical development, under the hegemonic command of capital and the state'.
  25. Andrew Nash (2009) notes the bottom-up democracy of the shopfloor organisation in the union movement of the 1970s, where meetings, conducted in languages that workers could all understand, could go on into the night with union leaders careful not to impose their views. By the mid-1980s, it is estimated that 150 union meetings were taking place across the country on most nights of the week. This deeply democratic model of accountability – mandate, report-back and recall – provided a framework that was replicated in student and community structures in the 1980s.
  26. Friedman (1993a) notes the division between property owners, business interests and shack dwellers in Alexandra.
  27. In 'Critique of the Gotha Program', Marx states that 'every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes' (1875/1974: 340).
  28. For an overview, see Mayekiso (1996: 86–96).
  29. The 1910 Constitution included a non-racial property-based male franchise in the Cape. In 1936, Africans in the Cape were disenfranchised and instead elected four White 'representatives'. Coloureds were removed from the Cape's common voters roll in 1956 and similarly 'represented' by White MPs until 1968.
  30. It is important to remember that the shift in US attitudes towards dictatorships and the need to control mass democratic movements were also engendered by the mass movement against Baby Doc Duvalier in Haiti, and the people's power movement against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. For the US, Haiti remained unpredictable with the election of Aristide; the US maintained that democracy was only sufficiently established once he was removed (see Robinson 1996 and Hallward's excellent 2007 study). In other words, military interventions and coups would not be dropped from the US's arsenal in containing democracy, especially in the Americas, as the histories of Haiti, Grenada and Panama attest.
  31. The reduction of post-apartheid revolts to service-delivery protests is one example of how current spontaneous movements are dumbed down rather than seriously engaged.
  32. MK is an abbreviation for the name of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation).
  33. The phrase 'relentless participation' comes from MacShane, Plaut and Ward (1984: 66). One should also note the worker poets: see the excerpt from 'Black Mamba Rising: The South African Worker Poets in Struggle' (Bunn and Taylor 1987) and issue 69 of *TriQuarterly*, which offers an important representation of the rich cultural struggle against apartheid (see also Gibson 1988b). For an early assessment of COSATU in government, see Maree (1997). The shift from

left critic to power player is epitomised by Stephen Gelb, who expressed this move in an article he titled 'There Is No Alternative . . . for Now' (1991). Gelb later became a co-author of the ANC's neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution agenda.

34. In contrast to the left intellectuals, this poem expresses workers' anger at how quickly the ANC government has forgotten the forces that helped bring down apartheid and the vision of a socialist future. The full poem reads as follows:

How Soon You Forget, by Matserane Chimurenga Wa-Mapena (NUMSA shop steward, Wits East)

You create a false political Utopia / Work and security is your promise /  
Labour flexibility is your marketing strategy / Bad working conditions  
you mention not / Retrenchments you excel at / Competition and  
profit is what you want / How soon you forget

When we speak of closing the apartheid wage gap / You say we are  
irresponsible / You call us aristocracies and elite workers' trade union /  
When we fight for Employment equity / You call for individual rights /  
Organisational rights you ignore / You forget that the new South  
Africa works on the new LRA / How soon you forget

When we fight for a living wage / You call us communist / When we  
reason / We are treasonably ungovernable /

You forget about our constitutional rights / How soon you forget /

When we remind you of the mandate / You tell us we have no respect /  
When we speak about accountability / You talk of protocol / When we  
speak of report backs / You say time waits for no man / You say we  
push things too far too fast / When we remind you about the basics /  
You soon launch your own organisations / And you forget about your  
stubbornness / How soon you forget

When we speak of revolutionary discipline / You run to the press for  
defence / You tell us about your exclusionary freedom of speech /  
Mechanical discipline is what they have taught you / You talk of  
freedom of association / When we do the same you call us names and  
look / For unholy alliances / What do you really want?

You are ignorant of the gradual changes / You forget about the new  
constitution / You forget about people's government / You forget about  
feeding schemes for school children / You forget about free health care  
schemes / You forget about equal pensions and grants for the aged and  
the needy / You forget about Basic Conditions of Employment Act as  
amended / You run amok when employment equity is raised / How  
soon you forget

Tell me / When will you start remembering?

35. Though it begins earlier, with Mandela's secret meetings with the apartheid government in 1986, which took place in the absence of consultation with other ANC leaders.
36. Terreblanche (2003: 142 n.22) notes that COSATU's status as an ANC ally is confirmed by the transfer of the assets of the defunct South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) to COSATU in 1990.
37. Nash's excellent *The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa*, especially Chapter 9, 'Marxism and Dialectic: From Sharpeville to the Negotiated Settlement', should be consulted for a deeper analysis of these issues.
38. The SACP continues to be a pole of attraction for the Trotskyist left, including the 'state capitalists' (that is, the group that define their existence by an analysis of 'Communist' Russia as state capitalism), underlining, on the one hand, the continuing dominance of the SACP in the left, and, on the other hand, the ideological capitulation or (perhaps better) the theoretical paucity of the anti-Stalinist left.
39. The speech was reprinted in 1993 as 'Will the ANC sell-out workers?' in *African Communist* (134 [3]: 7-8).
40. See Marais (1998: 185-95) for a discussion of the left's lack of vision, hidden by its 'will to strategise'. In an article in *New Left Review*, John Saul (1991) had advocated an institutional-building approach that resonated with left unionists; Patrick Bond (1994), who had been involved in drafting some of the RDP, insisted in the Trotskyist *International Viewpoint* that the RDP had a 'non-capitalist logic'; and Azghur Adelzadeh and Vishnu Padayachee in *Transformation* (1995) teased out the RDP's 'progressive' elements. With such a hailing of the RDP, GEAR came as a shock, rather than as a next stage.
41. This was of course, simply a rehash of the dismissive critique of those who had criticised the SACP's two-stage theory in the 1980s (see, for example, Zuma 1987).
42. For example, in 2009, the powerful and militant National Union of Mineworkers threatened to strike over working conditions and safety issues (including the high number of fatalities) but simultaneously condemned protests against the government, saying that the protesters should use proper channels (such as phoning the government's 'Presidential Hotline' to air their grievances (see Hattingh 2009). Peter Dwyer (2009) also notes that while the 'radical National Union of Metalworkers Union leadership' says that the protests are the result of neoliberal policies, it accuses 'some protestors of being "opportunists and reactionary forces" who are manipulating the township protests'.
43. Through the destruction of import-substitution industries like clothing, footwear, textiles, etc., in the 1990s unemployment doubled, rising from 23 per cent in 1991 to 48 per cent in 2002 (Mosoetsa 2005: 861). In 1998, in Durban alone, it was estimated that 23 per cent of jobs in manufacturing were lost, and that from 1994 to the end of the decade, an estimated 500 000 jobs were lost in factory closures (see Mosoetsa 2005: 861).

## CHAPTER 3

1. My chapter title derives from Fanon's working title for *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, which was 'The Reality of the Nation'. The English translation, *A Dying Colonialism*, was published in 1967.
2. For example, see the *Mail & Guardian's* 16-page pull-out on South Africa's 'decade of democracy', compiled by the University of the Witwatersrand's Institute for Social and Economic Research under the editorial title 'A Critical Humanism' (published in July 2004).
3. Today cosmopolitanism would be the preferred term for critics at Wits's Institute for Social and Economic Research. For example, Gilroy considers a 'planetary consciousness' (2004: 290) as 'a precious result of the anticolonial conflict', but he skips over the dialectic of national consciousness to arrive at 'cosmopolitanism', dismissing, as does Laura Chrisman (2003: 89), the nationalist struggle 'as ethnically absolutist and generally socially dangerous'. In other words, in Fanon's terms, the issue is not only the problematical character of cosmopolitanism (represented by the liberal elites), but the disconnection from the lived experience of the struggle against colonialism that remains abstractly 'internationalist'. For Fanon, 'the damned', the masses, the poor find a cosmopolitan comradeship in struggles for freedom.
4. Michael Neocosmos (2009) argues that the replacement of non-racialism by multiracialism (or the rainbow nation in the 1990s) presages the end of the idea that the nation is created by political action from below. It is also worth mentioning that while the UDF (with its considerable debt to Black Consciousness in terms of its leading figures and ideas) embraced the idea of non-racialism, the ANC – even at its most radically socialist – actually stood for multiracialism, making politics organised along racial and ethnic lines a mobilising point.
5. I hope to make clear below that the claim to 'logical' interdependence is not fanciful. It has its roots in what Marx ironically calls the 'rosy dawn' of capitalist accumulation, and in the extirpation and expropriation of Africans from Africa as slaves.
6. On Fanon's critique of national consciousness, see Fanon (1968: 148–205) and Gibson (2003: 177–205).
7. It is often overlooked that Marx's first use of the term 'revolution in permanence' is in this essay. He most openly calls for such a revolution in the 1850 'Address to the Communist League' (Marx and Engels 1850/1973: 330): 'The relationship of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests . . . Their battle cry must be: "The Revolution in Permanence".'

8. In this topsy-turvy world, religion itself represents a 'real', albeit alienated response to alienation as 'the heart of the heartless world' (Marx 1844d/1975: 244).
9. In other words, it is worth noting that the roots of BEE – or at the time, the cultivation of a Black business class – were developed as measures to counter the radicalism of Biko's Black Consciousness.
10. Moeletsi Mbeki (2009a: 66–73) argues that the 'massive transfers' from the 'mineral-industrial complex' to the state are the relatively small costs that allow the multinationals to expropriate (not his term) South Africa's minerals.
11. Gumedde (2007) notes that Thabo Mbeki tried to develop a code of ethics to regulate leading ANC members in the private sector. Despite his best intentions, this could not be enforced.
12. BEE has helped create not only a Black managerial class but also a group of Black capitalists who receive lucrative tenders based almost solely on loyalty to the ANC. To bolster its appeal, BEE is expressed in the rhetoric of Black or African authenticity, including references to *ubuntu*, but which are reduced to commercialism, while being 'authentic' is equated with unquestionable loyalty to the ANC and its neoliberal policies.
13. For Moeletsi Mbeki, there is the added problem that BEE creates an impression that 'previously disadvantaged individuals' (91 per cent of the population) could benefit from BEE. In other words, though the biggest problem is the BEE elites and the culture of entitlement (the idea that the state should provide the Black elite with high-paying jobs), he also implies that the poor should give up any expectations. Despite his critique of the continuing power of (White) mining capital in the post-apartheid economy, and his focus on the unproductive Black elite, Moeletsi Mbeki insists that any remuneration be connected to productivity (2009a). The implication is that alongside the creation of a class of educated cheap labour, the poor should be educated by savings and micro-financing schemes to make entrepreneurs of themselves.
14. What still makes the news is the conspicuous consumption of those who flaunt it; 'liberation' is having the big house and fast car.
15. Hernando de Soto is perhaps the most cited of these authors. He argues (2000) that the poor are 'natural' entrepreneurs and all they need to free their spirit is a small amount of capital – capital that they already 'own' in themselves and in their shacks. He is an advocate, therefore, of privatising the shacks by giving shack dwellers property titles. While post-apartheid South Africa has not done away with extreme poverty, there has been a change in image of South Africa's poorest areas, remarks another critic, James Ferguson (2007). The discourse has changed from liberal to neoliberal. Rather than poverty being a scandal, the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of the poor 'empowering' themselves is celebrated. The ambiguity of the 'do-good' liberal is expressed in Craig Fraser's (2003) *Shack Chic*, which is based on a series of photographs taken in the shack

lands of the Cape. It is a coffee-table book for the rich, one that anaesthetises poverty by emphasising the aesthetic sensibilities and pride of the shack dwellers. Yet at the same time, Fraser bemoans the lack of employment opportunities and services for basic human needs, and notes that to join the settlement in the Western Cape you must approach the community leader of the neighbourhood with a reference, 'a letter from the street committee from your previous area of residence vouching for your character'. This type of representation 'humanises' the poor ('look, they are just like you, with their aesthetic sensibilities and pride') and ultimately reassures those far away who own a coffee table and would buy such a book to display on it.

16. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967a: 42–4) analyses the novels of Mayotte Capécia as an expression of mimicry. Capécia, argues Fanon, wishes to turn White, both literally and figuratively. Why? Because one becomes rich through Whiteness (with a capital W), and as Capécia understands it, one is White above a certain financial level (or as Fanon says in *The Wretched*, 'you are white because you are rich' [1968: 40]). In other words, by becoming rich, you become White, and the question here is, once again, to what extent is South Africa a post-racist society? After all, the Black bourgeoisie has emerged at the expense of the majority of Blacks. For Capécia, her wish to be White ('living on the hill that dominates the city' and entering into high society) is because this means you've 'made it', and is an attitude of mind and way of being based on colonial oppression and capitalist expansion.
17. Terreblanche (2003: 89 n.4) notes that there is little appreciation of the predicament of millions of Blacks: 'whites who display an indifferent and contemptuous attitude towards black poverty are confronted with the question' of what they would do under a similar situation 'normally reject the question as irrelevant'. I would add that underneath this Nietzschean pathos of distance lies a collective guilt that takes on the character of an often-racialised class dynamic.
18. Sometimes a moment in thought becomes the basis for understanding an historical period. These are rare occurrences, and Fanon expresses such a moment, not only as a critic of Western rationalism, but through the concretisation of the dialectic of liberation on the African continent. This point is clearly articulated in *The Wretched* (1968: 35–7, 310–16). See also Dunayevskaya (2002: 3–5).
19. By the 1840s, working-class 'combinations' were already a part of political life, especially after mass action (including the Luddite riots of 1811 and 1812) won the repeal of the Anti-Combination Acts in 1824, and concomitantly led to the first capitalist crisis of overproduction and depression. Worker revolt and capitalist crisis blew apart the Ricardian School.
20. In his 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx noted that his articles on the Moselle peasants were the 'first' that occasioned his concern for economic issues. I am not sure whether anyone has considered

these articles as part of Marx's analysis of 'primitive accumulation', but such an approach would be fruitful. Marx argues that the struggle over collecting dead wood is the fight between what was regarded as communal land and centuries-old inalienable rights, and the emerging capitalist notion of 'property' rights and privatisation. Rather than championing 'capitalist development', Marx champions 'custom', laying claim to the law of custom as the 'law of these undermost, dispossessed, and elementary masses and of them alone', for the dispossessed, he says, have no other law. On the idea of 'accumulation through dispossession', see Harvey (2003: 137–82).

21. In reality, COPE reflected a faction of the ANC rather than a party offering an alternative ideology. Mosiuoa (Terror) Lekota, one of its leaders, made it clear to the business elites (just as Zuma had before him) that the party promoted capitalism and the free market. Rather than supporting COPE as an alternative to the ANC, the Poor People's Alliance, the Anti-Privatisation Forum and the independent farm workers' union Sikhula Sonke argued for an election boycott under the slogan 'No Land! No House! No Vote!'.
22. The examples are numerous, for they express the problem of quantitative methods in sociology, market research about 'attitudes', and so on. There is a famous sociological study of British car workers, which argues that 77 per cent of the workers had a 'co-operative attitude to management', having 'little tendency to interpret employer-worker relations in fundamentally oppositional terms'. Scarcely one month after the publication of the study, the car workers broke into open rebellion, attempting to take over the main office, calling on the director to be strung up and singing 'The Red Flag' (see Blackburn 1967: 23). Another example of apparent schizophrenia is that of American autoworkers during the Second World War. In *Wartime Strikes*, Martin Glaberman (1980) tells how a majority of the workers voted in favour of a 'patriotic' no-strike pledge and then how, in the same period, a majority of them walked off the job on wildcat strikes.
23. Perhaps an 'as if' personality is a better description than 'schizophrenic' (see Deutch 1965). The ANC appears as the active, engaged party of liberation but in reality is narrow-minded and authoritarian, and thus inauthentic. But the problem with this language is that it pathologises the issue. In truth, the ANC may appear schizophrenic, but in reality, it is a political organisation well versed in communication, rhetoric and strategy (in other words, of speaking out of two or more sides of its mouth at the same time).
24. There is also a truth to false consciousness in that the fetish that attaches itself to commodities is an expression of the way things really are! Thus, writing of a 'class for itself' did not mean that Marx had given up his disdain for Proudhon and others. For Marx, criticism meant a ruthless criticism of all that exists and not a proclamation of 'truth' before which all should kneel. Also consult Georg Lukács's classic essay on this issue, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the



Proletariat', and the brilliant 'What is Orthodox Marxism?', written in 1919 (see Lukács 1971). The shortcoming of Lukács, it should be remembered, is that he ends up solving the 'antinomy' of self-consciousness and alienation by falling back on an external unifier – the party as the 'standpoint of the proletariat'. Lukács's 'discovery' of Marx's (1844b) essay 'Alienated Labor' (also called 'Estranged Labour') did not move the later Lukács to reconsider this standpoint, as his 1967 introduction sadly confirms. Henri Lefebvre (1968: 37) argues that Lukács's philosophy 'conceived the end of philosophy without its realization'. Rather than developing a philosophy of the proletariat, Lefebvre maintains that a critique of alienation begins with an active and critical engagement with everyday experience. Lefebvre began with a critique of everyday life, holding on to Marx's concept of praxis and with it Marx's notion that the idea of 'objective truth' in human thinking was a practical question.

25. This is exactly the point that Marx makes against Proudhon in 'The Poverty of Philosophy': in the place of dialectical movement is placed the dogmatic distinction between good and bad; thus 'there is no longer any dialectics but only, at most, absolutely pure morality' (1847/1976: 168–9). This pure morality, which is translated into a set of principles workers should follow, is echoed in the directives of the modern vanguardists.
26. In other words, the problem is not the backward 'poor' but the false consciousness of the intellectuals and the 'poverty of philosophy'.
27. This question was asked by miners on strike in the US in 1949, and became centrally important to the development of Marxist-Humanism. See Dunayevskaya (1958/1988: 3, 276).
28. Part of the 'newness' of these social movements is that the 'old avenues of opposition were absorbed into the post-apartheid government, thus leaving opponents of the government without a "voice" with which to express or a mechanism to organise opposition' (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006: 15).
29. Including the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, the Anti-Privatisation Forum and the Landless People's Movement (Gauteng) in Johannesburg, the Concerned Citizens Forum in Durban, and the Anti-Eviction Campaign and Landless People's Movement in Cape Town.
30. As an example, they refer to the Concerned Citizens Forum, which played an important role in the struggle in the council flats in two areas of Chatsworth, Bayview and Westcliffe and which 'was formed and driven by Fatima Meer . . . and Ashwin Desai'. Desai's move was more Fanonian. After he was suspended from his university position, he 'grew politically' by learning from the inside out the truth of the new South Africa, noting that what he was interested in was 'integrating myself in communities and learning and being] part of those movements . . . I was listening and I was learning' (Desai 2002b: 24–5).
31. Luxemburg understood how movements can be destroyed and broken by the state, but she insisted in her famous critique of Lenin that freedom of opinion,

and the right to disagree, was a necessity, not a virtue. That Luxemburg 'failed' and the 1919 revolution in Germany was crushed and Lenin 'succeeded' in taking state power only further underlines the importance of her position. To live and to grow, poor people's movements have no other resources than to be radically democratic and open, and thus even if destroyed, remain a beacon of struggle and principle. However, while Luxemburg appreciated the creative spontaneity of the masses, she failed to appreciate the importance of anti-colonial movements as a self-developing subject. Lenin, in contrast, hailed the 'failed' 1916 uprising in Dublin against the British as one of the 'bacilli' for revolution (see Lenin 1970: 357).

32. For a debate among activist-intellectuals about some of these issues as they relate to the struggles against eviction in Mandela Park, Cape Town, see the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2004, No. 4).
33. Some critics regard Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* – especially its opening pages – as Fanon's philosophical *leitmotif*, especially Marx's conception of historical materialism: human beings make history but not in the circumstances of their own choosing (see Martin 1999). While Fanon may have taken the title of *The Wretched of the Earth* from *The Internationale*, one can locate the subjects of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* rethought in the colonial context in Fanon's *The Wretched*, especially in the central chapters, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of Spontaneity' and 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', which have become almost a script for postcolonial Africa.
34. Embedded in Fanon's description of colonial compartmentalisation is its dialectical reordering, marking out a new society. 'If we examine closely this system of compartments we will at least be able to reveal the *lines of force* it implies. This approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical layout will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized' (Fanon 1968: 38, my emphasis).
35. In post-apartheid South Africa, the new *lines of force* are represented on the one hand by the privatisation of public spaces in the 'deracialised' bourgeois urban areas, rich gated suburbia, and on the other hand by the outlying apartheid and post-apartheid housing, and the 'temporary housing' camps for the poor.
36. It is often lamented that Fanon's claims about 'The Revolution' creating the 'new person' are naive and even a dangerously utopian addenda to his explication of colonial relations (see Memmi 1971).
37. *The Treason of the Intellectuals* is the title of a famous book by Julien Benda, discussed by Edward Said (1996). Perhaps it does not need to be said, but apart from his suggestive title, Benda's conservative neo-Platonist views have nothing to do with my argument. I mention this only because of Adele Jinadu's (1986) analogy between Fanon's concept of political education and Plato's concept of philosopher kings. In contrast, see Gibson (2003: 192–200).
38. In other words, anti-intellectualism develops where ideas are reduced to strategy;

assumptions are made that the masses are not particularly interested in ideas and that the only ideas worth their salt are those that address the immediate tasks. Leftist intellectuals who want only a programme of action, not a humanist programme that involves a real discussion of ideas, are a good example of this. Irish revolutionary James Connolly put it well: 'revolution is never practical until the time of revolution strikes. Then it alone is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromisers become the most futile and visionary of human language' (1974: 252).

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Some of the following was adapted from my introduction to *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Gibson 2006: 1-14).
2. Smith (2002: 435) writes of the 'geographical expansion of cities outstripping their ability to get people from work to home and back again'. He adds that the daily commute in São Paulo and Harare is, for example, four hours each way and notes that the percentage of weekly income dedicated to an increasingly privatised transportation system has grown exponentially.
3. 'Informal settlement' is a term preferred by INGOs and NGOs and gives the impression of temporary accommodation, which is far from the truth. Often families have lived in these settlements for generations.
4. One result of the mobilisation was regular refuse removal.
5. Given that so much literature on shack settlements is based on studies by UN-Habitat in Nairobi (where the problem is slumlordism produced by a rental market for shacks), it is necessary to point out that authoritarian modes of governance tend to be based on clientelistic associations, where local leaders try to turn 'their people' into vote banks for the ruling party in exchange for favours from above.
6. A member of the KwaZulu-Natal Cabinet is reported to have stated: 'We can't build matchboxes next to three-million-rand houses' (Khan 2006a), while one of the shack dwellers notes simply, 'They want it for the rich' (Alfred Ndlovu quoted in Pithouse 2005b).
7. The promise that housing would be built in nearby Elf Road had been repeated two weeks before the bulldozers came.
8. For more on the environmental politics of the dump, see Patel (2009).
9. It is important to note that the handful of middle-class activists/intellectuals from the University of KwaZulu-Natal who were involved in the movement adhered to the principle that the people spoke for themselves.
10. The councillor, Yakooob Baig, started his career in the apartheid National Party and joined the ANC after a stint in the Democratic Alliance.

11. Legitimation of the shacks could take different forms. One form, which is akin to privatisation, is to legalise the shacks by providing title deeds, thus making shack dwellers into individual property owners. The shack dwellers' movement is not advocating this strategy since it would probably undermine the autonomy of the settlement and would prove detrimental to a movement based on community solidarity.
12. Of the 32 elected representatives, 15 were women and 17 were men. The roots of the word *mjondolo* (the colloquial word for shacks) are numerous. One line of thought is that *jondolo* originally referred to the John Deere tractor crates that were used for shack construction in the 1970s.
13. In 2005 alone, there were over 600 community actions across the country (Alexander 2010). These included demonstrations, occupations and battles with police that resulted in bloodshed. Several new technologies were harnessed to aid communication (particularly mobile phones and SMSes – on SMS activism in Africa, see Ekine 2010). This has enabled the shack dwellers' and other movements to speak for themselves and represent themselves in the media more than was possible in the past.
14. In a 1993 press release, the ANC proclaimed that people living in 'squatter areas' should 'make their voice heard. "Your problems are my problems, your solution is my solution," says President Nelson Mandela'. As Dumisani Makhaye put it, 'The crisis in housing in South Africa is . . . a result of apartheid' (ANC 1993).
15. Alan Hirsch (2005) suggests that the neoliberal programme was instituted by the government to protect South Africa's sovereignty from the IMF/World Bank's institution of a neoliberal programme. Also see Chapter 2 of this volume, where the issue of South Africa's structural adjustment programme is covered in more detail.
16. On the formation of the new South African elites, see Terreblanche (2003).
17. In this context, even a shack in the city is a much better option.
18. We should remember that although apartheid minister Piet Koornhof announced in 1981 that forced removals would end, they did not. What changed were the tactics and language, which included 'vague promises, ambiguous statements, announcements and retractions, rumours and harassment' (Platzky 1986: 395). The same tactics are being used in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, promises to bring electricity to the shacks were retracted because the informal settlements were 'temporary' and the shack dwellers would be rehoused by 2010. The 2010 date was later retracted.
19. Until 2001, electricity connections were available in Durban to those shack dwellers who could afford the fairly steep deposit.
20. Martin Legassick (2009) argues that, given the city council's house-building plans in Cape Town, it would take a hundred years to end the backlog of housing needs. All things being equal, one can assume that a similar situation applies countrywide.

21. As Shantel Vachani (2006) puts it, 'One would have to ask what those living in informal settlements during Apartheid, supporting the ANC government throughout, have gained from years of struggle . . . How many Mhlengi Khumalo and Zithulele [Dhloro] cases [a one-year-old and a 70-year-old killed by shack fires at Kennedy Road] must occur before justice is served?'
22. Buntu Siwisa points out that the 6 kilolitres of free water per month is hardly sufficient: 'In the Durban region over the last five years, the average domestic consumption of water declined from 36 kilolitres per month to 26.6 kilolitres per month . . . mainly as a consequence of the Durban local government's water cost recovery policy' (2008: 923). Patrick Bond has pointed out how the water tariff system in Johannesburg is remarkably distorted towards the rich, with an extremely high price increase for consumption over 8 kilolitres but a flat tariff for consumption above 40 kilolitres (2006: 119).
23. Also see Matt Birkinshaw's (2008) report on the problem of fires in the shacks.
24. Also known as Pretoria.
25. Early in 2007 he lost his job at the petrol station because of his political activity. For more of Zikode's biography, see Zikode (2009b).
26. Zikode is always clear that Abahlalim is about the 'movement', not about individuals. Inviting Zikode to speak at one or another workshop, NGOs are often shocked to be told that the movement will first discuss whether or not to attend the workshop and then, if they decide to attend, will send an elected representative or representatives.
27. The 'third force' refers to covert units of the apartheid security forces, who it was believed were 'acting in concert with individuals or groupings, such as the IFP and certain right-wing paramilitary organisations' to ferment violence in the early 1990s as part of a 'counter-insurgency' (TRC 2003: 579).
28. The importance of Zikode's analysis should not be underestimated. When Blade Nzimande, general secretary of the SACP, condemned the protests by the poor in 2009 and dismissed looting and destruction of property as the work of a 'third force', newspaper columnists (such as Karumbidza 2009) responded with references to Zikode's 'Third Force' argument.
29. Zikode's rhetoric resonates with Black theologies of liberation, indicating the continuing importance of those ideas of liberation in popular consciousness of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa, and also resonates with Jean-Bertrand Aristide's theology of liberation in which the essential point is that the 'poor themselves should be actors' (Aristide quoted in Hallward 2007: 21).
30. There certainly have been many things won since then. In his 2008 post-annual-general-meeting speech, Zikode noted Abahlali's 'victories in 2008', which included negotiating with the city council while keeping their 'intellectual autonomy' and to the principle of exchanging one shack for one house; agreements for upgrading and providing services to settlements; eliminating the threat of forced removal that had been hanging over Kennedy Road; fighting

- the Elimination and Prevention of Slums Act; organising against xenophobic attacks; and forming the Poor People's Alliance (Zikode 2008c).
31. Non-participation in apartheid structures was not just a tactic but a central element of South African politics that goes back to the struggle against segregationist representation in the 1930s. The struggle against apartheid, from the Soweto revolt of 1976 onwards, was largely an urban one – centred on township revolts, school boycotts and industrial actions. A central element of the drive to make South Africa ungovernable (in the mid- to late 1980s) was the strategy of non-payment of water and electricity bills and the boycotting of local government elections. In the early 1980s, non-participation in the tricameral elections killed the hopes of the apartheid reformers and legitimated the anti-apartheid movement around the UDF (and its smaller rival, the National Forum). On the history of non-participation in South African politics during the late colonial and apartheid period, see Gibson (1990).
  32. The Landless People's Movement had launched a campaign using the slogan 'No Land, No Vote' during the build-up to South Africa's national general election in 2004.
  33. For an analysis of Abahlali and the 2006 election, see Patel (2009).
  34. This relationship was broken in late September 2009, when the police stood by while Abahlali members were expelled from the Kenendy Road shack settlement and their shacks were destroyed. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8gQv19cD4Y>.
  35. Just as the politicians used to bring people pots of biryani at election time, so the phrase biryani money has come to be used to describe the use of money as an attempt at co-optation.
  36. Khan is an academic who, at the time, was a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and was also working with Abahlali.
  37. In December of 2006, Abahlali and the Anti-Eviction Campaign caused a stir when they left the Centre for Civil Society-sponsored Social Movements Indaba, and protested at what they perceived to be a paternalistic attitude towards them by 'the left' who wanted to speak for, rather than to, the shack dwellers. Abahlali have since broken all ties with the Centre for Civil Society (for a statement about this decision, see Abahlali 2007). Sadly, some of the left responded by labelling the shack dwellers' protest at the Social Movements Indaba criminal and irrational. See the *Mail & Guardian* articles, 'On the Far Side of the Left' (8 December 2006) and 'Report Glosses over Tsotsi Politics' (16 December 2006). However, unedited video footage of this protest shows that the protest was both peaceful and rational (see Abahlali 2006b). These events prove how difficult it was to be at two universities, the University of Abahlali and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, at the same time.
  38. And thus reminiscent of Aristide's liberation theology and its three principles of a people's programme: dignity, transparent simplicity and participation. For

- Aristide, 'the democracy to be built should be in the image of Lavalas [the Aristide-aligned populist movement]: participatory, uncomplicated, and in permanent motion' (Aristide and Wargny 1993: 126).
39. Hegel famously said that 'truth is concrete' and that 'the real is rational'. Here the challenge to theory is the reality of the situation, expressed by the thinking (rationality) of the shack dwellers. Rather than a source of theory, the thinking done in the communities is itself a form of theory (see Dunayevskaya 2002). Dunayevskaya's argument (1958) that Marx reorganised *Capital* on the basis of ongoing struggles and the 'limits of an intellectual work' is a point lost on many Marxists.
  40. The IFP leader, Buthelezi, was appointed Minister of Home Affairs in the first post-apartheid government and was acting president a number of times. During the early 1990s there was a lot of fighting between the ANC and IFP, often encouraged by the army or a 'third force'. Many youths involved in the fighting were not necessarily members of the IFP but would be mobilised to 'defend' the community. Zikode (2009b) remarks, 'When there is a gunshot they would quickly mobilise and everyone goes – every man and every boy. It's compulsory. You were not asked whether you joined the party or not but you had to defend your vicinity, your surroundings.'
  41. For example, Mnikelo Ndabankulu, one of Abahlali's founder members, was elected as the movement's spokesperson in 2005 at the age of nineteen. Mnikelo's grandfather, Chief Babini, participated in the struggle against *irhafu* (tax) in 1960 that resulted in many people being killed and arrested in the Eastern Cape.
  42. In the beginning, people asserted that they were ANC-supporting dissenters. On the issue of continued support for the ANC as an organisation and criticism of individual leaders of the ANC, see Beresford (2009).
  43. Richard Pithouse informed me in 2007 that a popular song in Abahlali is 'I am a socialist', which people learned from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. The chorus goes: 'My father was a garden boy/My mother was a kitchen girl/ And I am a socialist.'
  44. Rather, the recognition of building democracy from below in the face of a hostile state can often be considered a 'success', just as the decline of a movement can be defined by its loss of 'radical élan and vision' (Goodwin and Jasper 2003: 316). The focus on 'process' rather than goal may seem little more than the old 'revisionist' idea that the movement is everything and the goal is nothing. Here, movement and goal are to be understood as interconnected but not synonymous. On social movements in post-apartheid South Africa, see Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) and Gibson (2006).
  45. Gillian Hart (2008) argues that these were 'movements beyond movements' because they arose outside the scope of new social movements that had been heralded at the turn of the millennium but had begun to decline. She adds that the heralded social movements had, in fact, little to offer the real new movements.

46. In 2004, at the Frantz Fanon lecture at the University of Durban-Westville, I asked whether 'new organisations that have emerged from struggles for basic human rights open up new spaces from where visions and practices of an alternative post-apartheid South Africa . . . may be organised and discussed' and whether these 'new mass-based organisations . . . are capable of not only representing themselves but also developing through discussions with intellectuals and activists alternative philosophic programmes'. It seems that a year later the answer was given in the affirmative. Indeed, Abahlali has been developing a philosophic programme. The interesting and important caveat is that it has come 'through discussions with intellectuals and activists' almost only insofar as those activists and intellectuals are within the shacks. Certainly, intellectuals outside of the shacks, in the university and in the left, have had a very hard time making connections with the movement because of intellectuals' continued belief that they are, in the Leninist sense, the bringers of consciousness (including theory and strategy) from outside.
47. David Harvey is among the more sophisticated of these Marxists. Harvey creates a schematic division between what he calls accumulation through expansion of wage labour in industry and agriculture and 'accumulation through dispossession' (which is based on what Marx called 'so-called primitive accumulation'). The former, he says, produces an 'oppositional culture' such as that 'embedded in trade unions and working-class political parties that produced the social democratic compromise', and the latter produces a 'fragmented and particular' culture (see Harvey 2006: 52). This is not the place to question the schematic division between these modes of accumulation, but I do wonder whether there is a privileging of a social-democratic oppositional culture formed by trade unions and labour parties (he calls them working-class parties but the designation is unclear to me). Marx, we should remember, on hearing of the English trade unions' chauvinism towards the Irish workers, proclaimed that 'the proletariat is revolutionary, or it is nothing'. He opposed the reformism and chauvinism of British trade unionism, arguing that one needed to go 'lower and deeper' and appeal to the masses, whom the trade unions avoided (such as the poor in London's East End and peasants newly arrived in cities), to find the revolutionary strata. We should also keep in mind that when Lenin articulated the dialectical relationship between social democracy and imperialism during the First World War, his critique of Marxist 'orthodoxy' shifted the dialectic of liberation to include struggles in the colonies. This point is worth remembering since many seem to overlook that the majority of 'slums' are developing in the postcolonial South, and the most rapidly urbanising continent is Africa. Additionally, since Harvey's argument is about political culture, what is particularly interesting in the development of Abahlali is its political culture, which is neither fragmented nor particular, nor necessarily local.



48. There are thieves and charlatans, gangs, drugs and violence against women. It is important to note that, not only the lack of toilets, but also rape and lack of security in the shacks were mentioned by many in their letters to President Mbeki in the 'Unfreedom Day 2006: No freedom for the poor' event. As Zama Ndlovu puts it, 'The place is not safe for children and women. Young girls are getting raped more often. Nobody cares about that, neither the police nor the councillor. South African law is against poor people. Rapists are walking free. Tsotsis and all the criminals are free, but when innocent people are protesting against slow service delivery they are getting arrested' (see CCS 2006). In an article called 'Shack Shame' in the widely read *Move* magazine, Mpuni Zulu interviewed S'bu Zikode. He pointed out that the six toilets that are shared by 7 000 people are often blocked and that consequently, 'People often go to the nearby bush to relieve themselves. This very often makes women and children vulnerable to rape. The stinking toilets have worms around them and hungry children often mistake them for rice and eat them.' The report continues: 'But besides the physical dangers there is the unseen emotional brunt and stigma of living in a place that does not have something as simple as a flushing toilet' (Zulu 2006: 16–17).
49. In a review of Davis's book, Tom Angotti (2006: 961) writes, 'The title of Mike Davis' latest tome should make every progressive cringe'. Boston's Mel King, a prominent African-American community activist, once said that for him the term *slum* was a reminder that 'somebody else defined my community in a way that allowed them to justify destruction of it'. Indeed, *slum clearance* was the high-minded objective of the federal urban-renewal programme in the US, the programme that displaced millions of disproportionately poor and African-American people. Around the world today, working people are constantly evicted by governments and private developers who determine which neighbourhoods are hopeless 'slums, breeding disease, crime, and unemployment, all supposedly problems which they claim will go away once the people are out of sight and cities stop growing'. In their press statement of 21 June 2007 on the Elimination and Prevention of Slums Bill, Abahlali argued that 'The Bill uses the word "slum" in a way that makes it sound like the places where poor people live are a problem that must be cleared away because there is something wrong with poor people. But it does not admit that the poor have been made poor by the same history of theft and exploitation that made the rich to be rich and it does not admit that places where poor people live often lack infrastructure and toilets because of the failure of landlords or the government to provide these things. The solution to the fact that we often don't have toilets in our communities is to provide toilets where we live and not to destroy our communities and move us out of the city.'
50. The term 'lumpen' is almost synonymous with a reactionary and often fascist politics of the mob. Though this conception can certainly be traced back to

Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, what is often overlooked in Marx's notion of the lumpenproletariat is twofold. Though Engels continues to use the term, Marx doesn't seem to use it after the early 1850s, after which Marx changes his attitude towards the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and others he had considered 'marginal' to capitalist development. The etymological meaning of lumpen is 'rag'. Thus a 'raggedy proletariat' is purely descriptive of poverty. Marx uses the term 'lumpenproletariat' in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to speak of the 'refuse of all classes' (including intellectuals – the literati – and the financial aristocracy) whose chief is Louis Bonaparte. But just as Marx was dismissive of the peasantry in the French revolution of 1848 the fact that this did not mean, as some Marxists contend, that Marx created a universal rule contending that the peasantry would always play a reactionary role, the same can be said of the 'lumpenproletarian' urban poor. Indeed, by the end of his life, Marx was writing about the regenerated peasant commune in Russia becoming the basis for a possible new society that wouldn't have to go through capitalism. It all depended, he added, on the historical situation. For example, Marx changes his views on Ireland and the nationalist struggle during the 1860s, concluding at the end of the decade that Irish freedom from England was a necessary precondition for any progressive movement in England. It was those who might be considered the Irish 'lumpenproletariat', not the English proletariat, in other words, who represented *the greatest revolutionary potential*. Then, in the 1870s, after the Paris Commune, Marx was so disgusted with the chauvinism of the organised working class in England towards the Irish that he argued it was 'nothing' and turned instead to the unorganised and those newly arrived in the cities. The point, however, is not to create a universal out of a fixed particular. Fanon engaged Marx's class concepts from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in *The Wretched*; he argued that the lumpenproletariat (really a majority of the urban colonised population) was the most spontaneously revolutionary, but also the most unpredictable. Critical of the term 'lumpenproletariat', De Souza (2009) created the neologism 'hyperprecariat', whose daily life is hyperprecarious. Thus, he argues, it would be both naive and optimistic, and indeed mechanistic, to believe that because the hyperprecariat are objectively oppressed, they will develop a progressive politics. But it is equally mechanistic to think that the poor are irredeemably lost to developing a progressive politics. In other words, each historical situation – such as the specificity of the shack dwellers in post-apartheid South Africa – has to be approached dialectically, namely by holding on to the contradictions.

51. It is worth remembering that Marx considers the 'unemployed army' (what the capitalists think of as surplus humanity) as the system's gravediggers. Davis seems to be arguing that capitalism has found a solution (at least in the foreseeable future) to the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation. Yet

- for Marx, it is exactly the subjectivity of revolt of 'the lower and deeper' that eludes Davis.
52. Achille Mbembe (2010) shares this conception. In an article entitled 'Fifty Years of African Decolonisation' he writes, 'The squatter settlement has become the nerve centre of . . . a pitiless struggle for survival focused on access to resources' and the 'tragic symbol' of a 'lumpen radicalism, in effect a form of violence unattached to an alternative political project'.
  53. Davis maintains that the left is absent from the slums, where Marx has given way to Mohammed (Davis 2004), which implies, of course, the brewing of terrorists. In the article (which preceded his book), Davis argues that revolt in the 'slums' is 'episodic and discontinuous', akin to 'eighteenth-century sociologies of protest' and that the absence of the left in the 'slum' has seen the rise of Pentecostalism and Islamic fundamentalism. His conclusion that the left is absent from the slum is taken up by Pithouse (2005a), who makes the point that Davis's dichotomy between religion and resistance is historically uninformed. Certainly, Christopher Hill's work on the English revolution makes it clear that such a dichotomy is fallacious. On the other hand, Davis's quote from the socialist prime minister of Morocco is telling: 'We [the left] have become embourgeoisified. We have cut ourselves off from the people' (Davis 2004: 30). The suggestion here, which Davis seems to have missed, is that the division between shack dwellers and the left is not only about where one lives physically, but also where one lives conceptually. The issue, in other words, is not to live in the slums, but to hear what the people are saying and thinking and to take that seriously, rather than having a dismissive and bourgeois attitude to the poor. In Durban, the first response of the 'left' was mainly to consider the shack dwellers' eruption a spontaneous one that exhibited no special consciousness 'in itself'; the shack dwellers were depicted simply as force, not reason. In this schema, the 'shacks' become an issue within a larger critique of local and national policy, rather than a basis for rethinking not only policy but also philosophy. Post-apartheid debates are thus narrowed to a discussion of the RDP (good) and GEAR (bad), rather than completely overhauling the elite foundations of both policies. It is not a question of what is good for the poor but of the poor becoming the authors and architects of policy, and thus starting the debate about post-apartheid South Africa from scratch and from the ground up. When it became clear, for example, that the shack dwellers' movement would not allow 'the left' to speak for them, the view shifted from misunderstanding the shack dwellers' movement as spontaneous, to an embracing of the state's (racist) White-agitator thesis (see Mabaso and Mchunu 2006).
  54. The logic of Davis's position is shared by many on the 'global' left.
  55. Davis's book has a global perspective, and has been defended as a metanarrative, but it does not excuse his relative lack of engagement with the people who live in the slums. In an extensive review of Davis's work, David Cunningham argues,

'Pithouse's complaint that Davis "relies so heavily on the work of [World] Bank and other institutions of contemporary imperialism" seems misguided, for it misrecognizes the level of analysis at which a text as such operates' (Cunningham 2007: 11). These discussions are too abstract to include ground-level activities in their textual critique (they are 'too high', as Zikode puts it, and can't see the reality of what's happening on the ground). Certainly, dialogue takes place at multiple levels that don't always connect, but the shack dwellers' movement seems to be precisely challenging 'the grand narrative' to reinsert the human subject.

56. How does one characterise the growing world of squatters: as one that is increasingly autonomous from the state, or as a lumpenproletariat, or both? Robert Neuwirth notes that some of the squatters he lived with wanted nothing more than 'rights', namely the rights that De Soto (2000) argues accrue from property deeds, and will become the basis of the end of poverty in the global South. Thus, in contrast to a quest for autonomy, there is a quest for legalisation, or at least for the apparent safety that comes with property ownership. It is believed that the state will then not come overnight and destroy the squatter cities as it did in 'operation clean-up' in Harare, displacing 700 000 people (Neuwirth 2005).
57. On favela activism in Latin America, see De Souza (2000); on global activism in the 'slums', see Metamute (2006).
58. We should remember that there are vast differences in the politics and histories of shack settlements in South Africa, even those that exist right next to each other. But, on the other hand, the existence of self-governing structures in these settlements is often an indirect legacy of the struggles against apartheid. Marie Huchzermeyer (2006) has pointed out that because of their politicisation in the late anti-apartheid struggle, shanty towns in South Africa might be less commodified than, for example, in Kibera (Nairobi), Kenya, where informal settlements are shaped by exploitative super-profit-driven landlordism and corrupt land distribution practices.
59. Pithouse notes that the 'massively dense' settlement near Kennedy Road at Foreman Road was 'allowed to become so huge because it is behind a hill and hidden from bourgeois eyes' (Pithouse 2006c: 179).
60. Here I include organisations such as the Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction (COHRE), an international human rights NGO based in Geneva, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and Miloon Kothari, the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing.
61. That left critics of the ANC agree with the ANC that the protests are about delivery indicates a far larger conceptual agreement between the two groups.
62. That their autonomy is partly a product of their marginalisation and partly a product of the struggles against apartheid indicates that they are neither powerless nor without ideas. They resist being moved out to peri-urban areas

- because they understand that it is better to live in the shacks in the urban areas than to live on the periphery, even further from employment opportunities, schools and hospitals. They want ambulances and fire engines to serve their communities, and they criticise the class character of a state that serves rich people but lets the shacks burn without a fire engine in sight. And while they are continually forced to protect themselves and rely on their own collective endeavours for survival, they have created autonomous democratic spaces where they make working decisions over their own rules and structures of governance.
63. On the depoliticisation of politics, see Neocosmos (2006).
  64. Since the shack dwellers are often perceived to be ‘uncivil’ (lawless, criminals, and so on), this movement challenges the exclusionary nature of post-apartheid civil society.
  65. In interviews and on Giles and Khan’s (2005) film, we hear the shack dwellers speaking of the conditions they have been enduring and asking, ‘Should anyone have to live like this?’ But there is no abstract discussion of ethics, no discourse on points of view; the discussion of what kind of home human beings should live in is grounded in concrete conditions revolving around taps, sanitation, light and warmth but never simply reduced to the delivery of these services.
  66. South Africa has a liberal Constitution that grants recognition to individuals and to ‘minorities’. Indeed, in contrast to its apartheid past, South Africa is promoted as a rainbow nation celebrating multiculturalism. And in the mid-1990s, Nelson Mandela went to great lengths to stress, ‘I love each of you – of all races’. Additionally material rights, such as housing, are included in the Constitution even if the extent of their guarantee is debatable. The fact that the Constitution includes language about second-generation human rights means that the law courts, however weighted, are still a terrain of struggle in which the shack dwellers’ movement can operate. But at the same time, in practice, the law courts are constrained by the state.
  67. Abahlali is far from alone. Writing in the *Mail & Guardian*, Richard Calland (2007) argues that South Africans deserve more from democracy than a government of experts with a plan. Explicitly criticising ‘Durban city manager and ANC stalwart Mike Sutcliffe’, he argues for ‘a very different vision of a participatory democracy, in which citizens are provided with meaningful opportunities to engage government in a permanent conversation, as opposed to the anachronistic, five-yearly episodic model of representative democracy’.
  68. This, of course, becomes more challenging as Abahlali has grown and shack dwellers join Abahlali for an immediate goal, such as to stop an eviction, and become fairly inactive after that goal is achieved and thus do not play an active part in the organisation’s culture of grassroots democratic participation and ‘living learning’ (see Pithouse 2009c). This became apparent for a short while after the attacks at Kennedy Road in 2009, when many of the movement’s activists were in hiding.

69. Pithouse (2006b: 39) reports that on 6 October 2005 'a meeting of 12 settlements that all now had autonomous committees was held in Kennedy Road. There were 32 elected representatives there, 17 men and 15 women. They agreed that they will not vote in the coming elections and that they will stand together and fight together as the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* movement.'
70. Beresford based this observation on an Abahlali meeting at Kennedy Road Community Centre (21 June 2006) and the Abahlali workshop on a provincial meeting at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (21 May 2006).
71. Pithouse (2006b: 61) notes that while all are included, it is mostly young women without children or older women with teenage or adult children who are able to go. He says that for meetings to be fully democratic, childcare will have to be provided, although in some settlements there just isn't a physical space large enough for collective childcare arrangements.
72. See Lennox Mabaso and Harry Mchunu (2006). The charge that Abahlali is run by a White man – a charge levelled by both the ANC and part of the NGO left – is certainly a racist claim, one that suggests by default that the shack dwellers could be so manipulated, and couldn't organise such a movement on their own. Of course, Richard Pithouse's participation at the beginning of the movement shouldn't be dismissed, but the assumption that outsiders bring resources and thus 'buy' loyalty is part of the third force and outsider-agitator argument. Commenting on a draft of this chapter, Pithouse, echoing Fanon, wrote that his most important contribution in the beginning was to engage in 'discussion, to give people confidence in their right to resist and to explore modes of resistance'. He helped get a lawyer for those arrested on 19 March 2005 and wrote an article in the local paper that explained the road blockade from the point of view of the people who had organised it. This became the foundation for the relationship he would slowly build with the people in the Kennedy Road settlement. (Hearing about the roadblock, Pithouse went to Kennedy Road and was initially shunned by the youth. But he stayed around and began to talk with others and slowly built a relationship of trust; attitudes changed after they read Pithouse's article in the press.)
73. On Fanon's challenge to intellectuals and his conception of political education, see (1968: 185–205) and Gibson (2003: 192–200).
74. The most widely read of Pithouse's articles is one co-authored with Ashwin Desai on the Mandela Park (Cape Town) Anti-Eviction Campaign (Desai and Pithouse 2003).
75. Smith's (1999: 9–10) notion of 'decolonizing methodologies' has an affinity with 'Fanonian practice'. For her, 'sharing knowledge is a long-term commitment', which includes sharing theories and analyses of how knowledge and information is constructed and thereby recovering self-determination.
76. See Pithouse (2006d), written before his involvement in Abahlali.
77. Two of the three, Khan and Pithouse, were also involved in struggles in the

1990s to keep the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) open to the poor (the early 1990s was the period when S'bu Zikode was enrolled at the university). Later UDW merged with the University of Natal to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the first steps to becoming 'world class', which only meant, argues Khan (2006b), 'accelerating the process of commodification in the interests of local elites and against the interests of ordinary South Africans'. And all three academics were involved in a workers' strike at the university in 2006. For the story of Fazel Khan's struggle, see <http://fazel.shackdwellers.org/>.

78. In an essay reflecting on the possibility of an emancipatory mode of academic engagement from within South African universities, Pithouse (2009d) argues that 'left authoritarianism' alongside corporate and elite nationalist authoritarianism makes such a mode of engagement particularly difficult.
79. Abahlali has its own website and runs computer classes. Films about the shack dwellers' struggle are available on youtube.com.
80. It is worth noting that Abahlali has a good number of active Indian members.

## CHAPTER 5

1. Pierre Bourdieu's (1962: 178) description of the resettlement development in Algeria could just as well describe that in post-apartheid South Africa: 'A soulless agglomeration which has the superficial aspect of a town but which cannot ensure the advantages normally associated with urban living – employment, housing and a minimum of comfort – the resettlement project is, in truth, a kind of rural shantytown.' He adds in a note that these settlements favour the appearance of a 'class of profiteers . . . often supported by the army by reasons of their "loyalty", who held the majority of administrative responsibilities . . . and were allowed to run the principal business concerns'. We could replace army with party and again it would be a fairly accurate description of South Africa.
2. This includes economic necessity, and a flight from authoritarian 'chiefs', fathers, uncles and husbands in the rural areas.
3. For a brief history of shack settlements in colonial and apartheid South Africa, see Pithouse (2008a).
4. Underlining the fact that building houses and a democratic polity are not synonymous, the post-apartheid government's involvement in massive building projects has also been about removing the poor from cities, rather than including them in the creation of democratic urban spaces.
5. Africans were never simply passive victims in the urbanisation process. Because shack settlements were free from municipal regulations and close to centres of work, they offered a modicum of autonomy that included opportunities for activities in the 'informal economy'.

6. In this case, the Joe Slovo settlement was near the main route from the airport into central Cape Town, a road that tourists use.
7. Public outcry after the court decision, including pressure brought to bear by the Joe Slovo shack dwellers, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and legal scholars, led the new housing minister to realise that politically the decision could not hold. The Constitutional Court then quietly issued a new order suspending the evictions 'until further notice' (see De Vos 2009).
8. Spokesperson for Abahlali baseMjondolo, Mnikelo Ndabankulu, argues that these 'government-approved *jondolos* will lead to government becoming shack lords and shack farmers which make it (and its business partners) profit out of people's despondency' (Butler and Ntseng 2007).
9. Slum clearance was stopped in the late 1980s due to struggle and started again only in 2001. In other words, there was a break during the transition, then a return to repressive practices.
10. As Kipfer and Goonewardena (2007) remind us, the right to the city 'doubles as a right to difference', that is, as a struggle for a radical cosmopolitanism.
11. This situation is not unique to South Africa but is a global phenomenon (see Harvey 2008).
12. As Neocosmos (2010) argues, post-apartheid South Africa was never a 'developmental state' (with 'development' as a state project); it has always been a post-development state (based on a 'private/public partnership' and cost recovery).
13. Central to the removal (or 'relocation') is the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act, which Marie Huchzermeyer (2008b) argues is 'not only reminiscent of apartheid policy [but] reintroduces measures from the 1951 Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, which was repealed in 1998'. The underlying assumption of the Act is that all informal settlements should be removed and replaced by formal structures. This is despite admissions, even by the government, that RDP housing has removed people from their livelihoods, imposed transport burdens and made poverty worse, says Huchzermeyer. The 2004 'Breaking New Ground' policy of the national housing department sought to redress this by introducing an 'upgrading of informal settlements programme' (see Pithouse 2009c).
14. The minimum standard for a house is 30 square meters (100 square feet) of floor space and the provision of water through a standpipe. The quality of houses has in fact declined, not only since the apartheid-period matchbox housing (over 250 square feet) but also during the period of post-apartheid housing provision. Thus, critics declare that 'Mandela's houses are half the size of Verwoerd's'. Following the privatisation model favoured by the World Bank, houses were built through subsidies given to private builders. The builders tend to use the cheapest possible materials and modes of construction to guarantee their profits. Inflation has further squeezed the developers' profits, causing them to take further shortcuts in relation to building quality.



15. Housing policy has been contested and alternatives have been developed. However, the more progressive 'Breaking New Ground' policy, which includes a proviso for in-situ upgrades of shacks, lies fallow (see Pithouse 2009c). Even if lip service is paid to the search for viable alternatives, the hegemonic position is that forced removals and the eradication of the shacks are necessary.
16. Since 'slum clearance' has been largely directed towards shack settlements in the city centres (which under apartheid were areas designated for Whites, Indians and Coloureds) rather than settlements on the urban peripheries where conditions are worse, the policy also repeats apartheid's policy of separation.
17. There is a philosophical pedigree to the anti-economistic thinking of liberation in South Africa, which includes Steve Biko. A less well-known figure is philosopher-activist Rick Turner, who was banned and later murdered by the apartheid regime. In 1971, Turner criticised the idea of liberation associated with the 'old left' because 'it accepted the capitalist human model of fulfillment through the consumption and possession of material goods' (1971: 76). Influenced by Sartre, Turner shared a number of philosophical positions with Biko, whom he met in the early 1970s. It is not widely known that Turner and Biko were in a reading group together during this period. A study comparing Turner and Biko still remains to be done.
18. Some prefer to describe these events as a 'pogrom' because xenophobia is considered to be an attitude rather than an action.
19. Personal communication, 2010.
20. In other words, putting principle in front of material security requires an extraordinary amount of political will. I wish to thank Lou Turner for making this point. In a fascinating interview, Ashwin Desai asks Strini Moodley why he didn't 'cash in' his credentials. Moodley's answer reminds me of Fanon's discussion of the 'honest intellectual' in *The Wretched*. Moodley says, 'If you're involved in a revolutionary struggle, it's basically about mental strength.' He then goes on to talk about how 'the ANC has rewritten the whole struggle' and that 'BC has been written out of the struggle'. For him, he concludes, 'this is a good thing' (2008: 274).
21. This is because South African society, like the Antillean society Fanon describes, 'is a neurotic society, a society of "comparison". The neurosis does not lie in the "soul" of the individual but rather in the environment' (1967a: 213).
22. The fear that Biko perceived during apartheid (1978: 73–80) continues to play an important part in South African politics.
23. In *Black Skin*, Fanon writes of the contemptuous attitude of the middle-class Antillean towards other Black Antilleans. However, arriving in the colonial metropole, the 'evolved' Antillean gets a shock. He finds that he is considered Black and is thus an object of contempt. What if we change the sequence and return to the Antilles in a postcolonial frame? Fanon argues that, shaped by the environment and 'under the patronage of the white man' (1967a: 215), the

Antillean compares him- or herself to other Blacks, and wants to be greater than them (superior), inferiorising them and turning them into objects denied humanity – ‘they are not (civilized) like us’. Would it be far-fetched to say that among the Black elites in South Africa there are attitudes towards the Black poor that are similar to the neuroses described by Fanon? And would it be far-fetched to say with Fanon: ‘“The environment, society are responsible for your delusion.” Once that has been said, the rest will follow of itself, and what that is we know. The end of the world’ (1967a: 216).

24. Writers on the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign website used the term ‘Afrophobic’. In the *Sowetan*, many readers reacted to the attacks as ‘un-African’ and against the spirit of ‘ubuntu’.
25. Such as the Zulu word for ‘elbow’, which became known as the ‘elbow test’.
26. Speaking of the Zimbabwean reality, Dingani writes, ‘They do not beat everyone who disagrees’; ‘the rest suffer from hyperinflation, poverty, etc.’ The alternative to starvation is to go south and work in the periphery of the South African economy.
27. This does not mean that empirically one cannot be poor and White in South Africa. Indeed, one million Whites are counted among the poor.
28. Fanon argues in *Black Skin* that ‘it is normal’ for the Antillean to be a negrophobe since the collective unconscious of the Antillean has assimilated all the European’s archetypes (1967a: 191). I am also reminded here of Césaire’s critique of his own complicity (noted by Fanon 1967a: 193), which I quoted in Chapter 3.
29. Political action, such as marches and demonstrations (even when the ‘correct’ documentation is filed), is often deemed illegal.
30. Dingani (2008) writes: ‘Moral outrage turned to analysis of poverty and the frustrations of the poor. The killing, looting and raping continued nonetheless. By the end of the week, all that talk of poverty and marginalisation was still present, and moral outrage too, but strains of prejudice, and “these foreigners bring this and do that” began to creep into the callers’ contributions. And then it finally dawned on me that this damnable disease, xenophobia, infected the middle classes too.’
31. ‘From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism and finally to racism. These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls wrecked’ (Fanon 1968: 156). The following statement, made by the leader of the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC) is a perfect example of Fanon’s point: ‘we are the ones who fought for freedom and democracy, and now these Somalis are here eating our democracy’ (quoted in Joubert 2008). NAFCOC’s Western Cape secretary, Mandise Njoli, adds that the Somalis ‘fight civil wars in their own countries and then come here and take away our livelihood. Maybe we should start a civil war so that they will leave our communities’ (quoted in Joubert 2008).
32. Both Biko (1978) and Turner (1978) articulated a similar critique of middle-class White society in the 1970s.

33. 'Living politics' is a commitment to a politics that, in Fanon's terms, speaks in the language that everyone can understand. As Abahlali leader S'bu Zikode puts it, 'we must – as we always do – start with a living politics, a politics of what's close and real to the people. This has been the basis of the movement's success' (quoted in Butler and Ntseng 2008).
34. 'In the low-cost housing development of "France" in Imbali outside Pietermaritzburg . . . more than 100 houses built at the cost of over two million rand have been vacant since their completion in 2002. The intended "beneficiaries" have refused to take occupation or transfer on the grounds that the houses are too far away from the city. In the words of one community member: "We want to stay here because we don't pay for transport to the city. It is better for us to stay in our mud houses rather than be forced to relocate to a place that we don't like"' (Pithouse 2009c: 8).
35. By November 2009, Abahlali had just over 10 000 paid-up members in 53 settlements. In 2008, Abahlali together with the Landless People's Movement (in Gauteng), the Rural Network (in KwaZulu-Natal) and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign formed the Poor People's Alliance, a national network of democratic, membership-based poor people's movements.
36. This number is based on the number of people living in areas that have decided, all democratically, to formally affiliate to the movement. There is a real sense in which the movement has a mandate to represent these people but they are not all members and many are not active supporters.
37. In Zulu, the term '*ubuntu*' expresses the concept of sharing, based not only on respect for others but on interdependency, as expressed in the saying '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' ('A person is a person through other persons'; 'I am because we are').
38. This is a phrase Marx uses to describe the greatest achievement of the Paris Commune.
39. During the Paris Commune, Marx argued that all state officials 'would be elected, be subject to recall at any time, and their salary would be fixed at the level of workers' wages. Representative institutions would be retained, but the representatives would be closely and constantly controlled by their electors, and also subject to recall. In effect, the proletarian majority was intended not only to rule but actually to govern in a regime which amounted to the exercise of semi-direct popular power' (Miliband in Bottomore et al. 1998: 524). With the exception of the salaries (of which there are none in Abahlali), this is also true of the settlements where Abahlali governs autonomously.
40. This is exactly what impressed Marx about the Paris Commune since 'the political instruments of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instruments of their emancipation' (Marx and Engels 1971: 196). The working class had to develop a political form that was itself emancipatory.

41. 'Breaking New Ground: A Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements' was approved by Cabinet in September 2004. It requires that 'communities and beneficiaries of government housing programmes be mobilised to partner [with] the Department in the implementation of the new settlement plan' (Department of Housing 2004: 26). On the failure of this 'top-down' mobilisation of 'partnership', see Pithouse's (2009c) aptly titled 'A Progressive Policy without a Progressive Politics: Lessons from the Failure to Implement "Breaking New Ground"'. See also Huchzermeyer (2008b).
42. Since the commodity expresses a social relationship between things, it is important to maintain that defetishisation is crucial to decommodification. Without a critique of alienation and thingification of human relations, decommodification is reduced to a critique of the market rather than the commodity form, and a new fetish is made of nationalised and public property.
43. The world-class city seems to be less about becoming like a Northern city than it is about emulating cities such as Dubai. India and China provide models for the state's goals vis-à-vis contemporary South African cities. For example, Lindiwe Sisulu, South Africa's Minister of Housing from 2004 to 2009, attempted to forcibly remove people from the Joe Slovo shack settlement near the Cape Town airport to a 'transit camp' in Delft. The idea of the transit camp used in this way comes from India.
44. This touches on the issue of autonomy discussed in Chapter 4. For example, at Kennedy Road, Abahlali took over some bureaucratic functions, such as issuing letters of residency which are needed for IDs, jobs, grants, banks accounts, and so on (see Chance 2010). These functions were taken over after complaints that the councillor was running them along party-patronage lines. Rather than taking over state functions, I think that Abahlali is, in principle, committed to a quite different politics, and unlike a political party or sect, the organisation is willing to engage these contradictions concretely. This means learning from mistakes, and allowing opposing points of view to be aired. The principle of being open to different opinions could also mean being open to different forces, and individuals who look to subvert the process are also part of the process. This is, of course, inherently problematic, but discussing these problems is where 'living politics' and 'living learning' begins, and where theoretical work is concretely engaged.
45. In other words, a horizontal rather than a vertical notion of governance. John Holloway's critique of what he calls the 'fetishisation of the state' in *Change the World Without Taking Power* has been much debated (see *Capital and Class*, No. 85, and *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 13, No. 4). This fetishisation is certainly applicable to postcolonial Africa, yet Holloway dismisses democracy as a 'state-defined process of electoral influenced decision making' (2002: 97), without considering the importance of grassroots participatory democracy in movements that are fundamentally critical of power. This is not simply a modern

- phenomenon, as Michael Löwy (2005) points out in writing of Rosa Luxemburg's critique of the Bolsheviks.
46. On the importance of NGOs in Africa, see Hearn (2007). In the South African context, one should note the importance of the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), which has been funded by the Gates Foundation. SDI is not a democratic organisation of shack dwellers but an elite organisation that works as a gatekeeper with other NGOs and academic institutions (such as the Sustainability Institute at Stellenbosch University). Echoing World Bank 'bootstrap' programmes for the poor, and the currently fashionable micro-financing programmes, their major initiative is to encourage micro-saving and credit schemes, which often pathologise the poor for their 'inability' to save. Other 'progressive' NGOs, akin to vanguardist left groups, tend to try to take over movements and redirect them towards larger 'political' movements such as the World Social Forum and away from grassroots issues. On Abahlali's attitude to 'progressive' NGOs, see Abahlali (2006a); also see De Souza (2006) for a Brazilian perspective.
  47. In other words, they reject the Trotskyist position that they are *lumpen* in need of leadership, and also reject the autonomist and Maoist notion that they are the suffering poor, a blank slate upon which one can write the most beautiful characters.
  48. I reference Lukács, aware of Edward Said's contention that Lukács influenced Fanon's work (Said 1999). As I have argued, the importance of subjectivity in Fanon's subject/object dialectic does go some way towards solving the problematic of Lukács' notion of reification, which, in the end, posits the 'standpoint of the proletariat' (namely the Communist Party) as the resolution. On this point, I am also aware that Fanon does not provide an answer as such. Fanonian practices gesture towards one in the knowledge that any answers can only come from our practice. As Fanon famously put it, 'each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it' (1968: 206).
  49. In recognising this, they are implicitly aware of the destructiveness of the division between 'mental and manual' labour - between thinking and doing - which Marx called the hallmark of class society.
  50. Indeed, the development of Abahlali's website was aided by such appropriations.
  51. '*Eplasinini*' is derived from Afrikaans word for farm (*plaas*) and, in this context, loosely means farmworkers or the rural poor.

## IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

1. Fanon notes that the small number of honest intellectuals have 'no precise ideas about politics but distrust the race for positions' (1968: 177). Honesty also characterises the 'revolutionary minority' who oppose the conservatism of the nationalist 'party machine'. They got involved in politics not for personal gain, Fanon argues: '[O]ften unskilled workers, seasonal labourers, or even

sometimes chronically unemployed . . . they have worked themselves up from the bottom [of the party] . . . through . . . their untiring work [and] their spirit of sacrifice' (1968: 125).

2. I am grateful to Sophie Oldfield for this reference.
3. Jean Dreze (2002: 817–19) represents an alternative view in the academy. He notes that he has learnt more from informal gatherings of drought-affected men and women than from 'the entire academic literature on famine prevention in India' (2002: 817). Arguing that 'inaction is not neutrality', he advocates 'action-oriented research', which enhances research and 'paves the way toward a healthy "democratization"' (2002: 818).
4. Ironically, since Lenin is usually dismissed as a brute vanguardist, I am thinking here of Lenin's original critique of Menshevism – namely, that rather than becoming autonomous, the revolutionary intellectual needs to be 'disciplined' (interestingly not by party diktat but) by the working people in the branch meetings.
5. It should be remembered that, in a similar vein, the Haitian constitution had called its citizens 'Blacks' and included in that designation all Europeans who had fought for Haitian liberation.
6. The attacks on Abahlali at Kennedy Road in September 2009 represented the concatenation of different ideological positions. First, provincial ANC leaders were particularly angry that the movement had derailed the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act of 2007 by taking the provincial government to the Constitutional Court, and viewed Abahlali as a direct threat to their 'development' plans and the economic and political interests behind them. Second, Abahlali's 'outing' of local ANC leaders and businessmen as corrupt and joining in the campaign to boycott the elections constituted a direct threat to the power of the ANC at the local and branch level, which relied on unelected or at best authoritarian leaders to 'deliver' settlements en masse as vote banks. Third, the success of negotiations between Abahlali and the city about shack upgrades at Kennedy Road threatened those same leaders' access to the purse strings. The local ANC viewed Abahlali as it viewed itself, as a patronage organisation and thus as an absolute political threat. Abahlali's success in court created an instant reaction. The ANC proclaimed that Abahlali was operating as an opposition political party that was 'against development' and thus had to be liquidated. Only the timing of the elimination remained in question. Nigel Gumede, the head of the city's housing and infrastructure committee, derided and mocked Abahlali, accusing it of being against development and blamed the shack dwellers for choosing to live in squalor. Niren Tolsi (2009a) quotes Gumede as saying that 'the social movement had opposed government's housing efforts and was anti-development, as continued deprivation guaranteed funding from academics and NGOs'. In the same article, Gumede is also reported to have indicated that 'one of the many

obstacles that had stopped government delivering houses to residents was Abahlali's Constitutional Court case against the KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act'.

7. Anyone associated with Abahlali was forced to renounce their membership or leave the settlement. In June 2010, Abahlali members who had been meeting secretly collected 500 signatures, mainly from women, pledging to support the return of the Kennedy Road Development Committee and Abahlali to the settlement. On 13 June 2010, 120 people participated in the first democratic meeting at Kennedy Road since the clampdown.

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