

Amandla is still Awethu¹:

Fanonian Practices in post-apartheid South Africa

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Practicing dialectics

To speak about Fanonian practices in post-apartheid South Africa one first needs to think about the question of method in two not necessarily opposite directions. First, as an engagement with Fanon's critique of decolonization in its contemporary South African context; and second, from the perspective of new emergent movements that challenge philosophy. At the same time, since philosophy—not simply practical philosophy but a quest for universality and an elemental philosophy of liberation—is always already present in the movements of the damned of the earth,² 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 puts it, philosophy grips the masses. These dialogues—often hidden, underground and subjugated—make up what could also be called a philosophy of liberation.

Since his death, practicing Fanon's philosophy of liberation has taken many forms. For example, one could consider the resonances of James Cone's “Black Theology of Liberation” in

¹ Amanda Awethu, a cry for power and a response, “to the people,” popular during the anti-apartheid struggles is still used in current post-apartheid struggles. The phrase “Amanda is still Awethu” is a phrase used by S'bu Zikode in a press release on January 27, 2009 about the judgment handed down in the Durban High Court on the Shack Dweller organization, Abahlali baseMjondolo movement's application to declare the Kwa-Zulu Natal “Elimination Prevention of Re-Emergence of Slums Act 2007” unconstitutional.

² I use the title *Les Damnés de la Terre* rather than the English title, *The Wretched of the Earth*, because I think it better emphasizes the philosophical, existential and material being of those people who are damned, outside, and silenced.

the U.S. or Paulo Friere's "Pedagogy of Liberation" in Latin America³ (Cone 1986, 1997; Friere 1970). Each drew significantly upon Fanon as a liberation theorist. But on the African continent it was Steve Biko in South Africa who was the most significant practitioner of Fanon.⁴ In a new context Biko extended Fanon's project and developed "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 other thinkers including "western" philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (see Gordon 1995, Sekyi-Otu 1996, Gibson 2002).⁵ By shifting the "geography of reason" (Gordon 2005, Maldonado 2008, Mignolo 2000), Fanon moved its ground toward the marginal, the marginalized, the refugees, the noncitizens, the undocumented and illegal—in other words, the damned of the earth—finding new sources for truth and reality, namely for the emergence of new subjectivities that would challenge the reified objectivity of European colonial rule (see Fanon 1967a 224, 1968 36-37). 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 understood not as an emanation of pure will but as an organized self-consciousness, in other words, a praxis emerging from the lived experience of the colonized in the struggles against colonial objectivity. In fact, in *Les damnés*, Fanon notably adds that the starving "native" doesn't need to discover the truth but *is* the truth since

³ Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been viewed as an extensive reply to *Les damnés*. Friere's relationship to Africa, specifically to post independence Guinee-Bissau should also be noted. See Friere (1978).

⁴ This is certainly not to downplay significant influence of Fanon on the revolutionary theorist Amilcar Cabral (1969) or on writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah (1968) or on African political theorists and philosophers beginning perhaps with Emmanuel Hansen (1977).

⁵ The grounding of philosophy in experience can also be called phenomenology. Since this paper'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) and Gibson (1999), Alessandrini (2000).

they experience the *truth* of the colonial system—its violence and dehumanization—and understand the truth of the anticolonial revolt as one of bread and dignity (1968, 50). 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 an actional and conscious subject. Fanon’s challenge—the challenge he also set himself as a revolutionary and as a thinker—therefore was to map out and unravel how this subject *position* can become a self-determining, actional subjectivity that can absorb and change not only themselves, but also the objective material world into a free, inclusive, democratic space (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 1980).

After all, for Fanon, effective decolonization 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 a new dimension emerges. 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, Lefebvre 1987), posing a *new* humanist challenge to the status quo of hegemonic Western, imperialist “man.” Indeed, it is a humanism meant to hold up the humanity of those damned who have been emptied of humanity and excluded from the human community of “man” (1968 316).

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 which he defines as historically subjective 1971: 445).⁶ This movement is dialectical but there needs to be a moment or event when the suffering, indeed the hidden resistances, of the oppressed becomes manifest through a real poor people’s movement and when their subjectivity changes the objective situation.⁷ And one thing I have learnt is that such a moment is not a product of intellectual will or of a charismatic leader; it requires organization, not of the vanguard type, but of a practice of self-organization intimately connected to the organization 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.

Practicing Fanon’s Dialectic

By dialectic,⁸ I mean the confrontation and working out of contradictions, not through synthesis, but through absolute negativity.⁹ In this sense, Fanon’s contribution to practicing dialectics is twofold. First by “moving the center” (Ngugi 1983), he grounds his philosophy of liberation in the lived revolt of the damned of the earth, and second, from this standpoint, he maps out the internal contradictions of national liberation as it unfolds.¹⁰ For Fanon, the transformation of national liberation into its opposite, namely into an oppressive patronage and neocolonial system, was not inevitable but a dialectical development¹¹ that simultaneously

⁶ I have two things in mind here, first Hegel’s advice posited in his preface to *The Phenomenology* 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 remarks in “Haitian inspiration” (2004) that “the Haitian revolution is a particularly dramatic example of the way in which historical ‘necessity’ emerges on retrospectively.” On the importance of the Haitian revolution to Hegel’s *Phenomenology* see Buck-Morss (2009).

⁷ Of course, such an “event” also has a long “prehistory” of resistance involving thought, memory and activity.

⁸ For in depth discussions of Fanon’s dialectic see Sekyi-Otu (1986), Lewis R. Gordon (1995), and Nigel C. Gibson, (2003). Also see Jock McCulloch (1983).

⁹ For a fuller discussion of Fanon’s dialectic and its relation to absolute negativity, see Nigel Gibson (2002) and Lou Turner (1996).

¹⁰ One should not forget that *Les damnés* was written before Algeria’s independence from France.

¹¹ “Development” is understood here dialectically, namely a process that can be both progressive and retrogressive.

necessitated a critique of the *objective* situation and an openness to new situations and new movements among those marginalized and oppressed. In short, Fanon's philosophy demands practice, and such a practice of Fanon's philosophy of liberation is best understood in terms of what I call 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).¹² Rather, by political/philosophic, I mean philosophy that demands political action and given content to ideals of human freedom. As Fanon himself put it in his letter of resignation from Algeria's Blida psychiatric hospital in 1955, "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 (Fanon 1967b 53).¹³ Thus, *Les damnés*, the title of Fanon's last book, resonates with a whole history of revolution—from turning the world upside down—from peasant revolts to slave rebellions—in short, the constant revolts of the others, the marginalized, excluded and the ignored (the poor, damned and oppressed). It also resonates with theoreticians of revolution, radical humanists and Marxist

¹² The best discussion of the issue of ethics and "bad faith" in Fanon's thought can be found in Gordon (1995a).

¹³ One cannot but notice a Hegelian resonance here, namely the classic statement that the "real is rational," "the rational is real." 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).

heretics,¹⁴ 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 point of note 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 anticolonial struggles, while cognizant of the possibility of a new beginning, could also be crushed out, and the space for dialogue closed off, not only by the colonial powers but, by the anti colonial movement itself; for the sake of an external unifier (and frustrated by the seemingly endless contradictions) such as “the nation,” “the party,” “development,” and “unity.” This last point—that the damned of 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 one of *Les damnés* (indeed he uses the word over 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 here defined as the mediation between “nation” and “party,” rather than a critique of national consciousness that raises questions about the problematic of nation and party by “redefining nationalism along the lines of how working people understood it” (Depelchin 2005 5).¹⁵ But as *L'an V de la révolution Algérienne (A Dying Colonialism)*, which was written in the context of the Algerian revolution and 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 *L'an V* also warns of the exhaustion, indeed brutality, that can result from unreasoning and mindless activism, and the cycle of violence and

¹⁴ A tradition that includes Marx himself and such 20th century figures as Steve Biko, Raya Dunayevskaya, Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James.

¹⁵ On discussions of Fanon, violence and national liberation see Gibson 2003.

counter-violence it can perpetuate (see Fanon 1967c 24-5), it argues that such a situation would end in either self-destruction, or a reliance on an external forces that will destroy the possibility of self-actualization. For Fanon, activity that shuns reflection and critical thought cannot lead to liberation. Indeed, it invites myopic vanguard organization (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 anticolonial 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 is called upon to think. Successful action, in short, depends on a return to the idea and practice of “becoming human.” Rather than heralding a theory of violence Fanon’s resonance in South Africa has centered on developing a politics of solidarity, humanism and mental liberation.

Fanon’s emphasis on praxis, which remained consistent from *Black Skin White Masks* to *Les damnés*, was thus both rational and a critique of rationality.¹⁶ And the practice of his method was one at the same time a practice and a challenge to thought. After all understanding is critical to practice, and thought itself has to be alive to new impulses for liberation, to “rationalize popular action” attribute to it reason and to hear the theoretical questions that the people ask

¹⁶ 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 (1967: 12). I am thinking of method dialectically rather than analytically, as subject to its own method of ceaseless negativity. On the difference between reason and rationality see Gordon 2005 and 2006. Also see 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).

(2005 98, 134).¹⁷ Arising out of such an internal and intersubjective relationship Fanon's dialectic is thus "untidy," 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 to create a new society.

Fanon's Relevance

Canonical Western thought assumes that the colonized world has no history of philosophy (as Hegel argues about Africa) because it has no "purposive movement" (as Trevor-Roper puts it 1965, 9). History is that of Europeans in Africa. As Amilcar Cabral (1970, 73) argues, "the colonialists ... made us leave history, our history, to follow them, right at the back, to follow the progress of their history." Colonial history is, as Fanon puts it, "an epoch" and "an odyssey" (1968 51). And while Fanon's philosophy of liberation emerges from a specific physical space, he maintains "reality" has a proper time and that the form of his work is therefore "rooted in the temporal" (1967 104, 14). "Every human problem," he adds, "must be considered from the standpoint of time" (1967 14-15).

Yet, we are stuck in time, a neocolonial/postcolonial time. At the same time the present also seems far away from Fanonian invention. Indeed, so much has changed since Fanon's day that it is fashionable to remark that Fanon is no longer relevant.¹⁸ And, certainly, in today's globalized, "post-race" liberal "cosmopolitan" world, the colonial world that Fanon described so vividly seems no longer applicable. After all, in South Africa, apartheid, that bulwark of colonial

¹⁷ The new translation of *Les damnés* in 2005 included a foreword by Homi Bhabha. The 1968 Constance Farrington translation is still popular in the United States and is the only translation currently available in South Africa. The relationship of objectivity and subjectivity in Fanon's dialectic is explored in Gibson 1999b.

¹⁸ When Homi Bhabha asks in the foreword to the new translation of *The Wretched of the Earth* (2005) "Is Fanon Relevant," the question is not disinterested. Already in his foreword to the 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.

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 February 11th, 1990, the repeal of the pass laws in 1986 and so on.¹⁹ We could review the new constitution of South Africa and its guarantees of rights and freedoms, we could look at successful governmental elections and at South Africa’s economy, all of which seem to prove Fanon wrong. The question is, is Fanon’s critique simply outdated? Indeed some might wonder whether Fanon’s philosophy of liberation is still relevant to contemporary realities.²⁰

To address this skeptic, one might note that Africa’s place (or non-place, or “non-being,”) in the modern “globalized” world has remained remarkably consistent since the period of decolonization. Indeed, Africa’s “non-being” (in terms of capitalist investment and “development”) has simply been reinforced by globalization and the policies that were meant to open it up to its benefits. Neoliberal structural adjustment has simply opened up inequalities and increased pauperization,²¹ and Africa has become naturalized as a basket case; after years of IMF/World Bank “good governance” contingencies, it still suffers from its “huckstering” ruling elites. Moreover, since real decolonization was defined by Fanon as a political, economic and

¹⁹ As I worked on an early draft of this introduction, I learnt about Irene Grootboom’s death. In 2000, Mrs. Grootboom successfully brought a case before the South African Constitutional Court on behalf of 510 children and 290 adults living in deplorable conditions in Wallacedene, Cape Town, demanding better housing. The case resulted in what was called a landmark judgment that called upon the state to design and implement “a comprehensive and co-ordinated programme to realize the right of access to adequate housing.” The case, as liberal lawyers argued, highlighted the potential radicalism of the South African constitution. But, as Marie Huchzermeyer argues (2004: 4), the judgment did not reform the system of access to “temporary land” but was a request for “disaster management, i.e. temporary relief for those living in desperate or life threatening conditions Ms. Grootboom never got her house. The temporal realities intervened to thwart the “victory.” On 30 July, 2008 she died in a shack, still waiting for the South African government to meet her constitutional right to a home.

²⁰ See my critique of Homi Bhabha (Gibson 2007).

²¹ On Africa and Globalization, see Gibson (2004).

psychological liberation (what Ngugi (1986) calls “decolonizing the mind”), postcolonial Africa remains very much a product of the failures of the decolonization project.

And these failures are, as I have mentioned, not only material, but also epistemological (1967a, 224 see also 1968, 209). Indeed, as Fanon puts it in *Black Skin*, there is no other conception of life other than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery and hunger. And it is only from this personal struggle itself that new human relations and their *theorizations in new concepts* can emerge. This movement is dialectical. Without conceptualization and a new way of life, the struggle will rely on the memories of past battles and old formulas and fall back into an unhappy unconsciousness—what is called “Afro-Pessimism”—that will trap Africa in a binary: between Afro-pessimism (the permanent crisis reflected in perennial images of suffering humanity and “ethnic conflict”) on one pole and Afro-optimism (based on the rhetoric of free markets and postmodern boot straps micro-financed opportunities) on the other. So, the related question to the question of Fanon’s relevance then is, are we simply stuck in a neocolonial/postcolonial time? And, if so, can we apply Fanon’s critical analysis to the last decolonization in Africa, the most extreme or at least infamous expression of racism, colonialism and oppression: Apartheid South Africa, where the rhetoric of the anti-colonialism could find in the anti-apartheid struggle the clearest Manichean form?

After all, many of the leaders of the long liberation struggle—from Mandela’s Youth League of the 1940s, the mass disobedience of the 1950s and the Pan-Africanist revolt of 1960 to the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s and the mass movements of the 1980s—read Fanon. And while Biko and the Black consciousness movement of the 1970s made Fanon indigenous to South Africa, many of today’s South African leaders and elites also read Fanon in exile. Whether they have created policies and actions with these proscriptions, predictions about

“liberation,” and potential criticisms in mind is something I will address later, but, for now, what is clear is that everyone was and is aware of Fanon’s arguments. And the question that undergirds this paper is not simply Fanon continued relevance, but *how* Fanon can possibly speak to an Africa that is mired by neoliberal structural adjustment in rhetoric and in reality. How would Fanon, the revolutionary, think and act in this period of retrogression?

This double issue is central to Fanonian practices. 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 free-wheeling markets (Afro-Optimism), while, on the other hand, represented by images of xenophobic violence reinforcing the world’s view of it as permanently conflicted and suffering nation (Afro-Pessimism)²²—is a test case of Fanon’s continued relevance and his plea to create another world. To test the test case, to address this question of Fanon’s relevance today, Fanon’s critique of the standpoint of the pitfalls and “misadventures of national consciousness” is employed to evaluate and critique post-apartheid South African reality. Additionally, to address Fanon’s philosophy of liberation as actional and engaged, rather than detached and autonomous, critique 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 and listen to them. And against the material and philosophic binary gridlock that sees South Africa in either Afro-optimist or Afro-pessimistic terms, Fanonian practices offers a third position, “not in the service of a higher unity,” but of a radical negation of their presuppositions.

Spaces of postapartheid reality

A Fanonian analysis of post-apartheid South Africa could begin by testing Fanon’s bold stretching of Marxism from *Les damnés* that in the colonies, “you are rich because you are white

²² Michael Neocosmos analyses xenophobia in Fanonian terms in (Neocosmos 2006).

you are white because you are rich” (1968, 40). On first blush this binary seems to describe apartheid but doesn’t quite seem to be applicable to “multicultural” South Africa where a powerful new Black elite has emerged. Indeed, South Africa is producing three times more dollar millionaires than the global average and the fourth most in the world. Even in the context of the global crisis, luxury cars are on back-order (see Fanon 1968 155) and new gated communities for the new Black and old white national and international bourgeoisie are still springing up like mushrooms (see Fanon 1967 43-44). And yet behind the glitz and sheen lurks quite a different reality, one that is even expressed in UN and World Bank data.²³ 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, are not fully aware that the socioeconomic situation has shockingly worsened for the majority of South Africans. In fact, a leading South African (Afrikaner) academic, Sampie Terreblanche, has argued that “the quality of life of the poorer 50% has *deteriorated considerably* in the post-apartheid period” (Terreblanche 2004: 28, my emphasis), and he calls this the “dark side” of contemporary South African society, albeit one that has been, as he puts it, “transformed from a rigid, racially-divided society into a highly-stratified class society.” But while Terreblanche observes these transformations in South African society, he also acknowledges that “the highly-stratified class society has not been cleared of its erstwhile rigid, racial ... legacy of apartheid and colonialism” (Terreblanche 2004: 33-4). One third of the 15 million in the “bourgeois classes,” he adds, are white, while only two per cent of

²³ Despite an average GDP per capita of \$11000 (which puts it at 56 out of 170 countries and on par with Chile), South Africa’s Human Development Index ranks at 121, just below Gabon, and its life expectancy is just below that of Tanzania whose GDP per capita is a lowly \$744 (see UNDP, 2003). According to the Human Sciences Research Council, “New estimates of poverty show that the proportion of people living in poverty in South Africa has not changed significantly” since the end of apartheid (Schwarb, 2004). Households living in poverty have sunk deeper into poverty, and the gap between rich and poor has widened. Approximately 57% of individuals in South Africa were living below the poverty income line in 2001, unchanged from 1996. Limpopo and the Eastern Cape had highest proportion of poor with 77% and 72% of their populations living below the poverty income line, respectively. The Western Cape had the lowest proportion in poverty (32%), followed by Gauteng (42%).”

the 30 million people in the “lower classes” are white. And, interestingly, the UNDP’s “South African Development Report” notes that the share of white households in the top fifth of the income scale actually grew between 1995 and 2000. One can quibble about the figures, but taken as a whole, South Africa's Black population is surprisingly worse off with the end of apartheid. The Black working class, and especially the poor, has been the biggest losers over the past 15 years. Among the consequences of increasing inequality and unemployment are the reality of the more than ten million people who are disconnected from water and electricity and the two million plus people who are evicted from their homes (McDonald and Pape 2002: 170).²⁴

²⁴ The GINI coefficient (a measurement of inequality with one as absolutely unequal and 0 as equal) has in fact grown since the end of apartheid and is comparable to the most unequal societies in the world (see <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000990/>). So while inequality in South Africa has become increasingly defined as inequality within “population groups” (defined by the apartheid categories of African, Coloured, Indian and White—that these terms are still employed in census material speaks volumes about South Africa’s “rainbow nation”), it is worth remembering that the relative size of South Africa’s population means that in terms of sheer numbers race plays a significant simply because 90 per cent of the population is Black (in the Black consciousness sense) and thus everything else being equal 90% of the population who are poor are Black. But also since the GINI coefficient for the African population has risen from 0.62 in 1991 to 0.72 in 2001 (which is a level of inequality is comparable with the most unequal societies in the world), the percentage of African poor vis-à-vis other “population groups” is also higher. So while the number of middle class and rich Blacks has grown, the GINI coefficients indicates how poor Black households have sunk deeper into poverty since the “transition” from apartheid and continued throughout the period of ANC rule coinciding with an economic growth rate of about 5%.

Table 1 South Africa’s population by “group”

African	38 million
Coloured	4.2 million
Indian	1.1 million
White	4.3 million

Table 2 Gini coefficient by population group

	1991	1996	2001
African	0.62	0.66	0.72
White	0.46	0.50	0.60
Coloured	0.52	0.56	0.64
Asian	0.49	0.52	0.60

In short, South Africa’s economic growth has not “trickled down” at all but has instead been redistributed among the rich. The transition from apartheid has not seen a radical transfer of wealth nor any kind of social programs based on basic human needs and in the participation of the masses of people. Instead it has seen, as Biko predicted and Fanon foretold, the creation of a “black capitalist society” with South Africa putting “across to the world a pretty convincing, integrated picture, with still 70 percent of the population being underdogs (Biko 2008 41-2). The “elite pact” signed between corporate capital and the ANC leadership, the hallmark “opening” of the country to elections has also come to mean the opening of the country to disastrous neoliberal economic policies and its attendant ideologies.²⁵

And that is what Fanon predicts in *Les damnés* that a Black government and a new caste of rich Blacks would “Africanize” the economy for their own benefits but it wouldn’t change anything. For Fanon, there is nothing ontological about Blackness; Black skin does not contain an automatic set of values, nor does a Black government undermine racism if it doesn’t undermine the material structures on which it is built. Indeed, government and party often become a means for private advancement with patronage politics encouraging the selling of votes (see Buccus 2008). In a Fanonian vein, Michael Neocosmos adds:

There is little doubt that the politics of grabbing and enrichment among the post-apartheid elite have been both brazen and extensive. So-called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has enabled the development of a new class of “black diamonds” whose new-found wealth is not particularly geared towards national accumulation and

Total	0.68	0.69	0.77
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²⁵ The Afrikaner intellectual Sampie Terreblanche notes (2002, 36) that 50% of South Africa’s population is mostly unemployed and very poor earning a measly 3.3% of income. It is reasonable to assume that these figures have not improved.

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 (2008 587).

Yet also, as Sekyi-Otu forcefully argues, Fanon's "slight revision of the Marxist analysis" is manifest in the elevation of spatial metaphors in the structure of dominance . Thus added to a critique of inequality and the Manichean haves and have-nots, as well as the importance of "standpoint of time," Sekyi-Otu's reading of Fanon's "stretched Marxism," emphasizes the "absolute difference and radical irreciprocity" of the colonizer-colonized relation is made manifest spatially (Sekyi-Otu 72-73). In *Les damnés* Fanon argues that colonialism is totalitarian. There is no space outside it; there is not colonization of the land without the colonization of the people. The "native's" every everyday movement in space is constrained. Colonization, he argues, follows the "native" home, invades the "native's" space, body and its motion. In *Black Skin* Fanon says that the Black is walled in; in *Les damnés* he says that the "native" is hemmed in, pressed from all sides—oppressed—only able to find freedom of movement in dreams of muscular prowess. Colonialism is then, primarily, an experience of spatial confinement, of restraint and prohibition, a narrow world of poverty, oppression, and subjugation. Another prime example, early in *Les damnés*, is Fanon's description of the open and strongly built colonial city, a town of light and food and cramped oppressive hungry "native town" (1968 39) . The Manicheanism of the colonial world—with its absolute difference between the colonizer and colonized, which finds its apogee in apartheid—is thus expressed spatially. In the colonialsituation "space and the politics of space 'express' social relationships and react against

them” (Lefebvre 2003:15). Because the socio-economic spatial reality of the compartmentalized, divided colonial world can never mask human realities, an examination of this division—“the colonial world’s ... ordering and its geographical layout”—Fanon argues, “will allow us to *mark out the lines* on which a decolonized society will be reorganized” (1968 38-40, my emphasis).²⁶ *Thus one Fanonian test of post-apartheid society is to what extent South Africa has been spatially reorganized.* On this score, it is quite clear that “deracialization” of the urban areas has been an essentially “bourgeois” phenomenon with full membership and rights to South Africa’s cities now accessed by money and consequentially with urban policy—under the guise of providing “housing”—geared mainly toward the *removal* of the poor from urban areas. In other words, with plans based on the removal of urban informal settlements post-apartheid policy remains Manichean and zero-sum.²⁷ For example, fixated on creating “formal” structures, the government has built around two million housing units since 1994 but the new housing for the poor—those frightfully small and poorly built structures called houses²⁸—is based on the removal of the poor from city centers, built far away from bourgeois eyes outside urban spaces.

²⁶ Fanon’s point is echoed in Lefebvre’s theory on social space namely that space and social life are of a piece and that it is in space that social life unfolds.

²⁷ Central to the removal (or “relocation”) is the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-Emergence of Slums Act which Marie Huchzermeyer (2008) argues is “not only reminiscent of apartheid policy [but] it 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. This is, Huchzermeyer continues, despite admissions, even by the government, that RDP housing has removed people from their livelihoods, imposed transport burdens and made poverty worse. The 2004 “breaking new ground” policy of the national housing department sought to redress this by introducing an “upgrading of informal settlements programme.”

²⁸ 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 from the apartheid period matchbox housing (over 250 square feet) but also from the post-apartheid “RDP” houses. Thus critics declare that “Mandela’s houses are half the size of Verwoerd’s.” Following the privatization model favored by the World Bank, houses are built through subsidies to private builders. The builders look to use the cheapest possible materials and construction to guarantee a profit. Inflation has squeezed developers’ profits who have in turn searched to make further cuts in the quality of the buildings.

Housing policy thus reinforcing spatial segregation.²⁹ In the minds of the urban policy technicians and real estate speculators, shack settlements and middle class housing cannot be left by side. And just as with other gentrification schemes, under the guise of “upgrades” the poor are “removed” from the city. These “forced removals”—to use the language of apartheid—are the outcome of the ANC’s current promotions of “slum clearance”³⁰ which threatens millions of people who live in urban shack settlements with removal to “transit camps” and other “temporary” housing, far away from the urban centers.³¹ So what is at stake in Fanonian practices is not simply a critique of government inability to keep up with housing needs (and a deeper critique of what a house is) but the ways the “ordering and geographical layout” express the socialized citizens of a new South Africa.³²

Certainly, one cannot talk about xenophobia in 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 to the pitfalls 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 decolonization; an experience that is at one at the same time a liberation of space, a destruction of the confines of apartheid, and a solidarity born of radical

²⁹ Policy has been contested and alternative policy developed. However the more progressive “Breaking New Ground” which includes a proviso for “in-situ” upgrades of shacks has lain fallow. Even if lip-service is paid to it the hegemonic position is that of removal and eradicating the shacks (see Pithouse 2009).

³⁰ For example the 2007 “Elimination of the Slum Act.”

³¹ Since “slum clearance” has been largely been directed toward shack settlements in the center of the city (which under apartheid were areas designated for “white, “Indian” and “coloured,”) rather than settlements in the urban periphery where conditions are worse, the policy not only which also recapitulates the apartheid policy of separation.

³² There is a philosophical pedigree to this anti-economistic thinking of liberation in South Africa which includes Steve Biko. A less well-known figure is the white philosopher-activist, Rick Turner, who was banned and later murdered by the apartheid regime. In 1971 he articulated as notion of human liberation in contrast to that of the “old left” because it “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, who he met in the early 1970s. It is not widely known that Turner and Biko were in a reading group together in this period. A work comparing Turner and Biko still remains to be done.

commitment (Hallward 2002, 128) and develop new ideas of citizenship which include not only the right to the city and services but also autonomy and community control from below.³³ Decolonization is incomplete therefore if it is not waged on all levels, political-socio-economic-geographical-psychological: objective and subjective (1967, 13). 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 legitimized *via* claims of indigeneity while simultaneously reproducing a politics of political, social and spatial exclusion rooted in colonial racial classifications. This incompleteness marks postcolonial society, turning the project of decolonization backwards so that rather than creating a new history, it marks time in *neocolonialism*.

The postcolonial spatial politics are apparent in South Africa's May 2008 "pogrom." For example, during this violence the rich and middle class, white and Black were not singled out for attack.³⁴ The specificity of the conditions for anti-foreigner attacks might be unemployment, lack of housing, electricity, garbage removal etc, and frustration with failed government policies and perceived corruption and favoritism in the face of white and Black upper class prosperity but in fact, it was the Black poor not the rich who were singled out for their skin color—stopped on the street for being "too Black"—their accent inauthentic, or their knowledge of formal linguistic terms inadequate.³⁵

Writing of the pogroms in South Africa, Zimbabwean refugee Mavuso Dingani (2008) asks why the "rightful anger of the poor" was not directed toward big supermarket chains or even

³³ In his speech to the Diakonia Council of Churches Economic Justice Forum, S'bu Zikode (2008) calls it a "living communism": "We need to think about how we can create a new kind of communism, a new kind of togetherness. A living communism that recognizes the equal humanity of every person wherever they were born, wherever their ancestors came from."

³⁴ Some preferred the word pogrom because xenophobia is considered an attitude rather than a specific kind of action.

³⁵ Such as the Zulu word for "elbow," which became known as the "elbow test?"

small white or Indian traders. And political theorist Michael Neocosmos wonders why were the rich or for that matter white foreigners not targeted. Economic reductionism cannot explain it, and xenophobia, Dingani says, “is too empty a term that says much and explains little.”³⁶

Likewise, Andile Mngxitama 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 to the mass of people and almost 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 “illegals” live. Indeed in “polite” (civil) society there has been a shift from the open racism of apartheid to a more nuanced class position. Just as “the poor in Africa have replaced the Dark Continent as the symbolic conceptual definition of the obstacle to civilization” (Depelchin 134), in the “new” South Africa the dehumanizing and derogatory attitudes formerly projected towards all Blacks have been channeled toward the Black poor. Yet one should also be wary simply applying a new truth of “class” since 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). The internalization of colonial values and the psycho-spatial divide between the cultured colonized elite and the poor masses is of course central to Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*. In *Return to my native land*, Fanon tells us, Césaire discovers his cowardice. On the street car Césaire saw a starving, tired, faded Black man—destroyed by poverty-- in a threadbare jacket. Behind him women laughed thinking the man funny and Césaire laughed complicitly. Césaire’s negritude only went so far. He saw nothing in common with this man and realized the limits of his own heroism (Césaire 109).

³⁶ In this wonderful piece that speaks 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.

In post-apartheid South Africa, Steve Biko's critique of white liberals as the major barrier to Black liberation (1979 19-26) takes on a new concreteness. The indirect beneficiaries of racism and apartheid white liberals have not been called into account for their complicity with the apartheid state. In this vein, Grant Farred argues that one of the ANC's greatest failures was not to call white South Africa to account for its hand in the atrocities, exploitations, violence and suffering of the disenfranchised during apartheid (2004 113). This is a result of the ANC's "appeasement with the apartheid state" on one hand and the reconciliation ideology of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the other. White liberals and the Black bourgeoisie have then gotten their wish: "white (capital and cultural privilege) is protected and black (enfranchisement) is celebrated (Farred 2004 113, 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 forthcoming).

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 neoliberal capitalist economy, post-apartheid has been financialized and the poor Africans have become increasingly excluded and criminalized.³⁷ The discourse of money has replaced the confines of apartheid discourse 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 in search of nothing more than "bare life" (see (Agamben 1998; Farred 2004b 597³⁸). And at the same time, the political patronage discourse has become increasingly nativist and competitive. In this Manichean context

³⁷ Political action, such as marches and demonstrations (even when they file the "correct" documentation) are made illegal. See AbM (ref)

³⁸ Grant Farred reminds us that "those refugees from Mozambique and Zimbabwe ... are precisely those who historically supported the anti-apartheid struggle (2004b: 596).

then, the pogrom against Africans takes on a negrophobic character (Mngxitama 2008).³⁹ Black economic empowerment has simply become the legitimating veneer that masks the multination presence of capital investors (read white) and top executives of multinational corporations (read white); the “foreigners” are now simply the poor, and since there is, by definition, no poor whites, the targets are poor Africans.

Yet in the new South Africa, one cannot escape the double process, “primarily, economic; subsequently the internalization--or rather epiderminalization--of this inferiority” (Fanon 1967 11), where the poor are continually told that African “aliens” are to blame for their situation and the ruin of their country. The “xenophobia” 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 channeled inward, the violence of the lived experience of the poor must be allowed expression. For Fanon, it is allowed expression—or more precisely, allowed release—in the restricted urban concrete spaces where natives 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 indicated that however much it was decried, this was for many an acceptable outlet, if not the only available outlet.⁴⁰ Thus Fanon’s assertion that one is white beyond a certain financial level is expressed spatially; think of Mayotte Capecia’s desire for acceptance in high society that Fanon discussed in *Black Skin*, by living on a hill “dominating” the city (1967 44).

³⁹ Writers on the Western Cape Anti Eviction Campaign website used the term “Afrophobic.” In discussions in *The Sowetan* many readers reacted to the attacks as “un-African,” that is against the spirit of “ubuntu.”

⁴⁰ Mavusi Dingani writes (2008) “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 marginalization 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.”

Fanon's critique of exploitation in a "Black mask" and the rise of xenophobia have an existential and moral dimension. In *Black Skin*, Fanon argues that middle class white society is suffocating and sterile and the guiding point in *Les damnés* is to reject Western bourgeois society which despite its claims to humanism, murder "man" where they find him and where everything is judged by having, taking, owning and controlling. The point, he argues, is to develop a whole new way of life and value.⁴¹

What kind of democracy?

"Misadventures" or "Pitfalls" of National Consciousness, chapter three of *Les damnés*, was first delivered within the Algerian revolution as a lecture to Algerian Liberation army militants in 1960. 1960 was the year that sixteen African countries gained independence from colonial rule. But it was the year also of Lumumba's murder and the counter-revolution in the Congo, both of which loomed large in Fanon's mind as he wrote *Les damnés*. At the time Fanon was a lonely radical voice of criticism coming from within the anticolonial movements. Even now, nearly 50 years later, Fanon's *Les damnés*, especially "Misadventures of national consciousness," continues to be prescient in its criticisms of postcolonial Africa. Fanon's sharp analysis of the failures of the nationalist elites and the "laziness" of middle class intellectuals (their lack of ideas and easy capitulation to instrumental reason), and his descriptions of the degeneration of the national idea, the leaders, and the parties of national liberation and predictions of coups and xenophobic politics (see Bongmba 2005, Gibson 1994, Taiwo 1996), still resonate across the continent, with Zimbabwe's collapse being the latest tragic example of implosion. Zimbabwe is an extreme case of national degeneration as its increasingly decrepit leader and party feed off the increasing pauperized people. However South Africa is, as I have

⁴¹ It is interesting that both Biko (1979) and Turner (1978) articulate a similar critique of middle class white society in the 1970s.

argued, no exception. It is simply the latest of a line of postcolonial regimes in Africa that travelled the dead-end of narrow nationalism and neocolonialism that Fanon warned about in *Les damnés*. South Africa, in short, was a country worth fighting for but has now simply become another postcolonial African country (Alexander 2003).

The bigger issue is, in short, the logic of the degeneration of the idea of liberation. It wasn't the lack of education or the "objective forces" that stymied South Africa in the interregnum of the late 1980s and early 1990s; rather, it was the capitulation of the ANC-aligned elites and intelligentsia to what they considered "objective forces." Indeed, the capitulation to 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 homegrown authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism, which had always plagued the anti-apartheid movement. As Fanon predicted, during the transition from apartheid, critical voices in the ANC (let alone those outside the organization) were outmaneuvered, co-opted, told to keep quiet, or expelled into the political wilderness.⁴² This virtual silencing for the "sake of unity" continued even as the consequences of a homegrown neoliberal structural adjustment was plain to see. There was a class element to this as well. The intellectual elites, including many to the left of the ANC and South African Communist Party, who had courageously fought apartheid, were finally unwilling to break with the dominant paradigm (see Desai and Bohmke 1997, Gibson 2001, and Nash 1999). Without a significant opposition the "transition from apartheid" was able to follow the script emerged out of many of the transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This script became systematized in a US government funded political science literature of transition (for example see O'Donnell and Schmitter et al

⁴² Frank Wilderson paints a useful picture of this period that emphasizes the importance of the death of Chris Hani (see Wilderson 2008).

1986) and defined the strictures of the debate in terms of an “elite pact” overseeing a neoliberal economy and the accompanying demobilization of the mass movement. An earlier version of this script had in fact already been criticized in part by Fanon in *Les damnés*. Emphasizing their own (often military) weakness vis-à-vis the colonialists, the nationalist bourgeoisie, fearful that the masses would “destroy everything” (Fanon 1968, 62), quickly compromise the goals of liberation for a narrowly conceived share of political power. Their ability to control popular participation was crucial. In the 1970s, it was the mass based opposition to the military juntas and dictatorships in Latin America that engendered a new political science script of “democracy promotion.” By the 1980s, promoting a polyarchic democracy discourse (Robinson 1996) became part of what Peter Hallward calls the “politics of containment” and was often aided by a social democratic leaning or populist and centralized party (such as the ANC and its rhetoric as the party of liberation), led by a charismatic and bonapartist figure (such as Mandela), and fully-linked up with multinational, especially American interests. The concept of “civil society” became centrally important to what became known as the “second independence” in Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s as a new round of structural adjustment was linked to “good governance” and privatization. In response to the gathering crisis in apartheid South Africa, William Robinson argues that a key element of United States policy in the later 1980s was the creation of a programme designed to support moderate black leadership and marginalize 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 postapartheid South Africa” (quoted in Robinson 1996: 330). Robinson’s summary of the goals of the various coordinated democracy promotion projects reads as a roadmap of post-apartheid South African “development” and includes supporting the emergent Black middle class; and developing a

nationwide network of grassroots community leaders amongst the black population that could win leadership positions in diverse organs in civil society and compete with more radical leadership; cultivating a black business class that would have a stake in stable South African capitalism, develop economic power, and view the white transnationalized fraction of South African capital as allies and leaders (Robinson 1996: 331).

Thus brokered, the South African transition followed this elite transition scenario almost to a T. Yet it should remember that the silencing of the mass movement had to be homegrown. To silence oppositional thinking, the ANC elite traded on its claims to be the sole and historical representative of national liberation, subsuming other struggle discourses into the ANC tradition, and thus making “out of order” any movement that denied or challenged this.⁴³ In terms of housing, mainstream policy makers as well as those on the left agreed that shack settlements tended to be undemocratic, as the Marxist Mike Morris argued in 1992: “since their reproduction is based on forcible control [and], patronage.” While Morris argued that that was a result of the lack of individual control others recommended reducing the power of community based organizations arguing that “civics need to withdraw from managerial and financial aspects of the development process” but at the same time deliver community support for the “development” (McCarthy, Hindon and Oelofse quoted in Huchzermeyer 2004 152). Though it wasn’t realized at the time the civics became pressure groups co-opted into the ANC patron-client political structure.

A Fanonian perspective insists that we view the South African “transition” as bittersweet. The bitterness is realized at the moment when “the people find out the ubiquitous fact that exploitation can wear a black face” and necessitates the logic of what Fanon calls “social

⁴³ It is also clear that, whatever the rhetoric to the contrary, neoliberalism (and its ideology that there is no alternative) was both an economic and political policy.

treason”: As mentioned earlier, central to Fanonian practices is the idea of having one’s ears open to the voices and thinking from expected spaces, new movements from below, the rationality of their practices and to the language of the ideas of freedom and dignity expressed by the marginalized and “damned” of the world, those dismissed so quickly as “lumpen” and desperate. While this openness is often absent in the discourse of the left, shifting the geography of reason from the “enlightened” metropole to the “dark side” of the revolt of the colonial world also necessitates a revolution in listening. By the late 1990s, new revolts and movements of poor and marginalized people began erupting.⁴⁴ They did not necessarily speak in the language of the left but they demanded to be heard. Challenging the ANC government, these new movements, which express the concrete struggles of millions of ordinary people who have been excluded from the new South Africa, have begun in myriad ways to give expression to a qualitatively different visions of post-apartheid South Africa. It is toward one such movement, the product of contemporary South Africa, that I now turn.

The leap from necessity to freedom: Fanon and the shack dwellers

The shantytown sanctions the native’s biological decision to invade, at whatever cost and if necessary by the most cryptic methods, the enemy fortress. The lumpen-proletariat, once it is constituted, brings all its forces to endanger the “security” of the town, and is the sign of the irrevocable decay, the gangrene ever present at the heart of political domination.

Fanon, *Les damnés*

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

Marx, quoted by Fanon (1967 223)

I understand Fanon’s statement above that the growth of shantytowns as the colonized’s decision to invade the enemy citadel at all costs (1968 130) in a historical materialist way.

⁴⁴ According to the Freedom of Expression Institute, over 5000 protests were official recorded during 2004-5. This almost doubled to 10,000 the following year. The journalist, John Pilger (2008), has said that South Africa is “the most protest rich country in the world.”

Historically the shanty towns in South Africa were the result of the contradictory forces of the colonizers' need for cheap labor and the colonizers' fear of Africans on one hand and people's desire for an urban life. The shanty town was a response to the rural crisis, the desire for urbanization but, also, a way for women, and families to access the city. The shanty towns, in other words, are in part a consequence of structural forces (the rural crisis) but they are also an innovative popular response to it. Thus wars, taxes and the expropriation of land, formalized by the 1913 land act created debilitating poverty in the rural areas⁴⁵ and helped produce a class of landless laborers who desired an urban life and developed innovative ways to circumvent the state to maintain it.⁴⁶ The first shacks in Durban emerged after the destruction of the Zulu kingdom and the loss of land in the late nineteenth century. As Durban became a major port in the 20th century, the African urban population grew and, with it, white fears of contagion and the consequential implementation of urban segregation. Indeed South Africa's "multiracial cities," argues Jean Comaroff, were already "being transformed in response to contagion and medical emergency" such as the bubonic plague in 1900 (See Comaroff 1993 322). This notion of contagion was embedded in earlier attitudes like those of Henry Mayhew and other British urban reformers who sympathetic toward London's poor in the 1850s, wrote of the London "slums," the "terra incognita" and "dark netherworld," inhabited by "a savage or heathen race" in the geographic heart of the Empire (see Wohl). Thus it was logical that when the class assumptions of British planning were extended to the "heart of darkness" with missionaries playing an important role in the discourse of pollution and reform. In South Africa urban planning and the practices and discourses of public health became the vehicles for controlling African populations. By the early 1900s it became clear that the long-term solution to the purporting

⁴⁵ For a brief history of shack settlements in colonial and apartheid South Africa, see Richard Pithouse (2008).

⁴⁶ I want to thank Richard Pithouse for insisting on stressing the importance of agency and how popular responses often are outside the logic of structural forces.

“medical crisis” that was articulated by colonial public health officials was the mass removal of the black population. Thus, “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). Indeed what Fanon calls the “native’s biological decision” (perhaps better thought of as “biopolitical decision”) to move to the citadel was countered by the colonialist’s attempt to stem the tide of Africans to the cities by legislating “influx control” and “pass laws.” In the 1930s, white public health concerns, manifested in “slum” acts systematically destroyed African housing, yet the growth of shantytowns continued in the margins of urban areas and was further encouraged by the shortage of labor power during World War Two.

Once the war ended, however, the socio-economic/political threat and the repressed White fear of Africans taking over the cities found a new expression, providing the basis for apartheid and a new period of forced removal of urban Africans. With its detailed planning, apartheid South Africa became one of the largest builders of housing in the world⁴⁷ forcing Africans from cities relocating “townships” in peripheral areas or removing them to far off “homelands.” As much as planners created an apartheid dystopia, it could not halt the process of its own contradictions. By the 1980s the decision by millions of people to create shack settlements, to remain in or move close to cities, with all the dangers that such a move would bring, helped create the crisis that brought down the apartheid government.⁴⁸ But the deep structural contradictions of capitalist-colonial South Africa, on which post-apartheid society has

⁴⁷ This fact highlights that building houses and a democratic polity are not synonymous. Post-apartheid South Africa involvement in a massive building project is about removing the poor from cities, not including them in the creation of democratic cities.

⁴⁸ Africans were never simply passive victims in the urbanization process. Because settlements were free from municipal regulations and close to work, they offered a modicum of autonomy that included opportunities for activities in the “informal economy.”

been built, have meant that the issues of space, housing and people's livelihoods remain, even with the end of apartheid's formal laws.⁴⁹

It is, therefore, not surprising that resistance to attacks on the means to basic necessities, of "bare life," by the state and corporate power – disconnections from water and electricity and evictions from homes, remain, in Fanon's sense, biological. Additionally, it is not surprising that major contestations in post-apartheid South Africa would be around space and land and around the struggles of the poor to remain in the cities. It is also not surprising that a social movement of urban shack dwellers has emerged in the twenty-first century in the face of the post-apartheid government's attempt to "privatize" these issues—that is to say, shift the "human rights" to land and housing, inscribed in the constitution,⁵⁰ to a discourse of cost-recovery backed by force (either private or state backed). In short, poor people in South Africa regularly do not have the access to constitutional right. For them what Agamben (2005) calls the state of exception--the routinely unlawful and illegal acts by local government against the poor (such as violent evictions, demolitions, forced removals and repression of poor people's organisations)—is increasingly the rule. David Harvey argues that 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 the city and the rights of capitalist markets and private interest to the city, has become even more acute in the present period of neoliberal capitalism. Post-apartheid South Africa was never a "developmental state" (with "development" as a state project) but always a post-development state (based on a "private/public partnership" and cost recovery).⁵¹

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ This situation is not unique to South Africa but a global phenomenon. For example, Harvey notes that while the Indian constitution guarantees rights to housing and shelter, the Supreme Court has rewritten this "constitutional requirement" allowing the removal of squatters from cities based on legal proof of residence. However, he adds, "signs up rebellion are everywhere" (2008 35, 37).

⁵¹ On the "development" and "post-development" state in Africa see Michael Neocosmos (forthcoming).

Neoliberalism became the ideology of post-apartheid South Africa and on the structural legacies of apartheid it “embarked on one of the most ambitious deregulatory schemes in the world.” As Thomas Frank puts it, “South Africa is again a one-party state But money—thank God—is free last” (Frank 2008: 121). Since colonial and apartheid South Africa was built on spatial exclusion of Blacks from “white South Africa” and the struggle against it was also a struggle about the right to the city, it is not surprising that “the antinomy of right against right,” as Marx puts it,⁵² of one conception of the city against another in post-apartheid South Africa, contains alternative visions of what the city should be. Indeed a deep critique of post-apartheid society has emerged from those often denied rights to the city, outside of “civil society,” namely from the “damned of the earth.”

Since colonialism, especially settler 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 decentralizing 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 arose in part from the race to take over the seats of power, leaving intact the privileges of the centers of colonial administration and expropriation. For South Africa, Fanon’s critique is an important challenge to the centralistic and hierarchical culture of the ANC. As Fanon argues, decentralization is not simply an administrative or technical issue; it is connected with the goal of involving masses of people in a “living politics.” And explaining to the formerly excluded but newly politicized people that the future belongs to them, that they cannot rely on an imaginary leader, prophet, or anybody else (1968, 197), necessitates a decentralization of politics.

⁵² Marx speaks of the antinomy of rights in his chapter on the working day in *Capital* (1976 344).

The development of AbM, and the rise of xenophobic violence in shack settlements across South Africa's major cities are connected. Both have arisen as responses to increasing pauperization and spatial and political exclusion, the pogroms are the result of the channeling of anger toward African immigrants and the increasing importance of claims of indigeneity in politics; but they are also a consequence of the criminalization and repression of shack and other revolts by the poor by the police and governmental authorities, on one hand, as well as depoliticalization of these revolts by NGOs (including those on the left) who try to take them over. The attacks on African foreigners, in other words, are products of pauperization but are also a consequence of the state and NGOs (in the context of the hegemonic discourse of capitalist neoliberalism and hierarchical and undemocratic notions of professionalism and managerialism), which have acted in tandem to silence alternatives⁵³—what Fanon (and others such as Hallward 2005 and Neocosmos 2005) would consider a suppression of politics and oppositional discourses that allow the poor to organize and make their own demands.

Born in Durban⁵⁴ in 2005 Abahlali baseMjondolo has become the largest autonomous grass-roots organization in South Africa with members across the country.⁵⁵ Propelled by those who have almost nothing, the shack dweller's movement, which lives in a daily state of

⁵³ Space does not allow further development of this point. On the importance of NGOs in Africa see Hearn (2005). In the South African context, one should note the importance of the Shack (Slum) Dwellers International which has been funded by the Gates Foundation. SDI is not a democratic organization of shack dwellers but an elite organization that works as a gatekeeper with other NGOs organizations and academic institutions (such as the Sustainability Institute at Stellenbosch University). Echoing World Bank "boot strap" programs for the poor as well as currently fashionable micro-financing program, their major initiative is to encourage micro-saving and credit schemes which often pathologize the poor for their "inability" to save. Left NGOs, akin to vanguardist left groups, tend to try to take over movements and redirect them toward larger "political" movements like the World Social movement and away from grassroots issues. On Abahlali's attitude to "progressive" NGOs see "Supporting Abahlali" (2006); also see Souza (2006) for a Brazilian perspective.

⁵⁴ Durban is now part of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality with a population of around 3 million with an estimated 800,000 people living in shack settlements.

⁵⁵ By 2009 the paid up membership of AbM was just over 10,000 in 53 settlements. In 2008, AbM together with the Landless People's Movement (Gauteng), the Rural Network (KwaZulu-Natal) and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign Anti-Eviction formed the Poor People's Alliance, a national network of democratic membership based poor people's movements .

emergency and contingency, represents a truth of postcoloniality⁵⁶ and offers a critique of its ethics in the most Fanonian sense. After all, the damned of the earth judge wealth not only by indoor plumbing, taps and toilets, but also by human reciprocity and the relationships that develop through a rigorously democratic and inclusive movement. It is a wealth that builds on and emphasizes thinking, namely the thinking that is done collectively and on a continuing basis in the communities. There is a politics of scale that begins at the bottom. It challenges policy makers “up there” to come down to the settlements and speak with the poorest of the poor in the community on an equal basis. The shack dweller movement represents a clear and emergent case that makes the intertwining of household and community scale explicit with national politics and responds to Fanon’s critique and call to realize alternatives to the national scale/spaces of anti-colonial struggle.⁵⁷ As Steve Pile (2000 273) has argued, “Fanon’s revolutionary theory also necessitates that space is produced differently.” AbM may not equal the new society,⁵⁸ but in its democratic, decentralized and inclusive form, it is implicitly the idea of “new society.” At the very least, it is a challenge to theoreticians to engage with it and rethink philosophies of liberation to help create cognitive leap. What is significant about this new organization is that it expresses a new beginning in the daily struggle, and its brilliance lies in its grassroots democracy and “living politics” that is its “own working existence.”⁵⁹ For example, while land and housing

⁵⁶ As a continent Africa has the highest proportion of urban shack dwellers in the world (see Davis 2004). The South African government estimated in 2001 that 8 million people lived in shack settlements.

⁵⁷ Thanks to Deirdre Conlon for pointing this out to me. On the politics of scale see for example Marston and Smith (2001).

⁵⁸ Jovel Kovel remarks that Abahlali baseMjondolo have opted “to recreate commons ... [and] have organized themselves into a modern simulacrum of the Paris Commune (Kovel 2007, 251).

⁵⁹ When Raya Dunayevskaya’s claimed that the greatness of the organization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the U.S. in 1955 was its “own working existence” (a phrase Marx uses, referring to the Paris Commune) and “contains our future” (Dunayevskaya, 1957 281), the claim was considered outrageous since, as it was argued, how could a bus boycott be put on the same level as the Paris Commune? To say the same about the shack dwellers organization today would be similarly dismissed. Yet in retrospect, Dunayevskaya’s claim seems quite reasonable. Like the Montgomery Bus boycotters who met daily in open session and helped usher in the “civil rights” revolution in the United States, the brilliance of the shack dwellers grass roots democracy and “living politics” is its “own working existence.”

are essential elements to the struggle for a decolonized society, they understand that the struggle is ultimately about “building a society that recognizes the humanity of all” (see Nimmagudda 2008, 6).

This “fact of shackness” becomes the basis for shifting the geography of reason and rethinking the politics of space from a genuinely grassroots and genuinely democratic standpoint. Living in a shack settlement is hard. Everyday activities such as eating, washing, keeping well and being safe cannot be taken for granted, but take time and effort.⁶⁰ It is a long walk to collect the water needed for cooking and washing, and every time shacks leak and water comes up through the mud floors, ruining rugs, mats, and beds. Considered “temporary”—even though families have lived there for generations—they are not being served by city services like garbage removal which means garbage mounts up and rats are a constant threat. Because shacks are considered temporary they are often denied the electricity connections promised at the end of apartheid, and with only a few accessible taps and toilets, shacks settlements are cramped, fummy spaces. Because cooking is by paraffin stoves and lighting by candlelight, death, injury and the destruction of property by fire is a constant threat. And there is a need for vigilance. Living in a shack is made harder by the threat and fact of forced removal to far off badly built “houses” or barbed wire fenced “transit camps”; it is made harder by police harassment and criminalization. Yet, out of this lived reality, a wholly democratic and thoughtful new political movement has evolved, and their politics has a moral-existential and class bite in the words of the old struggle song –what have we done to deserve this?

Indeed, why should anyone live like this? Shack dwellers fight against the government desire to move them out of the city into small poor quality houses built in peripheral ghettos

⁶⁰ Or perhaps the lack of toilets, water, and electricity creates a particular burden on women and a waste of their time.

that have entrenched the spatial logic of apartheid—miles from their lives away from jobs, schools, hospitals, parks, libraries, churches and the cultural life of cities. They want more than a barren life far from town. “It is not unusual,” writes Richard Pithouse (2009), “for people to simply abandon relocation houses and move back to better located shacks or to refuse to leave shacks for relocation houses.”⁶¹ In short, the shack dwellers are voicing their right to live in the city, challenging the idea of citizenship and insisting on an active democratic polity. In this sense, AbM shack dwellers are expressing a new kind of inclusive politics from the ground up, one which appears local and reformist, such as providing services to settlements, but is also radical and national. They do not speak in terms of a critique of “the state,” nor in terms of a critique of political economy, but they do address the politics of the state and the spatial political economy of postcolonialism that concerned Fanon: If the shacks dweller’s demand for housing in the city is won—and negotiations are currently taking place between AbM and the city—and if housing policy is based in fully democratic and open discussions with the poor, the spatial and political economy of the city could be radically altered, and a fundamental shift in post-apartheid social consciousness and a decisive intervention in its spatial economy could occur.⁶² Crucial to this shift would be a move from technocratic state planning toward “grassroots urban planning.”⁶³

⁶¹ For example, continues Pithouse (2009) “in the low-cost housing development of ‘France’ in Imbali, outside Pietermaritzburg, more than 100 houses built at the cost of over R2 million 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.’”

⁶² Abolishing apartheid’s spatial planning is a goal of the South African housing department but its practice is the removal of people from centrally located shack settlements to peripheral locations reinforces apartheid’s spatial logic.

⁶³ There are many potential pitfalls if planning is simply taken over by progressives without genuine input from grassroots and community organizations. Based on his experiences in Brazil, Marcelo Lopes De Souza warns that what he calls Leftwing technocratism “corresponds to a contradiction in the context of which ‘too much’ attention is paid to technical instruments and exaggerated expectations are raised in relation to the possibilities and potentialities of the formal legal and institutional framework ... [and] a progressive strategy is developed and supported mainly by

Such a radical change of consciousness, where “the last would be first and the first last” (quoted in Fanon 1968 37), would see a shift in the geography of reason from the elitist and technical discussion of services—mediated by “those 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. 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) would amount to a defetishization of the city:⁶⁴ a shift away from the Northern-focused elite discourse of creating “world class” citadels in South Africa. But this movement from the praxis of “the underside” of humanity will not come all at once. Indeed it emerges from necessity—namely from the state of emergency that is its daily reality and a historical necessity—and in the challenge to thought about the post-apartheid city itself away from technicist concerns toward humanist programming guided by people’s needs. This radical mutation in thought requires a shift in attitudes toward the damned. After all, positioned outside of “civil society” (indeed, they are in effect “barred” from civil society), shack dwellers are frightening; they are “savages, morons and illiterates,” as Fanon ventriloquizes. It was not strange to hear such derogatory comments about the poor during the xenophobic violence of 2008,⁶⁵ when middle class “civil society,” tut-tutting the violence of the poor against the poor,

scholars and the (middle-class) staff of NGOs, while the poor and their grassroots organizations only play a very secondary role in terms of strategy building and intellectual elaboration” (2006: 337).

⁶⁴ Since the commodity is a social relationship between things, I think it is important to maintain that defetishization 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 place and a new fetish is made of nationalized and public property.

⁶⁵ The poor were blamed for the pogroms of 2008 but they were the greatest losers from the violence. Indeed, the postcolonial elites and middle classes condemned it from afar but did little to stop it. It was from within the shacks, namely from Abahlali baseMjondolo, that such a move developed. Upon recognizing the pogrom, AbM responded immediately and worked to ensure that attacks did not occur in any Abahlali settlements. In a widely distributed

viewed it as an ontological problem. Indeed, the poor are often told that their wretchedness is self-inflicted by bad choices, bad luck, or bad genes. They are naturalized as backward, in need of education about “development,” about health and morality from myriad NGOs who report to Northern donors who view them as both a suffering humanity and a threatening and frightening mass. In Marxian terms, they are a classic lumpenproletariat,⁶⁶ reactive and backward, a substantive mass in a Hobbesian world of struggle and scarcity, of reaction and resentment (see Davis 2004). It is only with the emergence of a movement that these external and internalized attitudes have become openly criticized. By creating their own organization, shack dwellers have created a notion of shack consciousness that has shattered what Fanon called the “unreflected position” (Fanon 1967 135). They insist that they are not dependent on anyone else but imminent in themselves. And insisting that they are not the potentiality of something but *are*, the shack dwellers movement has articulated a living politics that challenges the formulaic idea of South African “citizenship,” not only in terms of inclusion but in terms of the need to rethink both the notion of “who is South African” and more basically the politics of human reciprocity.

The question is not simply whether Abahlali is reasonable, or whether its practical demands can be met within the current South African political order. The question is more whether the shack dweller movement upsets the spatial order on which modern South African society rests and thereby fundamentally challenge its “governmentality.”

press release (discussed below) they expressed a political/philosophic maturity that needed no mediations and articulated, in the great tradition of radical humanism in which all human beings are recognized as human.

⁶⁶ Translated from the German, lumpen, like lappen, means “rag.” Thus a “raggedy proletariat” is purely descriptive of their poverty. In the *Communist Manifesto* lumpenproletariat is the name used for a “dangerous class, ‘the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society.’” In the *18th Brumaire*, Marx speaks of the lumpenproletariat as the “refuse of all classes” whose chief is Bonaparte. It is unclear from Marx’s descriptions whether this term has any use at all—except, quite literally, as a “raggedy proletariat”—in describing the Shack dwellers.

When the xenophobic violence first broke out in Johannesburg, for example, AbM immediately responded to the “Xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg”⁶⁷ with a press statement highlighting the important principle of solidarity and the unity of the oppressed in their organization. The principle also reflects notions of “community” rooted in African cultural concepts of collectivity and sharing.⁶⁸ But like Fanon, they also warned that the “anger of the poor can go in many directions” and insisted that all who live in a shack settlement are from the community and have equal voice irrespective of their origins. This was not mere rhetoric. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong political self-organization, and with undocumented migrants in key positions within the movement, the shack dwellers’ political leadership was eloquent and direct. They insisted that neither poverty nor oppression justified turning on another poor person:

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.

They went on to warn that the war against Mozambiquan and Zimbabwean was already becoming a war against the Shangaan and Shona and could degenerate into a war against the Venda and Xhosa. In a “rainbow” city like Durban where Zulu, Xhosa, Phondo, Sotho mix, where Indian and African militants together created Black consciousness, where people born in Asia and Africa congregate.

⁶⁷ Later the attacks spread to Durban but there were no reports of attacks in the settlements associated with AbM. The movement was also able to mobilize against them more generally and to stop an in progress attack in the (ANC aligned) Kenville Settlement. They also arranged shelter for people who had fled their homes in their settlements as they always arrange shelter for South Africans evicted by the state. In a forthcoming book, “Fanonian Practices,” I will discuss these events in terms of Fanon’s critique of national liberation and how it is playing out in South Africa.

⁶⁸ In Zulu “Ubuntu,” the idea of sharing based not only on respect for others but a dependency expressed in the expression that “a person is a person through other persons” and that “I am because we are.”

Demonstrating the political self-education acquired in their living discussions in the shack settlements, AbM insists that the issue is not educating the poor about xenophobia. Instead they challenge society to educate itself about the real situation in the settlements with a Fanonian resonance. They also challenge those in the settlements to educate themselves “so we can take action”:

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 clear 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 (AbM, 2008).

Their appeal to a basic humanism is as profound as it is simple: no one is illegal; as AbM puts it, “a person cannot be illegal. A person is a person whether they find themselves.”

Educating the educators

And with no care for any rest, we climbed ... until I saw, though a round opening, some of those things of beauty that heaven bears.

Dante⁶⁹

⁶⁹ I think Gordon (2006) is right to make a connection between this quote from Dante and Fanon’s invocation at the conclusion to *Les damnés* “to set foot a new man.” Certainly it is from the standpoint of a living hell that the damned rise to see those things of beauty that heaven bears.

The nation does not exist in the program which has been worked out by revolutionary leaders ... [but] in the muscles and intelligences of men and women.
Fanon, *Les damnés*

Neither a lumpenproletariat, nor simply spontaneous in Fanon's sense, the organized shack dwellers have developed an infrastructure for self-organization in the "University of the Abahlali." It is a new kind of organization: not outside, not above, not separate from the shack dwellers, but self-organized and insistent on decentralization, autonomy, grassroots democracy and accountability. It appreciates acts of living solidarity but shuns money and political power from government and nongovernmental groups. It is an organization, as Fanon understood it, a "living organism." As I have already mentioned, the shack dwellers call it a *living* politics—and hence a space that is produced differently—and it represents the kind of challenge to committed intellectuals and activists that Fanon mapped out in *Les damnés*, namely that intellectuals need to put themselves in "the school of the people." Since Fanonian practices emphasizes the importance Fanon places on developing a liberatory ideology and a humanist program based on everyday discussions and meetings, it is worth reflecting on the pragmatic, creative and critical thinking that emerges from reflecting about experience in the shack meetings. After experiences of the elite of some left, often Northern, intellectuals actively denying that poor people can think their own politics, Abahlali demands that intellectuals, who really want to dialogue and work with them, should first come to the settlements and listen to what they have to say and be a part of the meetings. S'bu Zikode, the elected chair of Abahlali puts it very concisely:

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 2008).⁷⁰

In the discussions that Abahlali has named “Living Learning,”⁷¹ what remains crucial is the principle that the usefulness of whatever is learnt from outside the shacks in schools and university courses is judged by the lived experiences of the struggle of people in the shacks. Knowledge is thus considered neither private property nor the means for private advancement; it is to be shared. S’bu Zikode thus explains that Abahlali is a “practical, not theoretical” endeavor (Nimmagudda 2008); it is a living organization:

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 (Zikode 2007).

At the very beginning of the shack dweller movement, the self-activity and subjectivity of the poor, and the continuity of the struggle for a new society, confirmed Fanon’s belief that “thing” becomes human “in the very process by which it frees itself” (1968 36-7). It is the process of becoming historical protagonists. Zikode, gestures to the continuity of the struggle in the language of liberation theology, “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 Christs, but Christ was the first Mandela, the first liberator, who articulated a new heaven on earth. Mandela is Christ

⁷⁰ In other words, they reject the Trotskyist position that they are *lumpen* in need of leadership and also reject the autonomist and Maoist desire that they are the suffering poor, a blank slate upon which one can write the most beautiful characters.

⁷¹ The “Programme for a Living Learning” arose from an opportunity to allocate resources from Church Land Programme to a limited number of militants chosen by movements to attend the Certificate in Education (Participatory development) offered by the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Kwa- Zulu Natal. Two members of the Abahlali baseMjondolo attended the course. (Information taken from January 2008,” Living Learning” minutes).

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, it is the failure of the historical Mandela, the leader, to liberate South Africa that was demanding the birth of a new Mandela: the poor themselves. In contrast to the Christian homily that the poor would always be among us, and by subtly critiquing Mandela's limited leadership, the poor were taking issues into their own hands, seeing themselves as the force and reason for their own liberation. They had become their own Mandelas, their own leaders intimating that true human liberation would be realized only when human beings recognize and organize their own power as social forces, rather than separating and molding themselves into the shape of political power (see Marx, 1975 234). In this sense, the shack dweller's movement heralds a new transition.

Fanon's visionary critique of postcolonial elite politics mapped out a "living politics" based on a decentralized and democratic form of self-governing which opens up new spaces for the politics of the excluded from the ground up. Thus, Fanon's project can be understood in a Gramscian frame of building counter-hegemony from below that opens up spaces that fundamentally change the political status quo and contest the moral and intellectual leadership of the ruling elites, and is also akin to Lefebvre's reordering sequence by which we understand space as lived in. Fanon concluded *Les damnés* with the call to work out a "new humanism," which, in contrast to the old humanism of Europe, would be a living, breathing, humanism based on a consciousness of social and political needs of the damned of the earth and their inclusion in the "enlightening and fruitful work" of nation building (1968 204).

Since a philosophy of liberation expresses the merging of the dialectics of revolt and its reason, it is through critical engagement, 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 who do not remain in their place but insist on the importance of their thinking a politics of that does not begin from the art of the possible—those “out of order” with the prevailing order such as the organized shack dwellers—have challenged the legitimacy of “supernatural,” political power. This living politics, in a sense turning over a new page of history, may appear “utopian thinking” (Turner 1978)⁷² but it is also absolutely necessary and practical. From it new spaces open up for Fanonian practices.

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⁷² I reference Richard Turner here to remind people that it appeared utopian to many that apartheid could 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.

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