

Finding Fanon, Looking for second liberations

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[I]f action does not transform individual consciousness then it is nothing more than incoherence and agitation ... Have faith in your people and devote your life to their dignity and betterment. For us there is no other way. Your brother, Franz

Fanon, Dedication to Bertène Juminer

A second phase of total liberation is necessary because [it] is required by the popular masses.

Fanon, "First Truths on the Colonial Problem," 1958

Finding Fanon

I was introduced to Fanon via Steve Biko, and it was in 1981 that I first met Black Consciousness émigrés from South Africa in London. 1981 was the year of the hunger strikes in Northern Ireland. Bobby Sands and other prisoners were also reading Fanon finding the measure of national culture as a "combat culture" essential as, in the hellholes of the H blocks, they taught each other the Irish language as a conscious anticolonial activity.

As a student I was interested in how theories of liberation, like Fanon's could become alive in new situations. Unlike many South African liberals and Marxists, Biko did not think that Black consciousness was a passing psychological stage which would be "transcended" by class politics. Instead connecting Fanon's criticism in *Black Skin White Masks* of Sartre's dismissal of Black consciousness as a "minor term" to Fanon's dialectic of national consciousness in *Les damnés* as an opening up to reciprocity, Biko found the basis for a new politics based on a positive negation of Apartheid's negation of being it called "non-white." Biko called Black Consciousness a quest for a new humanity.

Recently, I was invited to speak about my book *Fanonian Practices in South Africa, from Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* in a bookshop in Durban. Abahlali baseMjondolo which translates as “residents of the shacks,” is a consciously ground-up, reflective, and radically inclusive democratic movement based on a shared experience of space. Someone in the audience asked whether I had spoken about Fanon in the shack settlements.¹ The question was meant as a provocation, implying that the book was an intellectual exercise which had no resonance to shack dwellers who are stereotypically criminal, were uneducated and reactionary.² In fact, on my arrival in Durban, I had been invited to talk about the book with Abahlali members in shack settlements and at an Abahlali meeting in Durban, where I was warned of the attacks I would face from the authoritarian left for my support of the movement. Clearly this organization of shack dwellers recognized the importance of its own reasoning and at the same time took seriously the discussion of liberatory ideas.

Before I could answer the comments at the bookshop, somebody else pointed out that Fanon didn’t need to be brought to the shack settlements. He was already found there. As Abahlali says, we are Professors of our own poverty, that it to say, as Fanon argues in *Les damnés de la terre* in contrast to discourses on Truth, the poor are the measure of their truth. More than a turn toward an epistemology of the marginal *qua* marginal as a subject position, the self-organized poor, Abahlali, insist on a praxis involving everybody, rather than a politicized elite, to discuss the question of truth. So Fanon is concrete to life in the shack settlements; but because of that immediate identity the shack dwellers do not need Fanon, or any social theorist for that matter, to tell them about their own oppression and exploitation. They already know.

In the foreword to *Fanonian Practices*, Abahlali’s founding president, S’bu Zikode Zikode writes that Abahlali was first introduced to Fanon (by Richard Pithouse³) “when we were dealing with the arrests after our first road blockade” and were struck by Fanon’s phrase that “every generation has to discover its mission and either fulfill or betray it.” He adds that they always “felt very close to some of [the] ancestors of our struggle” because “many of our comrades were in the trade unions or the UDF [United Democratic Front]; some are the children of the women of Cato Manor [who led the revolt of 1959]; a grandson of Bhambatha [the leader of the 1906 uprising] is one of our respected older members; and we have felt a strong connection to Biko through Bishop Rubin Phillip.” Phillip was the vice President of the South African Student Organization in 1969 when Biko was President, and was part of those early discussions about Black consciousness, which included clandestine readings of Fanon. Feeling “on their own,” but also welcoming their autonomy from party politics, NGOs and self-appointed left vanguard who wanted to tell them what to think (and oversee the softening of top-down “development”), Fanon’s concept of generational responsibility gave them confidence about their worth as a living politics. Zikode continues,

¹ Looking for Fanon Amongst the Shacks: Fanonian Practices in South Africa Launched in Durban, <http://ukznpress.bookslive.co.za/blog/2011/06/03/looking-for-fanon-amongst-the-shacks-fanonian-practices-in-south-africa-launched-in-durban/>

² Attitudes shared by the state and its left critics.

³ Who also introduced me to Abahlali. On Pithouse’s early work with Abahlali, which cost him his job, see Nigel Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*, pp. 175-177. Pithouse has written extensively on Fanon, see for example “‘That the tool never possess the man’: Taking Fanon’s humanism seriously,” *Politikon*, Vol 30:1 2003, pp 107-131.

If you are serious about victory, about succeeding to humanize the world, even a little bit, then your struggle must be a living politics. It must be owned and shaped in thought and in action by ordinary men and women. If every gogo (grandmother) does not understand your politics then you are on the road to another top-down system. You also run the risk of being on your own in the face of repression.

Fanonian Practices has three parts, the first traces the recreation of Fanonian subjectivity in Biko's Black consciousness philosophy; the second takes the measure of post-apartheid South Africa through the lens of Fanon's critique, especially the pitfalls and misadventures of national consciousness which reads—if one simply changes the names of the players—as a blueprint for what has happened in South Africa. But *Fanonian Practices* could not have been written without the third part, the actions and reflections of the shack dweller movement, which influences the structure of the work. In other words, the project was to bring those actions into conversation with Fanon. Rather than applying theory to practice, it was the movement from practice, the human experience, action and thinking among the poorest of the poor, which challenges theory, enlivens Fanon's philosophy. The movement helped bring to light the importance, for example, of a politics of space as a dimension of his decolonial phenomenology as it searched for ways to maintain its humanity in face of a suffocating reality. The task I set myself, aware of myriad discontinuities and separations, was to remain as truthful to the movement and to Fanon.

Abahlali calls their philosophy of Abahlalism “living learning.” The idea of a dialectical relationship between socially lived experience and learning within a social movement (which begins as Porto Gonçalves puts it “from the starting point of people breaking the inertia and moving, i.e., changing place, rejecting the place historically assigned for them” (quoted in Zibechi 2013 210); these movements out of place becomes “a political and cultural creation” as Uruguayan social theorist, Raúl Zibechi (2013 210) puts it, bringing to mind Fanon's discussion of what we might call *living* culture in *L'an cinq de la révolution Algérienne*. (Though Fanon is often criticized for not really understanding culture⁴ [Marxists and liberals, for example, agree that he didn't understand North Africans and was ignorant of Islam], he was certainly not a culturalist (see Cherki 209-210). In other words, Fanon's views about cultural change as utopian is only understandable if they are utterly decontextualized.)⁵

⁴ Representative is Stuart Hall's remarks in Isaac Julien's (1996) film, “Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask,” but it has a long pedigree. See for example Albert Memmi's “Frozen by death in the Image of Third World Prophet,” *New York Times* March 14, 1971.

⁵ It is nevertheless surprising, given Fanon's writings about the changing relations in the family in *L'An Cinq* and also after much discussion (see for example the chapters of my Rethinking Fanon) that a new book (2012) *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the Emancipation of Algerian Women* by Neil MacMaster claims that such a thing as “Fanonist feminism” reproduces a discourse that “the essential being of women in a liberated society is to fulfill her domesticated destiny of wife and mother” (341). He mistakenly reduces Fanon's conception of revolution to a reaction to the propaganda and desire of colonial administration. And yet in contrast, historian Richard Keller has shown that after 1958, in other words at the very point that Fanon is writing *L'An Cinq* as a critique, “the minister of education ordered that all schools offer ‘a special lesson on France's work in North Africa’ that would emphasize ‘economic, social and human’ accomplishment—including the production of a modern medical infrastructure (Keller 157). Fanon's conception of the radical changes in attitudes to medicine and the radio can be seen as a response to French education propaganda. Fanon's writings have long been criticized by feminists as masculinist, and yet it is important to note, as Judith Butler does (226), that to understand “masculine violent fantasy as compensatory” suggests that Fanon “understands the fantastmatic dimension of a hypermasculism” and “as such ... does not serve as a moral ideal toward

I was reminded of this by Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh's recent book, *Language, Resistance and Revival: Republican Prisoners and the Irish Language in the North of Ireland*. The book shows that the men and women isolated in prison cells with nothing other than a blanket (they refused to wear the prison uniforms imposed under British state criminalization) were central participants in the Irish language revival in the North. By the 1970s the politics of language had become fairly peripheral to the military/political struggle led by Sinn Fein and Provisional IRA. But things changed as criminalization and the loss of political status led to long imprisonments. Reading Fanon in the cages, one prisoner recalls "we realized ... the central role of culture in reconquest of a country" (2013, 202). It was the prisoners' activity and the support for the prisoners in the community around the hunger strikes that led to the language revival as a central element of the mass ground up movement against the H blocks.

It is difficult to know beforehand when a new freedom movement arises, but after it comes to be, it becomes obvious that it has been brewing for ages, and rather than simply being reactive brings out new meanings. Rather than an expression of impoverishment and fragmentation and reduced to "little-known cultural treasures" (Fanon 1968 223), the revival of the Irish language became an essential element of a "fighting culture"⁶ best understood, Mac Ionnrachtaigh argues, "as an expression of reaction in the post-hunger strike conditions of intensive military occupation" (2013 199).

Rather than being viewed as a compulsory school requirement imposed from above by the church or state (as in the South), learning Irish became part of the living culture of the smash H block movement. Just as the prisoners' communication with community activists helped created a mass movement outside, Irish language became essential to communication in the spaces under intense military occupation inside and outside the prisons. As the prisoners in the H blocks put it, when all you had was a filthy blanket, the ability to communicate with yourself and with others in a language that was your own, and one not understood by the guards, was a liberating experience. The new movements revitalized the Republican struggle which in retrospect also reflected emergent divisions, not only between English and Irish language speakers but also within the vertical nationalist organization which conceived culture as a "minor element" to be used by a political party, while the actual democratic practice of community organizing where the Irish language was political and dynamic, driven by the popular struggle. It was in this context that Fanon's conception of a combat culture in contrast to more benign notions of cultural identity, becomes important.⁷

which the decolonized should strive."

⁶ For a discussion of Fanon's idea of a fighting culture see Gibson 2003.

⁷ Fanon helps us understand the psychology of the passionate defense of culture in the face of imperial power, but it is always the present condition that concerns him. He is, as Cherki puts it "a tireless militant for the idea of culture in motion and continually altered in new situations" (210). Thus rather than an inventory of the past, culture in motion becomes liberated from its historical subservience, in stark contrast to the promotion of any cultural essentialisms.

In a response to a question about how he came to Fanon, Mac Ionnrachtaigh (at a talk at Emerson College in Boston) said that Fanon was introduced to him by the prisoners—not the other way around.⁸ Mac Ionnrachtaigh, who came from a family of republican community activists—his father was interned without trial in the 1970s and brother was murdered in 1998—grew up in a republican neighborhood under the watchful eye of British army posts and on streets bordered by British army checkpoints. He was the first in his family to go to an Irish language school in the mid-1980s. An honest intellectual in Fanon’s terms, he conducted his research as an activist with intimate knowledge of the people involved as well as the atmosphere of violence and the tactics of the British whose response to mass movements was to encourage the militarization of the struggle.

I. Trauma and the needed second liberation

But the war goes on. And for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonist onslaught.
Fanon, “Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders”⁹

Would Fanon be surprised that now 15 years after the agreement in Northern Ireland,¹⁰ people continue to experience trauma and relive countless sufferings?¹¹ Neoliberal cost accounting finds an elective affinity between biology and pathologization as treatment for trauma is reduced to medication or self-medication and a private hell if the traumatized families do not undertake the burden of care. They become part of the unwanted, since the past is officially understood as something to move on from. Former leaders of the struggle make speeches on struggle holidays but are mostly keen to acquire the fruits of the deal. While the situation for many remains dire, the dream is to become part of “Northern Ireland PLC,” a branded public limited company, or to acquire a place on the board of a South African mining corporation. Not much new there.

⁸ Fanon helped legitimize his research—Of course there is some irony to this since for many years Fanon was not legitimate in universities, but we must recognize a change, even if that change comes with scholastic baggage.

⁹ Fanon concludes his first case with the remark, “On independence, I’ll take my wife back. If it doesn’t work out, I’ll come and see you again in Algiers.” Of course, Fanon was never in Algiers again, though he certainly wished to practice in that city after the war, and according to Cherki was interested in undergoing psychoanalysis.

¹⁰ The “Good Friday Agreement” (which included the governments of Britain and The Republic of Ireland in the agreement) recognized the legitimacy of political affiliation alongside civil and cultural rights, but contained no social or economic reforms, was approved by a referendum in May 1998 (born in the midst of the Celtic Tiger exuberance). For an analysis of neoliberalism and the Good Friday Agreement see Brian Kelley’s “Neoliberal Belfast,” <http://www.feargalmac.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Neoliberal-Belfast-Article-Format-Alt-Kelly.pdf>

¹¹ In “Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders” (1968 249-310), Fanon speaks to the trauma of armed occupation, to the constant fear created by the daily actions of military, paramilitaries and police that does not magically disappear after a ceasefire.

Nor is there much new for the masses of people, for whom politically organized and limited reconciliation commissions gloss over the underlining socio-economic and psychological trauma; which is why Fanon signals the need for a second struggle for liberation. The points of identity between Fanon and contemporary struggles appear over and over again as new generations face the consequences of the neoliberal pact (quite literally a pact between elites), such as occurred in South Africa and Northern Ireland. The call for the development of a real democracy in inverse relation to demonization of democracy haunts postcolonial politics. Simply replacing one species of man by another drives the kind of *resentiment* and narcissistic *comparaison* that Fanon discusses in *Black Skin White Masks* and propagates the reification Fanon described in the *Les damnés*. Colonialism thus bleeds into the postcolonial.¹² The attitudes and systems of thought promoted by colonial classifications (racism, classism, orientalism, sectarianism, tribalism and so on) are often uncritically if not unconsciously mimicked and promoted as truth because life for the majority is still organized through such categories. Ethnic identity remains powerful in Sub-Saharan Africa because it is a factor by which politics—and *thus* material life—is organized for the disempowered whether that is through identity cards or language as a test of authenticity. Thus, for example while Ubuntu in Southern Africa is an idea that encourages ideas of dignity and respect and of recognition and understanding, notions of community can also be exclusionary, ethnicized and indeed nativist. Fanon not only warns that custom represents the “deterioration of culture” but anti-colonial politics can also become nativized and reduced to the slogan “replace the foreigner.”¹³

Post-apartheid South Africa remains a highly politicized nation, which is often encouraged though not controlled by the theatrics of the political leadership. It is not surprising, for example, that the ANC youth leader and millionaire businessman, Julius Malema spoke to the miners after the Marikana massacre last year, using the rhetoric of nativism and socialism as he tried to channel the anger of the miners for his political needs. Abahlali echoes Fanon’s warning. Its members know the anger of the poor. But they see it turned against themselves and warns that it can be channeled in many directions. The xenophobic attacks of 2008 (which left 62 people dead) were first denied by the South African state.¹⁴ But Abahlali immediately responded. Their press statement, “Xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg,” confirmed what was taking place, and highlighted the important principle of the solidarity and unity of the oppressed in their organization. The statement was universal and humanist in the most radical sense of Ubuntu. It read: “Our struggle and every real struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off. An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they may find themselves.” (Quoted in Gibson 2011: 21)

¹² In his recent book *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* Derek Hook notes that “one cannot simply equate colonial and apartheid” since South Africa was already a postcolonial state free from imperial rule, and thus gives pause to maintaining that postcolonialism transcends “certain ‘colonialities’ (2012 10).” The same might be said of Northern Ireland.

¹³ In short culture, even that which has been central to the historical anticolonial movement, can become a fixed particular. The same can be said of the Irish language if that is divorced from the struggle for freedom. Similarly with forms of organization. This was Marx’s attitude to the First International after the Paris Commune. The ANC and Sinn Féin were vanguard organizations, but movements like Black Consciousness have also degenerated.

¹⁴ Indeed Michael Neocosmos’ Fanonian inspired analysis of nativism in South Africa (2010) indicates the myriad ways state actions and media create the ground for it.

Because shack dwellers are from many different backgrounds and histories, come from different places, hold different religious beliefs and speak in different languages, Abahlali had to encourage a *profound opening*, one that ensures that “the spirit of humanity is everyone.” Here is an expression of Fanon’s notion of a new humanism as a concrete universal, a humanism that emerges from new spaces out of place, reflecting an idea of nation not based on territoriality or indigeneity but one without borders and exceptions, one expressly in contrast to the exclusivity of European. It is a humanity then that is created not from treatises on the human but from the praxis of those considered surplus populations (to use an apartheid term). Zikode notes, implicitly addressing Fanon’s call at the end of *Les damnés* to work out new concepts:

The collective culture that we have built within the movement, that pride of belonging to this collective force that was not spoken about before, becomes a new concept, a new belief – especially as Abahlali in its own nature, on its own, is different to other politics. It requires a different style of membership and leadership. It requires a lot of thinking ... Therefore learning Abahlalism demands, in its nature, the form that it takes. It doesn’t require one to adopt some ideas and approach from outside ... We did not start with a plan – the movement has always been shaped by the daily activities of the people that make it, by their daily thinking, by their daily influence. This togetherness is what has shaped the movement ... [and] common sense that all are equal comes from the very new spirit of ubuntu (Zikode quoted in Gibson 2011, 200-1, my emphasis).

This is, I believe, a Fanonian political education.

A question I am asking, in other words, is how to approach Fanon today? Applying Fanon’s categories to new situations is valuable to a degree, but what does Fanon offer us? How does he actually get us to rethink our concepts as suggested by Zikode? In other words, a critic could have said in January 2011 in Tahrir Square that if you read Fanon, you know that the liberatory moment is going to be closed down by the military or the state and their backroom deals. You end up with a kind of ontological pessimism. We are defeated before we start. But the critic might add, “But look, the Arab Spring has failed; there has been little substantive change.” One could say the same about the long struggles in Ireland and South Africa. This lonely and cynical critic could point to the ANC and the IRA as organizations that have simply embraced neoliberalism for their gain. The same could be said of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and countless other parties of liberation. It is a vicious cycle. While our critic might be formally correct, the criticism is external and mechanical. It is almost like Sartre telling Fanon that negritude was a passing stage and he already knew the outcome or Fanon’s critique of the anticolonial intellectual whose thinking remains formalist. The consequence of such an *a priori* attitude is that the real movements and real experiences are elided, as history is preordained and the damned of the earth are expelled from it (Fanon 1968 169).

Fanon offers an entirely different perspective because he is in the revolts and because those involved in them open themselves up to something very new. As an honest intellectual (Fanon’s term), one has to be aware, or listen, or open one’s mind to what are the new beginnings.

Now, you could look at the situation and say, Fanon tells us to be very wary of all the social and political forces that stymie social change: religious elites, nationalist elites, military elites, regional elites, and the comprador nature of some of these elites and all the repressive ideologies that justify them. So, the question then becomes: how do you employ Fanon productively? You do not want to close down possibilities, but at the same time, you want to be wary of Fanon's warnings. But it is not good enough to have a series of *a priori* categories to say, well, this revolt will fail because it does not correspond with the categories or fulfill certain expectations, we have to be open to the *rationality of the revolts*. What do they tell us? How do they come about? Why have they come about now? In what way can one see them as new beginnings, a turning of a page, and the creation of a new historical moment, rather than a repetition of a neocolonial situation? If Fanon's thought is alive, it cannot be simply applied.

It is in this context that we need to think further about Fanon's call for complete decentralization as a suggestion that the party be disbanded. It is a philosophical question. There are moments when it seems that Fanon argues for a party to bring enlightenment to the masses. But he quickly reminds us that the people don't need to be school mastered. Writing of leaders, he critically uses the English word to "drive" as if the people need to be driven like a herd of animals. The Fanonian second liberation, in other words, suggests a different beginning framed neither by the state or party. The party model that had had been essential in many cases to end formal colonialism in the 20th century has proved detrimental to liberation (the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie). The autonomy expressed by Sinn Féin (which translates as "We ourselves") and the ANC represents an important moment of anticolonial organization "replacing a certain 'species' of men by another" (Fanon 1968 35) but the second liberation, then, suggests that a decolonized form of organization is connected with different notion of life and of being human.

The issue is not to simply pose social movements over a party form as an answer. There are myriad examples of mass movements becoming subservient to political organization just as the local movement becomes subservient to a centralizing nationalist party, but on the other hand we need to take seriously the importance of form to the space for radical democracy. As Zikode puts it to learn Abahlalism—to take seriously a new humanism—demands, in its nature, the form that it takes. Revisioning life "*does not exist* in a program which has been worked out by revolutionary leaders" which is then injected into the masses (Fanon 1968 203) but rather emerges from the active inclusion of those who have been excluded.

Perhaps in contrast to decolonization as an event expressed by universal suffrage, raising a flag or taking a seat at the United Nations, the second liberation is the continuation of Fanon's philosophical critique of de-ontologizing ontology and decolonizing the mind as a revolution, to use Césaire's word, informed to create ways of being human in the most materialist sense. The second liberation returns to the wish expressed in the penultimate sentence of *Black Skin White Masks* that "the world recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness" (1967 232), now mediated by the experience of the national liberation struggle. Still unwilling to jettison that dialectic of recognition he argues in *Les damnés* "philosophic thought teaches us that ... the consciousness of self is not closing the door to communication of experience" but "its guarantee" (1968 247).

II. The continuing violence

And yet to speak of Fanon and a radical humanism one cannot but mention violence. *Les damnés* opens with the idea of violence as an absolute, wherein human existence under colonialism is in fact nonbeing. Decolonization is equated with that nonbeing becoming historical. Violence is not a moment of colonial conquest but informs every relationship. Thus we can understand why there is a necessity of violence. But it is not a neutral instrument—it continues to haunt national independence. Fanon did not normalize violence, nor consider it therapeutic. Rather it was a problematic that had to be understood in all its elements—economic, political, social, geographical (spatial) and psychological. In other words, remarks Judith Butler (2008 225), Fanon does not “defend [violence] as a way of life and certainly not as a way of imagining the normative goals of a social movement.” In other words, even if we agree that Fanon’s thought is marked by a shift from the internal perspective of trauma to a critique of ideology (Bird-Pollan 392), revolutionary violence makes the issues of freedom and liberty of being and existence more not less problematic. And so it is not surprising that violence haunts the present, so that even dreams of liberation are deemed dangerous (and labeled reactionary, 3rd force etc.). And yet it should also be noted in this frightening context that new freedom movements continue to emerge and engage the Fanonian question of deepening national consciousness into a consciousness of social and political needs of being human (Fanon 1968 203-4). Such is the question of the Arab spring.

The threat of violence is often wheeled out to justify increased militarization, securitization and special limits of hard-won human rights. And yet Fanon’s insistence that we account for violence is to highlight the daily violence that becomes acceptable. For a large proportion of the world’s population the relationship to the nation-state, to its local representatives and boosters, let alone to regional and empire powers, is one of violence. The police do not protect, they are never there in response to murder, rape, or assault but appear only to keep the poor in their place—often includes forcing them out of the spaces they live in.¹⁵ When such scenes of violence are captured by social media it becomes a momentary scandal (like the factory collapse in Bangladesh). There might be an inquest, and yet the scandal is that for the majority the violence of exclusion and control, of order and suppression, are normal daily practices.

In other words, by gesturing to Fanon, I am thinking here of the experience of the majority of people, the contemporary damned of the earth—i.e. those who do not count—who are subject to the state’s force and daily reminded to stay in place. These are the uncivil and the dangerous, the criminal, alien and illegal, the unemployed and the uneducated, those who, from the point of view of political and civil society, do not really exist as fully fledged citizens or, to put it bluntly, do not exist as fully fledged human beings and simply are a threat.¹⁶ They are a threat. Often reduced to bare existence these people are often also viewed by the (civil society) left as lacking any social solidarity and seen as reactive and prey to reactionary ideologies and servile behavior. Thus we re-enter the Manicheanism so well described by Fanon, where the damned—literally the detritus of the postcolony—mark an important and seeming zero-sum challenge often expressed in spatial terms. In other words, “development” is against them and

¹⁵ Shack dwellers are moved to “housing,” which includes government “tin shacks,” often far from the urban areas (and means of subsistence, including employment, schools and hospitals as well as the communities of support in the settlements) recreating segregation.

¹⁶ The City of Cape Town “Open Streets” initiative to promote the use of roads and public spaces for people and without cars is designed for commerce and implicitly closed to the poor.

comes at their expense. Quite simply, whatever rhetoric to the contrary, it often means removal from urban areas tied to the suppression of popular local movements who question corruption and cronyism.¹⁷

The debilitating reality of poverty, inequality and oppression that Fanon described in the wake of independence struggles remains a constant even if the terms have changed in this neoliberal period. And just as people wondered what the struggle had brought in that earlier period, they have increasingly done the same in South Africa since 1994. At first people waited patiently, but the promises of liberation did not come. Intellectual sophistry does not mask the crudity of the situation, repeated over and over again, even if now notions of “development” are framed by social entrepreneurs rather than social engineers. Contemporary South Africa is degenerating into violence as it increasingly militarizes its police and security forces. The massacre at the platinum mine in Marikana last year, for example, where police opened fire, killing 34 striking miners, was the single most lethal use of force by South African security forces against civilians since the Sharpeville massacre of 1960s that was mentioned as an event of international significance by Fanon. Marikana was not an isolated event.¹⁸ It is not surprising then, that the state’s response to the increasing volume of protests across the country, many occurring in shack settlements, is violence alongside attempts to limit press freedom (through the government’s secrecy bill). But the struggle continues. For example, the connections between the miners struggle (who live in shacks atop the mine) and the struggle over place was not lost on a group of shack dwellers in Cape Town who occupied land a month ago and named it “Marikana” in honor of the miners’ strike, saying that they too were “willing to die for our struggle” (see Sacks, 2013b). “They have run out of patience,” as Fanon puts it, as residents are pepper sprayed, beaten and arrested while their shacks are illegally demolished. Illegal, that is to say, in terms of the South African constitution, a product of the struggle. This desperate willingness to risk everything—to die for the struggle—is in fact rational because there is literally no life, they insist, without human dignity.

And the struggle continues everyday in South Africa in the necessary revolts, which are not simply about service delivery, the lack of jobs, of houses, of electricity, and other human needs, about corruption and harassment, but also about the demand for recognition as equals. It is the hard work of second liberation, it is about life, not simply physical existence but *what it is to be human*.

¹⁷ Operation Murambatsvina (drive out rubbish) in which hundreds of thousands of people were forced out of their homes in Zimbabwe was just one an example of “urban cleansing” that occurs continentally.

¹⁸ The communities around Platinum mines are poor and the areas are ecologically compromised, but the communities are politically savvy, noting “the collusion between their traditional authorities and the mining corporations, between the local government and the mining corporations, between the politicians and the mining corporations” (Van Wyck 2013).

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