

The Pitfalls of South Africa's "Liberation"

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Abstract Six years after the end of apartheid there have been many changes, but little change in South Africa. Poverty and inequality seem to be increasing rather than decreasing. How were the dreams of freedom and social and economic equality so quickly dashed? Much of the answer can be found in South Africa's integration into globalized capitalism, yet pointing an accusatory finger at the IMF or the "West" does not allow us to consider the contested terrains of homegrown South African politics. In this essay I investigate the limitations of post-apartheid South Africa within the narrow confines of the anti-apartheid movement, particularly the absence of debate about alternative humanist futures. This methodological insight is suggested in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

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

Arriving at Johannesburg's airport is quite different from arriving at any other airport in Southern Africa. It is a Disneyland airport: postmodern, clean, and efficient. One leaves the terminal for a carpark full of expensive cars and White faces and travels to Johannesburg along a three-lane highway (a shock to someone coming south from Zambia where one judges a road not by width but by the extent of the blacktop and the number of potholes) lined by hi-tech companies, hi-security and hi-rental business and residential space.

Johannesburg is a different city by day than by night when the BMWs leave and it becomes an "African Town," but even when one arrives through the inner city suburb of Hillbrow during the day one sees the Africanization of Johannesburg's residential areas. Hillbrow, once solidly a White area, is now mainly Black, with a smattering of Whites, "Coloreds" and Indians, housing people who have "escaped" the townships, escaped rural areas, or are from outside South Africa altogether.¹ Though the Johannesburg inner city suburb, Hillbrow, for example, has experienced a racial sea-change over the past 20 years, the townships, those creations of apartheid—or more correctly of the colonial regime

1. When writing about South Africa one cannot avoid the language of race. Even with scare quotes we succumb. Does one say African to mean Black? Does one say Black and follow the old Black consciousness position of Steve Biko to include "Colored" and Indian? Readers should be aware of the problem and the ensuing confusion and not be satisfied by scare quotes.

(townships are not unique to South Africa)—have undergone little racial change. The spatial legacy of apartheid has shifted but has not been fundamentally challenged. Next to Sandton, where the rich White escapees from Johannesburg spread out in luxurious mansions (and where they want to move Johannesburg's central business district and stock exchange), is Alexandra, the cramped and overflowing African township. On Avis car-rental maps, international business travelers on their way to Sandton are warned not to use the Alexandra exit on the highway. They go directly from Johannesburg airport to the rich suburb, never seeing the South Africa of the majority.

There have been improvements in housing since the African National Congress (ANC) became the government in 1994, but the legacy of apartheid is palpable. The crude racial laws of apartheid have been abolished. Grand and petty apartheid that determined where people lived, where they worked, and how they were represented has been abolished. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for all its shortcomings, did make public the terrible legacy of apartheid: murders, tortures, beatings, and forced removals. These have all become part of the historical record. There is no going back. The homelands have been abolished. There is a universal suffrage, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and freedom of sexual orientation. There is the right to love whomever you want and to live wherever you want. Despite media hype about South Africa's new White poor,² however, South Africa remains a multi-racial, not a non-racial, society, where the correlation between race and poverty remains extremely strong.³ In a recent "Statistics South Africa," it was stated that 26.8% of Black households reported that children under seven years old were hungry and over a quarter of Black homes were shacks.⁴ My argument is that the ANC has failed in its attempts to alleviate poverty, not simply due to a lack of resources but also from specific policy choices. For example, the much-vaunted ANC program of building a million new houses has fallen short, not only in numbers and where the housing is constructed but also in the quality of housing. The government's desire to privatize the financing and building of new houses has, in many cases, simply exacerbated the dire situation of the poor. The new construction has passed them by or incorporated them into an ever increasing spiral of indebtedness.⁵

What has changed in the post-apartheid period is the expansion of a Black middle class. Though many middle class Blacks have moved out of the townships, the inequality in township housing is one indication of the enrichment of

2. For example, see Rachel L. Swarns, "Johannesburg Journal; South Africa's New Poor: White and Bewildered," *New York Times*, September 12, 2000.

3. Unemployment among Black South Africans has increased over the past five years. Over a third of Blacks are unemployed nationwide and nearly 50% in the Eastern Cape. Wages remain low, with most people earning less than 30,000 rand (less than \$5000). Education remains unequal with only small percentages of Blacks finishing high school.

4. See "SA Politics Moves Closer to Racial," *Weekly Mail*, August 4, 2000. < www.sm.apc.org/wmail/issues/000804/NEWS61.html >.

5. Water and electricity services are based on "cost recovery," which simply means no subsidies for poor communities. The lingering culture of nonpayment for services under apartheid would be broken by the whip of the free market, cutting off services and evicting nonpayers. On the other hand, there are some quite big houses in the townships. Though real estate is scarce, there are additions to houses just as one might find additions to a standardized council house in Britain after they were sold off by Thatcher in the early 1980s.

this small class. On the other hand, the shacks at Kliptown (where the Freedom Charter was signed) are devastating. Visibility is nearly nonexistent in the smokey environments inside and outside the shacks. Animals, not cars, park here and township wild pigs and other "domestic" animals walk along the rutted, muddy track. A shanty town with almost no amenities, communal porta cabins (one step up from the latrine) being the most modern convenience. The shacks are lean-tos made of corrugated iron sheets and, like a squatter camp, one can move the whole place.⁶ Is this South Africa in transition?

Six years after the end of apartheid, why has so little changed in South Africa? How were the dreams of freedom and social and economic equality so quickly dashed? The answer is complicated but is partly a result of the process of depoliticization in the negotiation process itself. That is taking politics out of the street to the green baize table, from the unpredictability of mass mobilization to calculable and instrumental politics of negotiation. Thus, the crisis that brought the parties to the negotiation table is "normalized" and "the struggle" against apartheid is rewritten as simply the means to a negotiated settlement. While apartheid South Africa was far from a closed economy with mining playing a major role, the end of apartheid (and with it the end of sanctions and trade boycotts) came at the very time the world was witnessed to increasing inequalities with pressures to maintain competitiveness based on lowering labor costs.⁷ In South Africa, despite the growth of a sizeable Black middle class, the GINI curve coefficients (a measurement of income inequality) have not changed with the end of apartheid. But the accusatory finger pointed at the IMF, World Bank, or the "West" also obscures important determinants in the contested terrains of homegrown South African politics. In the following, I take this latter insight a little further and offer perhaps a counter-intuitive approach. I investigate the problematic of post-apartheid South Africa within the confines of the narrowness of the anti-apartheid movement, particularly in its articulation

6. Racial/spatial/class divisions are not unique to South Africa (for the US, see Nancy Denton and Douglas Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), though they present a very long structural history there which predates 1948. Fanon (1968, pp. 37–39) famously spoke of the division of the colonial town in Manichean terms. But what is unique in South Africa is that the colonial world of compartments, described by Fanon, found its logical conclusion in apartheid. Apartheid has an even deeper legacy in the "rural" areas where the systematic appropriations of African lands which go back to 1913 were developed into a whole process of forced removals and creations of "native homelands" or "Bantustans" in the apartheid era. Often dirt poor, with its various "tribal" divisions enforced by apartheid segregations, rural South Africa confronts the post-apartheid government as an enormous problem which affects the majority of the population. Despite the ANC's program of land redistribution, it is a low priority and has not fundamentally challenged the power structures which include the so-called Traditional Leaders and Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party. In many cases the ANC has taken over, rather than challenged, symbols and systems of rural rule, thereby making problematic fundamental changes. South Africa is reproducing what Mahmood Mamdani calls a "bifurcated state," reforming only urban areas (though here not completely) and expanding civil society to urbanized subjects, while the rural remains under "despotic" rule. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 32).

7. Liberalization has increased rather than stopped capital outflows in the 1990s and at the end of the century. Hein Marias writes that South Africa's profile "resembles that of most developing countries: as a traditional commodity exporter and importer of capital goods and technologies." *South Africa: Limits to Change* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 122.

of alternative futures. This methodological insight is suggested in the work of the Algerian revolutionary, Frantz Fanon, to whom I now turn.⁸

Lazy Intellectuals?

In 1960, Frantz Fanon, then Algeria's representative to the provisional government in Accra, joined a unit reconnoitering the South Western borders of Algeria looking for infiltration routes through the Sahara. Fanon jotted down thoughts that would be developed in his final work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, the goal of which was "to put Africa in motion, to cooperate in its organization, in its regrouping, behind revolutionary principles."⁹ In those notebooks Fanon raised a number of issues that remain remarkably prescient. They include, on one hand, the impetuousness of the nationalist middle class whose eyes are fixed on the colonial power structure and, on the other, the idea of a small group of revolutionaries who keep their minds and ears open to new impulses and voices from below. In the vortex of this contradiction he writes of the "misadventures of national consciousness" and "the absence of ideology" in African revolutions.

Fanon's "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Spontaneity" and "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," included in *The Wretched*, represent a most serious

8. Frantz Fanon was born in Martinique, a French colony in the West Indies, in 1925. In high school he came under the influence of the negritude poet, Aimé Césaire, who was one of his teachers, but before finishing high school he joined the resistance to fight for the "Free French" and travelled to North Africa. Fanon would return to North Africa ten years later as the chief of services at Blida psychiatric hospital in Algeria.

While reading philosophy and politics (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre), he studied psychology at Lyon medical school after the war and defended his thesis in 1951. His first thesis, *Black Skin White Masks*, which was turned down by his academic sponsors, was published in 1952. Its central thesis, the "disalienation of the man of color," spoke directly to Fanon's experiences in Martinique and France and is in many ways autobiographical.

In late 1955, during the Battle of Algiers, he officially resigned his post at Blida hospital and publicly identified himself with the Algerian war of liberation. Forced to leave the country, he became an editor for the liberation front newspaper, *El Moudjahid* (many articles from the paper are collected in his *Toward the African Revolution*). In 1959 he published *A Dying Colonialism* which reported on the radical changes that the revolution had produced in Algerian social life. In 1960 he was appointed the ambassador of the provisional government to Accra, Ghana. His experiences in Ghana, as well as the murder of Lumumba in the Congo, and events in Algeria, provided the backdrop for his final book, *The Wretched of the Earth*. The work was finished after a "ten week eruption of intellectual energies" in May 1961, and he was reading proofs on his death bed in Washington DC by the end of the year. In late 1960 he was diagnosed with leukemia and he went to the Soviet Union for treatment. The Russians advised him to go to the United States. He resisted going to the US, and when he finally arrived the Americans did not treat him well. He was kept in Washington's Dupont hospital for eight days before being allowed treatment while being "debriefed" by CIA operatives. He died soon after.

A new biography has just been published by David Macey. A very good short political biography of Fanon by Emmanuel Hansen, "Frantz Fanon: Portrait of a Revolutionary," is reprinted in my *Rethinking Fanon* (Amherst: New York, 1999), pp. 49–82. Readers should also refer to *Rethinking Fanon* for a discussion of Fanon's reception in the US over the past 30 years.

9. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 177.

engagements with the dialectics of national liberation. His critique of the nationalist project and proclamation that "the single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" is strangely applicable to the ANC. Yet rather than simply shout "treason" at the ANC, I want to consider its logic in the context of the "absence of ideology" and the need to fill that void with a humanist project that begins from the lived experiences and needs of the mass of people. The use of the word ideology is complicated by the fact that, in South Africa, there were surely plenty of ideologies around from nationalists to Communists and Trotskyists and liberal democrats. By ideology I do not mean simply a reflection of the multi-class social composition of the anti-apartheid movement but as I believe Fanon is describing an expression of the power of ideas as an act of socially engaged critical thinking and self-reflection which can also become a force of change when it "grips the masses."¹⁰ Material force must be overthrown by material force, Marx argues, but Fanon, through the experience of the Algerian revolution, was well aware of the inequality of force and the power of ideas at historic moments of change.¹¹ Thus, by "absence of ideology" I take Fanon to mean an absence of a social vision, or a liberatory ideology.¹² By emphasizing the problematic of a liberatory ideology, and of the relationship between knowledge and action, Fanon understands how a powerful ideology is in determining the direction of the revolution. Ideology is what is needed to develop the openings created by social movements and to "invent" new souls. Thus I want to reconsider the "lack of an ideology" as a problem not of strategy, but of vision. My focus is not simply on the alienation of intellectuals from the "common people" (as Gramsci put it), which can take on an especially existential character in South Africa's racial politics, but in an anti-intellectualism that pervaded the anti-apartheid movement. This is especially so for the ANC and its ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), but it is also true of opposition groups such as the Pan African Congress (PAC), and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO).¹³

South African politics is complicated and nuanced. Hopefully, readers will forgive the flattening of some of these issues. My thesis is that the long and multifaceted struggle in South Africa, which raised many questions and contained many political tendencies, did not create a sufficient culture of discussion

10. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in Quintin Hoare (ed.), *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 251.

11. In *The Wretched* Fanon was prepared to take on no less an authority than Engels to make his point clear. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 63-64.

12. For more on this problem of ideology see my essay, "Beyond Mancieanisms: Dialectics in the Thought of Frantz Fanon," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4:3 (1999), pp. 337-364.

13. Thus, Thabo Mbeki's recent appointment of AZAPO's president Mosibudi Mamgona to Deputy Minister of Education is a tactical shift rather than a fundamental change in education policy. Despite its socialist rhetoric, AZAPO is a nationalist party, a mere shell of the Black consciousness philosophy developed by Biko. Mbeki has used the "race card," saying that South Africa remains a country of two nations, the rich White and poor Black. The rhetoric serves two purposes, to threaten White capital and placate Black activists. It expresses the "absence of ideology," as Fanon expressed it. Recently, Mbeki has had to tone down the rhetoric to placate White capital.

and political education¹⁴ and thereby, in Gramsci's terms, an ethical idea with enough power to challenge the dialectics of a limited transition within the context of a hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism and globalization. It is precisely this type of political education that was not undertaken.

Perhaps I am asking too much of a post-apartheid South Africa to develop an alternative scenario in the face of the ideological sea change reflected in the "Washington Consensus." My point is that despite the pressures from multinational capital, the present socioeconomic structure of post-apartheid South Africa is far from inevitable. It is often forgotten that the transition discourse is itself a part of an ideological terrain that promotes globalization and silences alternative paradigms. Continued optimism, therefore, about the benefits of that state's

14. There is a moment in any radical social movement when "political education of the masses is seen to be a historic necessity" (Fanon, 1968, p. 138). "[Y]ou'll never overthrow a terrible enemy machine, and you won't change human beings," argued Fanon, "if you forget to raise the standard of consciousness of the rank and file. Neither stubborn courage nor fine slogans are enough (Fanon, 1968, p. 136). Fanon's awakening to the vital role of 'political education' brings about a fundamental shift in his thought. It has been surprisingly underestimated by Fanon's critics. Political education at first means explaining to the masses the long-term objectives of the fight. It is not merely a question of strategy. The 'enlightening of consciousness' is not imposed from the outside, but comes into being as a new relationship between the intellectuals and the masses:

All this taking stock of the situation, this enlightening of consciousness, and this advance in the knowledge of the histories of societies are only possible within the framework of an organization and inside the structure of the people. (Fanon, 1968, p. 143)

Fanon introduces the question of political education in his critique of the nationalist bourgeoisie which creates an oligarchical government of privileges. Fanon quips that "public business should be the business of the public" and should be carried out on a "democratic basis," with the mass of people taking part in its running. Getting the people interested in running the economy can only be accomplished through political education. Fanon's ideal does not rely on propaganda—making the people think what the leadership wants them to think—nor on mere slogans repeated by the masses at large political gatherings. Instead,

Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand ... For if you think that you can manage a country without letting the people interfere, if you think that the people upset the game by their mere presence, ... you must keep them out. (Fanon, 1968, p. 189)

Fanon further claims that national production will actually rise, rather than decline, if the people take control: "The fact is that the time taken up by explaining, the time 'lost' in treating the worker as a human being, will be caught up in the execution of the plan" (Fanon, 1968, p. 192). The task of political education is not merely the practical administration of things or increased output. Political education is a humanistic enterprise where "treating the worker as a human being" and "raising the level of thought" is the chief determinant, whatever the production result. It involves a fundamental questioning and rethinking of every aspect of life, including ecological attitudes: "Perhaps it is necessary to begin everything all over again ... to re-examine the soil and mineral resources, the rivers ..." (Fanon, 1968, p. 100). Fanon is not proposing a "return to nature" but a questioning of how nature has been dominated detrimentally by the "economic channels created by colonialism." All this rethinking requires the involvement of the masses. Because its central credo is the self-activity and self-determination of the masses who understand their importance, "political education" is profoundly democratic: "The masses should be able to meet together, discuss, propose, and receive directions. The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves, and to put forward new ideas" (Fanon, 1968, p. 195).

institutional capacity building is misplaced. This overly technical (that is to say mechanical rather than human) approach to social questions has obscured the ideological subservience of trade unions and left intellectuals to capital and to the state. In other words, the institutionalization of the trade union has proceeded hand in hand with the economic liberalization and the globalization of the apartheid economy and has not resulted in significant economic redistribution or a fundamental challenge to the economic inequalities inherited from apartheid.¹⁵

The South African transition indicates the centrality of ideology and the development of a consensus as to what has constituted the "ends" of apartheid. It is an end that has brought little benefit to the majority of the population.

Missed Opportunities: Spontaneity and the Organization of Thought

Fanon criticized spontaneity not simply because it needed leadership but because it lacked an organization of thought, that is, a political program for the future. Though democratic forms developed in other anti-colonial movements in Africa, the political leaderships subsumed them under a central administration. Confronting this "iron law of oligarchy," Fanon argued for a vigorous decentralization and rigorous dissemination and flow of ideas between the organization and the people, a painstaking explanation and checking of policy and practice based on people's needs.

Without the swirl of ideas between spontaneity and organization the "art of politics" is transformed into "the art of war." What happens if we apply this to the South African townships in the mid 1980s?

[I]n every [locality] a government in miniature is formed and takes over power ... Each man or woman brings the nation to life by his or her action, and is pledged to ensure its triumph in their locality. We are dealing with a strategy of immediacy which is both radical and totalitarian.¹⁶

15. Trade unions were "legalized" under apartheid in 1979. The institutionalization of the trade unions in the ANC government has meant the co-option of COSATU leadership as a junior partner in government. The result of the institutionalization of the trade union and social movement leaderships in new regimes has actually weakened worker organizations. The democratic linkages between the shop floor and government have been weakened, thus dissipating the culture of shopfloor participation once held sacrosanct by the union "workerists." Additionally, a whole layer of experienced organizers has been seconded to government, creating new pressures and a significant gap between rank and file sentiments and union leadership. On present evidence, it is doubtful that strike action will be successful, but it is also likely that unions will become increasingly stratified and sectional, reflecting the divisions in the South African economy. Large technologically sophisticated companies exist alongside sweatshops and the informal sector. The institutionalization of the trade unions as representatives of the working class involves the "governing of their members," as O'Donnell *et al.* so aptly put it. Guillermo O'Donnell *et al.*, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 41. The apparent benefits of institutionalization (having the ear of the government) have obscured the processes of ideological subservience and trade union autonomy. Trade union involvement in the government has not resulted in economic redistribution nor a fundamental challenge to the economic inequalities inherited from apartheid.

16. Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

One weakness of local organization is the belief that the locale in question is the center of the world. The "nation" is proclaimed in each locality and with it a certainty that it can pass from "subject to citizen" without a transition, in one fell swoop. Fanon argues that the "mirage" of their "muscles' own immediacy"¹⁷ takes the place of a "chain of reasoning," so that in the local area there is a process toward authoritarianism, and concomitantly a narrowing of discussion. Rather than confronting problems through deepening the dialogue, tactics become strategy and theory is reduced to slogan and rhetoric. There is an unrealistic sense that the new society already exists and all that is needed is more action. Fanon's predictions were realized in South Africa. Rather than challenge this exhausting and increasingly dangerous activity, the ANC encouraged it, celebrating "ungovernability" at the same time that the movement was exhausted by multiple bannings, arrests and states of emergency.

State repression curtailed political discussion. It also vitiated political education. The struggle between state and social movements became a battle for political space where the brutality of the state was reflected back and internalized as a brutality of thought. The manichean analysis, which helped form so much of the first phase of revolt, proved limited. Because action based on reaction depends on the brutality of the enemy, a shift in the enemy's tactics toward negotiation necessitated a reevaluation that was in fact long overdue. This is when ideological weaknesses become apparent and are exploited by capital's power brokers.

The lack of critical thinking about their own actions expressed the ideological limitation of the mass movement. Unable to go forward, doubt developed. Militants looked for an analysis and an interpretation of where they had come from and where they were going, but the ANC, as well as other groups, such as the PAC and AZAPO, were never able to provide such an analysis. Rather than a reworking of theory on the basis of the new reality, the ANC's call to make the townships ungovernable was presaged on both the military and the negotiation option. Both encouraged psychological processes of disempowerment by articulating the stuff of politics outside the people's own activities. The hope that "the MK is coming"¹⁸ expressed another immediacy that blocked theoretical self-reflection. Consequently exhausted by endless activism, the direct democracy of the township civic and student groups¹⁹ easily degenerated into factions and

17. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

18. MK is the abbreviation for the ANC armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation).

19. The Black consciousness "Black Community Programs" were among the earliest of a new wave of civic organizations in the 1970s. Perhaps the most famous was the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization (PEBCO) led by a Ford Motorcar worker. It was formed in 1979 and spread quickly among African townships in Port Elizabeth. The dismissal of PEBCO's chairman from Ford, allegedly because of complaints against his activities with PEBCO, started a major strike. Alexandra continued to be an important center of political activity into the 1980s with Moses Mayekiso, a leader of the militant Metal Workers Union, playing an important role.

Most civics were grassroots organizations based around local concerns. The organization of squatters outside Cape Town, at Crossroads, was started spontaneously by women; other civic organizations were developed by political activists loosely associated with the ANC or BC. Civics organized rent strikes, consumer boycotts and worker "stayaways," and were strengthened through alliances with national youth and student

self-appointed leaderships that would brook no disagreement, producing what Fanon called a "brutality of thought."²⁰ On the other hand, the intellectual activity that had accompanied the incipient actions of the civics and unions was slowly diverted back into ANC strategies. Under the pressure of "unity" alternative ideas became dangerous.

In Fanon's narrative of decolonization, spontaneity alone is likely to exhaust itself. The movement's early euphoria dissipates as everyday resistance suffers the setback of no clear victory. Ruling class interests are forced to the negotiating table while the nationalist organization attempts to control the mass movement by telling them to keep faith with negotiations on one hand, and threatening them with a right wing coup on the other. The movement is quieted, called on only to support negotiations. Though there is a great deal of difference from being called on to make the townships ungovernable and being called on to march in favor of negotiations, both expressed the need to carry out ANC orders unquestionably:

The party leaders behave like common sergeant majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for "silence in the ranks." This party that used to call itself the servant of ... the people's will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control, hastens to send the people back to their caves.²¹

Former critics of the ANC played an important role in disempowering the people, arguing that politics should be left up to those who understood and thus echoing a line that the SACP had earlier pushed against the workers (and the "workerists"), namely, that they didn't understand the complexity of politics and without the party's leadership couldn't develop more than a trade union consciousness. In this latest phase former "workerist" intellectuals attacked their own legacy as well as the rich memory and culture of direct democracy developed in the 1970s and 1980s through the "relentless participation" of shopfloor participation.²²

(Footnote continued)

organizations. As united fronts, most civics made no distinction between township and work place struggle. This was a strength and a weakness. Boycotts were often enforced by students and youth who set up road blocs and took no interest in the specificity of workers' work place concerns. In some cases this led to divisions between the unions and student groups, but in many cases the civics were effective at winning concessions until the "state of emergency" in the mid-1980s.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

22. This was especially important to the development of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) where an important role was played by shop stewards. The phrase "relentless participation" comes from Dennis MacShane, Martin Plaut and David Ward, *Power: Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (South End Press: Boston, 1984), p. 66. Frank Meintjies and Mi Hlatshwayo argued in the anti-apartheid cultural magazine *Staffrider*, that "worker culture" expressed the "union's anti-hierarchical position thus recognizing the importance of every worker's experience." They insisted that workers' self-understanding was a gird against the ruling class "determin[ing] our thinking and actions." Frank Meintjies and Mi Hlatshwayo, "Worker Culture," *Staffrider* 8: 3/4 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), pp. 3-4. In this vein one should also note the worker poets. See the excerpt from "Black Mamba Rising: The South African Worker Poets in Struggle," in *TriQuarterly* 69 "From South Africa" (Northwestern University, 1987). The journal represents the rich cultural struggle against apartheid. See also Nigel Gibson, "Language, Culture, and Politics in South Africa," *Africa Today* 35:2 (1988).

Ideological Capitulation

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

Perhaps even more astounding than the ANC and SACP's elective affinity with capitalism has been the speed of the ideological capitulation of South Africa's critical left. To understand its marginalization, as well as its abandonment of its transformative project, it is necessary to retrace the end stages of apartheid.

It is at the point of apartheid's "opening" (which can be dated from the unbanning of the anti-apartheid organizations and the release of Mandela in February 1990) that the unpreparedness of the intellectuals became crucial. Apartheid's opening came almost the same time as the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. The collapse had a debilitating ideological effect not only on ANC and SACP supporters but more importantly leftists critical of "really on existing socialism." The accompanying "disillusionment," argues Dale McKin-

(Footnote continued)

For COSATU in government, see Jon Maree's "The COSATU Participatory Democratic Tradition and South Africa's New Parliament: Are They Reconcilable" (*African Affairs*, 1997). The shift from left critic to power player is epitomized by Stephen Gelb, who expressed the move in an article titled "There Is No Alternative ... for Now" (1991) and later became a co-author of the ANC's neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) agenda.

This recent poem expresses workers' anger at how the ANC government has quickly forgotten the forces that helped bring down apartheid and the vision of a socialist future:

How Soon You Forget

By Matserane Chimurenga Wa-Mapena
(Numsa shop steward Wits East)

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

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

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

ley, "combined with the new conditions of negotiation, made the movement more susceptible than ever to a strategic and ideological accordance."²³

A replay of Fanon's critique of the "laziness" of intellectuals that undergirds his analysis of the pitfalls of national consciousness became apparent with the collapse of Communism. The formerly critical anti-Stalinist left failed to reflect on the new situation. Instead, they swarmed to the SACP. One of the great ironies of the 1990s was the "the rapid movement into the SACP of a large grouping of leftists who were its strongest left-wing critics."²⁴ Too enamored with the structures of power, South Africa's critical Marxists were unable to develop their very reason for being, namely the capacity for critical reflection.²⁵ Coming from organizations and intellectual traditions that had formerly been at odds with it,²⁶ the SACP appeared to be the last place where left intellectuals had

(Footnote continued)

When we remind you of the mandate

You tell us we have no respect

When we speak about accountability

You talk of protocol

When we speak of report backs

You say time waits for no man

You say we push things too far too fast

When we remind you about the basics

You soon launch your own organisations

And you forget about your stubbornness

How soon you forget

When we speak of revolutionary discipline

You run to the press for defence

You tell us about your exclusionary freedom of speech

Mechanical discipline is what they have taught you

You talk of freedom of association

When we do the same you call us names and look

For unholy alliances

What do you really want?

You are ignorant of the gradual changes

You forget about the new constitution

You forget about people's government

You forget about feeding schemes for school children

You forget about free health care schemes

You forget about equal pensions and grants for the aged and the needy

You forget about Basic Conditions of Employment Act as amended

You run amok when employment equity is raised

How soon you forget

Tell me

When will you start remembering?

If you want to get a copy of the entire poem, send e-mail to <jennyg@numsa.org.za>.

23. Dale T. McKinley, *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Biography* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p. 105.

24. Mike Morris, "Dangerous Liaisons: Socialists and the SACP" *New Era* 6:1 (1991) (Johannesburg), p. 16.

25. See Andrew Nash, "The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* XIX: 1 (1999) (Durham, NC), pp. 79-80.

26. Recently the quasi-Trotskyist "state capitalists" (that is, the group that defined their existence by an analysis of "Communist" Russia as state capitalist) joined the SACP underlining the continuing dominance on the left of the SACP on the one hand and the

relevancy. The centrifugal pull of the independent left to the ANC and SACP after the end of apartheid included strident “workerists” like Moses Mayekiso, who had been instrumental in discussing a “workers charter”²⁷ as well as key leaders of civic organizations who had previously had an independent base. This shift came at exactly the same time that the ANC government was advocating a capitulation to capital.²⁸

While the disillusion and dissolution of the critical left may have seemed to come all at once, it had its roots in the ANC and SACP’s ideological dominance in the unions, the civics and youth organizations. Though these organizations continued to represent independent views, they were no match for the organizational power of the ANC/SACP which marginalized other

(Footnote continued)

ideological capitulation, or perhaps better the theoretical paucity, of the anti-Stalinist left, on the other.

27. Reflecting the ongoing tension between national liberation and socialism, a number of unions adopted the Freedom Charter as a “minimal demand” at the end of 1987 arguing that “apartheid and capitalism are two inseparable evils that must be smashed.” The National Union of Mineworkers resolution contended that the need to adopt the Freedom Charter as a minimal demand came from the “confusion that has arisen within COSATU and its affiliates regarding the definition of progressive organizations ... it has become imperative that those organizations should be clearly defined” (Resolution reprinted in *Azania Frontline* 21 (August, 1987)). The wording of the National Union of Metal Workers (NUMSA) was stronger:

Only the working class masses, under the leadership of organized industrial workers, can truly liberate our country from the chains of capitalist exploitation and apartheid oppression ... The national democratic struggle against apartheid oppression and the socialist struggle against capitalist exploitation are complementary parts of the uninterrupted struggle of organized workers for control over the industry and government of a liberated South Africa.

Moses Mayekiso, at the time a leader of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (which became part of NUMSA), was critical of the Freedom Charter on the grounds that it was not a socialist document. He saw the shop stewards as providing the organizational basis for a total change in society:

The Charter is a capitalist document. We need a workers’ charter that will clearly say who controls the farms, the factories, the mines. There must be a change of the whole society ... Through the shop stewards’ councils people are opposed to the idea that there will be two stages towards liberation ... It’s a waste of time, a waste of energy, and a waste of people’s blood.

Yet the Freedom Charter was adopted by COSATU, and the Workers’ Charter lost its power as an alternative becoming reduced to a discussion of workers’ rights in the South African constitution (see NUMSA Resolutions, 1991 at < www.numsa.org.za/congress/cong-wri.html >). And in the “Draft Workers Charter” put out by the left in the ANC in the same year, workers’ control of production was reduced to the old language of state ownership (see < www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/wcharter.html >).

28. The process was a fairly quick one. Whereas there was little said about the economy during the years 1990 to 1993, the period from 1994 saw an economic transition. By 1996, argues Hein Marias, “the ANC government’s economic policy had acquired an overt class character, and was unabashedly geared to service, the respective prerogatives of national and international capital and the aspirations of the merging black bourgeoisie ... It was a momentous shift for a party with a strong working class constituency ... But it also betrayed the ideological ambivalence of the organization” (*op. cit.*, p. 147).

discourses. Caught within this bind, the independent left remained trapped in the dominant discourse rather than finding a new element through an engagement with the contradictions and problematics of the revolt itself. The independents were unable to develop a positive program located in this movement through "the practice of the revolution," as Fanon put it. It was this estrangement that Fanon traced in *The Wretched*. Unless developed into a humanism, into a social and political program that addresses the elemental needs of the mass of people and includes them in the very discussion of the "nation," national consciousness becomes an empty shell, a slogan cynically repeated at rallies and anniversaries and the means for the advance of a new huckstering elite. It has been a trajectory all too often repeated in African revolutions, including post-apartheid South Africa. Instead of national consciousness becoming a basis for a new internationalism, we have seen, as Fanon warned, its degeneration and the development of new xenophobias, new regionalisms and new tribalisms, all in the context of a capitulation to the profit motive.

The misadventures of national consciousness are not inevitable, though their sources can be clearly seen in late stages of the anti-apartheid struggle. The ANC's call in the late 1980s to make South Africa ungovernable not only recorded what was already happening, it distorted and caricatured it. The daily mass spontaneous mobilizations, meetings and discussions were reduced to mindless activism in need of leadership. Yet these local movements also began to express the need for deep social changes. From the early 1980s on, in the factories and in the townships, a new kind of self-organization emerged. Among the youth, the cultural liberation that began with Black consciousness proved essential; in the factories experiences in shop floor democracy, which were helped by young White new-leftists, engendered programs in education, labor history as well as cultural expressions that saw the mushrooming of worker poets and myriad forms of history recorded from below. These experiments in democracy expressed a new social consciousness and an elemental humanism in Fanon's sense. In Fanon's schematic mapping of anti-colonial activity resistance is first determined by the colonizer. That is to say the actions of the occupier "determine the centers around which a people's will to survive becomes organized" (Fanon, 1967, p. 47). With mass action a fighting culture develops, not as a celebration of the past but as new forms of social activity, transforming the subjectivity of daily "ways of life" expressed in daily meetings, decisions, discussions and actions into a new way of life.

Issues such as education and language, as well as relations between children and adults, between men and women, and even questions of sexual orientation (reflected in South Africa's most liberal of Constitutions), which had never been an essential issue for any of the liberation movements, were discussed. Many hoped that such participatory democracy could become a basis of a post-apartheid society. Workers speaking for themselves, histories rediscovered, new forms of political education, new cultural productions such as worker theater and poetry, were challenges to the ANC. "Worker culture" recognized the importance of every worker's experience and expressed an elemental opposition to the White bosses determining thought and action.

The problem is that these expressions of direct democracy, however flawed and limited in their practice, were celebrated but not translated into a radical

rethinking of liberation theory that mapped out paradigms of social and ethical practices for a post-apartheid society. This ideological pitfall was exploited by the ANC which was able to capture these narratives and celebrate the idea of “people’s power” while remaining the self-appointed future negotiator. While it was hoped that such participatory democracy could become a basis for a post-apartheid society, it never became a challenge to political theory. In fact, the sphere of cultural production, not political theory, proved the best expression of this elemental democratic form. This problem was critically analyzed by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched*, who insisted that the meaning and challenge of these new forms of expression and imagination “cannot leave intact either the form or content of the people’s culture.”²⁹

Fanon viewed local expressions of direct democracy as both a strength and a weakness. Rather than blaming the backwardness on the masses consciousness, Fanon blamed the weaknesses of the movement on the anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals, and on the absence of political education in the programs of the political opposition. Too often celebrating the manichean certainty of the struggle, they failed to see its inner contradictions and trajectories. For Fanon the “strength of spontaneity” refers both to mass activity and its theorization, which helps the rebellion reach beyond itself toward a self-understanding: it is “the essence of the fight which explodes old truths and reveals unexpected facets, which bring about new meanings.”³⁰ Fanon argues that changes occur at the intersection of spontaneity and organization referring both to the framework and epistemic structures of intellectual communication and exchange, as well as to the resources the people draw on as they reflect on their revolutionary experiences.

One major problem is that of organization. In terms of creating a living organization (what Fanon calls “*parti organique*”), the profound problem is for intellectuals to understand their estrangement from “the people.” The problem is compounded by an anti-intellectualism expressed as a pseudo anti-elitism, that one dumbs down to the so-called level of the people rather than simplifying the language in which one speaks. At the same time, however, there is no reason to think that discussions of ideas only take place between intellectuals. The very movement of people and their multiple subject positions, as rural labor in the “homelands,” as migrants in the hostels, as workers, as unemployed, as township activists, etc., become fertile ground for exchanges of ideas. Such a subterranean movement of ideas often yields incipient organizations but these, more often than not, become reduced to strategy, dismissing discussions of ideas of liberation as “impractical”. Thus, it is not simply a question of organization, far from it, but the question of the type of intellectual sediment that remains after the death or absence of its original members or the defeat of a movement.

The idea of hegemony does not foreclose a discussion of a fundamental reorganization of society, but reconfigures such a discussion into the development of a “counter-hegemonic” project, or perhaps better, a principled humanist one. This discussion depends on a quest for universality and self-understanding. What Gramsci called “the philosophy of praxis,” or what Fanon called the “untidy idea” of self-determination is movement and goal, both a consciousness

29. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched*, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

full of contradictions and an absolute humanism. The committed intellectual is a product of this contradictory relationship.³¹

In one limited sense, a moment of praxis was reached in the mid 1970s. On the one hand, White leftists working with Black workers to form independent trade unions, on young Black intellectuals organizing in the townships and schools under the umbrella of Black consciousness. Both movements had significant anti-elitist and anti-Stalinist trends, as well as implicit ideas of a future society (including Biko's gesturing to Fanon's conceptions of a new humanism³²). But these ideas never became the basis for a new kind of organization. The necessity to think through what kind of society one supports does not happen without a conscious organization of thought, a philosophic clearing of the head and confrontation with past failures. Put simply, the transition in South Africa did not include a full discussion of such future scenarios.

31. See *ibid.*, p. 150, and Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 445. For a discussion of hegemony in the African context, see Teodos Kiros, *Moral Philosophy and Development* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

32. Fanon's idea of a "new humanism" criticized the "old" humanism of the European enlightenment for its racism (see *The Wretched*, pp. 43–45). The problem with understanding what Fanon meant by a new humanism comes not because Fanon had little to say on the subject (in fact he uses the term in different ways in all his writings), but because Fanon scholars have not had that much to say; notable exceptions are Lou Turner and John Alan, "Frantz Fanon: World Revolutionary," in Nigel Gibson (ed.), *Rethinking Fanon* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books), pp. 103–118; and Robert Bernasconi, "Casting the Slough: Fanon's New Humanism for a New Humanity," in Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean-Sharpley-Whiting and Renée T. White (eds), *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 113–122. One problem for Fanon's readers was Sartre "mised" us (as Bernasconi puts it) about Fanon's idea of a new humanism. Rightly critical of the old humanism as racist, hypocritical, and a practice of exclusion, Sartre makes nothing of the new humanism in *The Wretched*, concentrating instead on violence. Though Fanon's notion of a new humanism does change, what remains consistent is its dialectical and transcendental core. In other words, whereas in *Black Skin* Fanon emphasizes the lived experience of negritude as a basis for a new humanism, and in *A Dying Colonialism* it is the lived experience of the revolution—(he speaks of the new persona of revolutionary woman emerging without any precedent, from her own activity)—the new humanism is prefigured in the struggle and, as Bernasconi reckons "promises a refiguring of the relation of theory and practice" (*ibid.*, p. 121).

Table 1. Periodized and schematic chart of shifts in ideology in relation to economic forces

Time period	Ruling class emergent hegemony	Ruling class declining hegemony	Oppositional emergent hegemony	Oppositional declining hegemony
1948–1970	Afrikaner Nationalist National Party develops apartheid. Agriculture and farming interests form initial core	English “liberalism”	Mass movements against restrictive laws. Major division in Movement is between ANC’s alliance with “white” SACP and PAC’s more stringent Black Nationalism. Both are banned; both resort to “armed struggle”	Elite nationalism of the old guard of the ANC
1970–1983	Reform (verligte) apartheid results in legal reforms and the tricameral parliament. Industrial interests and new technocratic Afrikaners. Increasing free marketization without a change in regime	Conservative (verkampte) apartheid based on farming, mining, rent and state bureaucratic interests	Black consciousness—appeals to Africans, Indians, and Coloured as “Black.” New generation of young activists realized in Soweto 1976. White leftists excluded from BC help develop a trade union movement. Durban strikes 1973. ANC seen in UDF and development of COSATU	ANC powerful outside of the country is overshadowed by new generation
1983–1994	Reformists in National Party open up negotiations with ANC. (1) business interests, global capital (2) sections of National Party exemplified by Deklerk	Grand Apartheid (reform of pass laws); agricultural and labor intensive small and medium business based on cheap black labor		Black Consciousness on one side, “workerist” elements of FOSATU on the other
1994–1996	ANC government. Explicit class divisions in triple alliance veiled by “class compromise.” Shift to free market neo-liberal economy and opening up economy to globalization seen in RDP compromise	Social democratic/Keynesian welfare state for whites	SACP/COSATU left social democracy GEAR	Social movement and civics politics
1996–1999	Liberalization and fiscal conservatism; adoption of TINA. Transition promoted as polyarchy	National planning	??	Trade union institutional power RDP

Table 2. South Africa in the world economy—in and out of step with globalization

PERIODIZATION	WORLD	SOUTH AFRICA
1974/5–1979	Recession/attempts at restructuring through old social contract (labor/government agreements) and lay-offs in primary and manufacturing. Increasing inflation and increasing unemployment	Decreasing gold prices; increasing black worker militancy 1976: Soweto uprising. Government reforms—trade union rights. Increasing cost of apartheid
1980s	Increasing lay-offs. Core industries of Steel and Coal closed. Rust Belt USA; South Wales UK Massive worker give backs by US unions and lay-offs in auto-industry—automation Reagan and Thatcher assault on the unions. Defeat of Miners in Britain Structural Adjustment in Africa Thatcher's TINA is hegemonic as Trade Unions on defensive and Welfare states are privatizing	1980–83: Development of trade unions—(a) FOSATU, worker run industry organization (b) General Unions (SAAWU), (c) Black Consciousness unions (CUSA). Increasing number of boycotts and strikes 1983: Tricameral Parliament. Government attempt at inclusion of Indians and Coloureds fails. Development of UDF and NF to fight tricameral parliament 1984/5: New period of mass activity. UDF becomes hegemonic/development of "civics" and myriad local organizations Formation of COSATU and adoption of Freedom Charter. "Workerists" loose out to "charterists" 1987: Apartheid state legitimacy decreasing, increasing use of force and repression vs continual action and movement exhaustion Business meets with ANC; massive miners strike (no clear winner)
1989	Collapse of communism (state capitalism and direct planning of economy); celebration of civil society and the free market; "second independence" in Africa linked to end of Cold War	COSATU membership increasing Negotiations about negotiations. National Party apartheid state capitalism increasingly undermined
1990s	American hegemony; liberalization; post-Fordism	ANC notion of state ownership (RDP & Freedom Charter) challenged