Nigel C. Gibson

FANONIAN

PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo

Fanonian practices in South Africa

From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo

Nigel C. Gibson

palgrave
macmillan

UKZN PRESS UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL PRESS

First published in 2011 in South Africa by University of KwaZulu-Natal Press
Private Bag X01
Scottsville, 3209
South Africa
Email: books@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukznpress.co.za

ISBN: 978-1-86914-197-4 (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press)

Managing editor: Sally Hines
Editor: Mary Ralphs
Typesetter: Patricia Comrie
Proofreader: Lisa Compton
Indexer: Abdul Bemath
Cover design: publicide

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder of the photograph of Frantz Fanon reproduced on the cover of this book.

First edition: 2011

Printed and bound by Interpak Books, Pietermaritzburg

Published in 2011 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States – a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN: 978-0-230-11784-6 (Palgrave Macmillan)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Abbreviations

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

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our struggle continues.

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

S'bu Zikode
Abahlali baseMjondolo

Preface and acknowledgements

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

— Frantz Fanon, Letter to Roger Tayeb, November 1961

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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