

pretations of the transition and how this can be bridged.

Overall the publication is an important and stimulating contribution to the scholarship on South Africa's democratic transition. Notwithstanding its theoretical approach to the topic, it should be useful for a wide spectrum of readers who are interested in the evolution of South Africa's body politic, as it engages across the academic, activist, policy and broader civil society divides. Habib's solutions to the challenges afflicting South Africa today may be interpreted by some critics as simplistic, but he aptly demonstrates his astute knowledge of the topic through thoughtful and thought-provoking analysis. His book is definitely a significant analytical contribution to the body of literature on South Africa's two-decade long political journey since its first democratic steps in 1994.

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Gibson, Nigel, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press 2011, 312 pp.

Frantz Fanon, the Algerian theorist of revolution and social change, continues living through his profoundly luminous work that remains influential to the thinking and actions of many a people across the world even today.¹⁾ In *Fanonian Practices in South Africa* (2011), which comprises an introduction and five chapters, Nigel Gibson grapples with the important question of the relevance of Fanon's thought, 50 years after his death in 1961, to the South African situation especially from the time of Steve Biko to the time of the birth of the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali) in Durban on 19 March 2005. Gibson acknowledges that the idea of *Fanonian Practices* is not limited to South Africa but relevant also for other African countries. Elsewhere, Fanon's ideas have been exported to Black theology of liberation by scholars such as James Cone in the United States of America (USA)²⁾ and Paulo Freire in Latin America.³⁾

In chapter one, Gibson focuses on Biko's re-creation of *Fanonian Practises* in contemporary South Africa. As Gibson rightfully observes,

Biko's *Fanonian Practices* are a direct result of the influence of Fanon's conclusion in his *The Wretched of the Earth* that "the working out of new concepts comes from a dialogue with common people" (p 43). Given that in South Africa, the *apartheid* regime banned anything that promoted political radicalism, especially Marxism, Fanonian ideas came to Biko and the emergent Black Consciousness movement as institutionalised among others in the South African Students Organisation (SASO) "through the writings of emergent American Black theologians, such as James Cone" (p 44). Unlike certain critics' ideas of Fanon as a philosopher of violence, Black theology's emphasis on Fanon's ideas of self-consciousness, struggle and liberation, had profound influence on Biko's thought.⁴⁾ Yet, besides the aforementioned ideas, which Biko adopted from Fanon, Cone's critique of mainstream Christianity also influenced Biko. As Gibson notes, Biko like Cone, "recognised that Christianity was an effective tool for mental enslavement" (p 45) and was therefore against Christian pacifism. This does not mean that Biko was an atheist or anti-Christian as he saw in the personage of Jesus a positive "fighting God"⁵⁾ for the cause of the poor and the oppressed. What Biko actually criticised was the exploitative and oppressive *apartheid* regime in South Africa.

The other Fanonian practice in Biko's philosophy that Gibson discusses in his chapter one is culture. Gibson notes that while the historical contexts of Fanon and Biko were different, the latter agrees with Fanon that African cultures that were "battered out of shape by settler colonialism" (p 51) through Western education were internalised by Black students. For Gibson, as for Fanon, such education betrayed the spirit of Black critical consciousness, national consciousness, solidarity, and self-becoming. Taking it from Fanon's concept of "national culture" and Biko's "authentic culture", Gibson is careful to point out that there is need for a "return to the native land"⁶⁾ or "to the source".⁷⁾ For him, the return, however, requires a "mental liberation from all the inferiority complexes that had been produced from years of living in apartheid South Africa" (p 52). This return was necessary for South Africa to reverse poverty and destitution which Biko believed were "not endemic to Africa but a product of colonialism and apartheid" (p 52).

Chapter two takes up the issue of "the pitfalls of South Africa's liberation". Gibson highlights positive changes that have occurred in contemporary South Africa. Yet though giving credit to the African National Congress (ANC) for ending "the crude racial laws of apartheid"

and ushering in the new democratic Constitution in 1994, Gibson blames the same government for having short-changed its people. The "exclusivity of heavily guarded colonial spaces that Fanon describes in his *Wretched* seem to have increased since ANC came to power" (p 72). Racial classification has not been abolished with "gated communities and secure shopping and entertainment centres now being the new Manichaeian divides ... that keep the poor people out" (p 72). In fact for Gibson, "post-apartheid South Africa has created more *poverty* than anything else"; hence has failed to liberate the people in Fanonian (and Bikoan) sense. Yet, while we agree with Gibson that most of the post-*apartheid* South Africans have become even poorer than before, we feel that not only the ruling South African government should be held responsible. This is because in post-*apartheid* South Africa, the White minority and a few Black elites, *and not government*, have remained at the helm of the country's economy. As far as we can tell, only political power and not economical power was transferred to the ruling government in 1994: the independence was not complete in the Fanonian (and Bikoan) sense. This partly explains why the majority have remained poor and even more others fell into abject poverty. Granted, this entails that Gibson's argument on runaway poverty in post-*apartheid* South Africa could have been enhanced by critiquing both the ruling government and the minority elite as well as the imposed International Monetary Fund/World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1990s that widened the rift between the poor and the rich.

Gibson's chapter three is an extension of his chapter two. It further explores the pitfalls of South Africa's liberation in terms of new struggles that continue to emerge from within the marginalised group to confront and challenge the pitfalls and the elite group. The chapter is in fact a critique of post-*apartheid* South Africa using Fanon and Marx's humanism. For Gibson, "both Marx and Fanon pose a theoretical challenge and an ideological alternative to the existing (bourgeois and elite) transition" (p 112) and to achieve "new humanisms" that seriously consider the plight of the poor. Based on our experiences in South Africa, this observation by Gibson is meticulous and worth seconding. It clearly depicts the situation in post-*apartheid* South Africa where life in the urban areas, for example, is 'a tale of two cities'. For Gibson, following Fanon and Biko, inequalities between the poor and the rich as observable in post-*apartheid* South Africa should be addressed dia-

lectically and as a matter of urgency.

In chapter four as in chapter five, Gibson concentrates more on the "emergent grassroots movements among the poorest", movements that also employ Fanonian thought in many ways to critique the idea of liberation and freedom in post-*apartheid* South Africa. In these two chapters, Gibson gives the central focus to Abahlali baseMjondolo which has become the "largest and most sustained grassroots movement of the poor" in post-*apartheid* South Africa. Gibson should be applauded for observing that the birth of the new shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali is "unfinished struggle for freedom" (p 144) by the poor, particularly their right to decent housing. Truly speaking, the problem of housing remains a thorn in the flesh for both the rural and urban dwellers. For scholars such as Hender⁸⁾ and Mabin,⁹⁾ the housing problem though not peculiar to South Africa is exacerbated by the sad history of *apartheid* and complex resource distribution in post-*apartheid* South Africa that have created even a wider gap between the rich and the poor. Yet, Gibson (pp 145-6) is convinced that the present government is fully responsible for all the problems (including housing) that haunt contemporary poor South Africans. These differences in opinion clearly testify that the poverty problem in post-*apartheid* South Africa is complex to deal with though Gibson (p 157) sees grassroots movements such as Abahlali as the most appropriate way to address it.

Gibson's book is theoretically rich and relevant *par excellence* to those interested in the geopolitics/social movements in South Africa. But it fails to provide all the necessary evidence and empirical data that the readers expect in such a volume, for example statistical figures and other evidence to document xenophobia, the impact of International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies and land distribution in post-*apartheid* South Africa to enliven the themes and substantiate arguments that run throughout the book.

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Endnotes

1. Fanon, F (1967), *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press (French original 1952); Fanon, F (1968), *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove

- Press (French original 1961).
2. Cone, J (1970), *A Black theology of liberation*. New York: Orbis.
 3. Freire, P (1970), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum: New York: Continuum.
 4. Biko, S (1978), *I write what I like*. London: Heinmann, p 68.
 5. *Ibid*, p 94.
 6. Césaire, A (2001), *Notebook of a return to the native land*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press.
 7. Cabral, A (1974), *Return to the source*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
 8. Hendler, P (1991), "The housing crisis", in Swilling, M, Humphries, R, and K Shubane (eds), *Apartheid city in transition: Contemporary South African debates*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
 9. Mabin, A (1992), "Dispossession, exploitation and struggle: An historical overview of South African urbanisation", in Smith, E (ed), *The apartheid city and beyond: Urbanisation and social change in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Filatova, Irina and Davidson, Apollon, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball 2013, 568 pp.

This is an important book that weaves together diverse strands of South African and Russian history, focusing on the ideological era in which Russia became a pivotal and global political player. The vast historical account begins in the pre-colonial era and cuts through some of the big themes in history, including among others the Anglo-Boer War, the revolutionary triumph of the Bolsheviks, the two world wars and the fall of *apartheid*.

Filatova and Davidson begin their ambitious study with the arrival of the first Russian *émigré*, Johannes Swellengrebel, who set foot on the Cape shores a few decades after the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck. Then follows a detailed treatment of Russian expeditions to the Cape of Good Hope under the orders of Catherine the Great, who reigned from 1762 to 1796. Historical accounts indicate that there was Russian scholarly interest in the affairs of the Cape from a very early stage, with travellers making astute observations about social and cultural life in the colony, including the practice of slavery and per-