

**UKZN**

**Ideology and agency in protest politics:  
Service delivery struggles in post-apartheid South Africa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

My aim in this dissertation is to explore the manner in which protest leaders in the post-apartheid context understand themselves and their actions against the backdrop of the socio-historical, political and economic conditions within which protests take place. The aim is to contribute to the debate around the nature of the challenge posed by protest action to the post-apartheid neoliberal order. The study uses an actor-oriented ethnographic methodology to examine at close range the nature of the protest movement in working class South African townships focusing on the so-called service delivery protests. In the quest to understand the action, forms of organisation and ideologies characteristic of the protests, and their significance for post-apartheid society, I use concepts and insights from the literature on social movements, discourse theory and, in particular, Gramsci's ideas on hegemony. The latter helps me to define and assess the threat posed by the protests to the dominant order which I characterise as neoliberalism or neoliberal capitalism. The conclusion that I come to is that the protests are best understood in the context of the transition from apartheid to democracy: its dynamics and its unmet expectations. They represent a fragmented and inchoate challenge to the post-apartheid neoliberal order. Their weakness, I argue, partly derives from the effects of the demobilisation of the working class movement during the transition to democracy. It will take broader societal developments, including the emergence of a particular kind of leadership and organisation, for the protests to pose a serious challenge to the present order. The experience of the struggle against apartheid suggests the necessity of a vision of alternatives to inspire, shape and cohere struggles around everyday issues and concerns into struggles for radical society-wide alternatives. Protest action was linked to imagination of a different way of doing things and organising society. Without this link, it is likely that the protest movement will be increasingly isolated and contained with some of its energy used negatively, for example, in populist chauvinism, xenophobic attacks, mob justice, and other forms of anti-social behavior that are becoming a worrisome feature of post-apartheid society. Nonetheless, it provides hope and the foundation for a different future.

## DECLARATION

As the candidate's supervisor I have/have not approved this thesis/dissertation for submission.

Date:

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## **PREFACE**

The empirical research described in this dissertation was carried out in the School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban, from August 2009 to May 2010 under the supervision of Professor Patrick Bond and Dr Richard Bullard.

This research study represents original work by the author and has not otherwise been submitted in any form for any degree or diploma to any tertiary institution. Where use has been made of the work of others it is duly acknowledged in the text.

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Trevor Ngwane

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# LIST OF CONTENTS

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Declaration	3
Preface	4
List of contents	5-8
Acknowledgements	9
Abbreviations	10
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>11-22</b>
1.1 The working class character of the protests	12
1.2 Periodisation of post-apartheid struggles	15
1.3 Rationale	19
1.4 Scope, research questions and methodology	20
1.5 Limitations of the study	21
1.6 Summary and chapter layout	21
<b>Chapter 2: General literature review</b>	<b>23-35</b>
2.1 Dynamics in societies in transition from dictatorship to democracy	24
2.2 Activation of historical agency	25
2.3 Marx's method and theoretical vision	26
2.4 Social movement theory	27
	5

2.5 The need for an alternative vision and discourse	31
2.6 Conclusion	34
<b>Chapter 3: Review of South African literature and theoretical framework</b>	<b>36-50</b>
3.1 The proliferation of protests in post-apartheid society	38
3.2 The political economy of transition	40
3.3 History of demobilisation of the internal anti-apartheid movement	42
3.4 Democracy and development	45
3.5 Protests, the development of oppositional knowledge and counter-hegemony: Towards a theoretical framework	48
3.6 Conclusion	50
<b>Chapter 4: Methodology</b>	<b>51-61</b>
4.1 Proximity and distance between researcher and researched	52
4.2 Interviews	54
4.3 Observation	57
4.4 Participant observation and autobiography	58
4.5 Primary sources	59
4.6 Secondary sources	60
4.7 Data analysis	60
<b>Chapter 5: The people and places that protest</b>	<b>62-81</b>
5.1 Comrade Martha Mbatha	62
5.2 Last outpost: The Landless Peoples Movement in Protea South	62

5.3 Comrade Mavis Gwala	64
5.4 The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee	65
5.5 Comrade Sipho Matlala	67
5.6 Homicide in Harrismith: The 2004 Intabazwe protests	68
5.7 Comrade Jacob Mbatha	73
5.8 Victory in Khutsong	73
5.9 Comrade Sandile Sithole	77
5.10 Balfour burnin'	77
5.11 Conclusion	79
<b>Chapter 6: Factors behind the protests</b>	<b>82-94</b>
6.1 The (anti-) apartheid inheritance	83
6.2 Poor services	87
6.3 Housing	89
6.4 Lack of accountability of local government	90
6.5 Organisation of the protests	92
6.6 Conclusion	94
<b>Chapter 7: The impact and significance of the protests</b>	<b>95-107</b>
7.1 Is the ANC losing support?	95
7.2 Achievements of the protests	97
7.3 The recovery of agency	99

7.4 What type of development?	103
7.5 A movement for counter-hegemonic change?	106
<b>Chapter 8: Autobiographical account</b>	<b>108-124</b>
8.1 Methodological remarks	108
8.2 Birth, family, study and work	109
8.3 Involvement in labour, township and socialist politics	114
8.4 Another world is possible	119
8.5 Concluding remarks	122
<b>Chapter 9: Summary, discussion and conclusions</b>	<b>125-138</b>
9.1 Summary of discussions	125
9.2 From demobilisation to remobilisation and renewal	127
9.3 Hegemony and the role of movement intellectuals	130
9.4 Youth and the future of protests	133
9.5 Socialist alternatives and the pedagogy of counter-hegemony	135
9.6 Scope for further research	136
9.7 Conclusion: Transcending capitalism	137
Bibliography	<b>139-159</b>
Appendices	<b>160-166</b>
Appendix 1: Interview schedule	160
Appendix 2: List of interviews	165

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I dedicate this thesis to all my respondents whose stories made this possible, my comrades in the APF, SECC and SG and to the memory of the late Comrades Bongani Lubisi and Bongani Shingwenyane both members of the SG. Aluta continua!

## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme
LPM	Landless Peoples Movement
MDF	Merafong Demarcation Forum
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
RDP	Reconstruction and development programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SECC	Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee
SG	Socialist Group
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
UDF	United Democratic Front
YCL	Young Communist League
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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Protests are the fly in the ointment of the “new” democratic South Africa. Frequent militant and sometimes violent social outbursts sit oddly with the image of the idyllic rainbow nation that many imagine emerged with the demise of apartheid and the transition to a free, non-racial society.<sup>1</sup> The remarkable rise in the number of protests has generated a growing literature on the subject (e.g. Alexander, 2010; Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010; Beinart and Dawson, 2010; Booysen, 2007 & 2009; Langa and von Holdt, 2010; Phokela, 2010). The protests underline the freedom of expression people enjoy in post-apartheid society, but they also corroborate the accusation that all is not well with the post-apartheid order (Bond, 2010a; Marais, 1998; McKinley, 2006).

There is no general consensus on the overall significance of the protests for post-apartheid society. This is a result of different theoretical and political approaches to the subject, as well as the relative novelty of the phenomenon. Research suggests that the highest number of both protests and strikes in South African history occurred in the year 2010 (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010; Ceruti, 2010b). This is history still in the making. This dissertation seeks to reflect on the general significance of the protest movement through consideration of popular forms of resistance that have emerged in post-apartheid society, in particular the “service delivery protests”, and secondarily the “new social movements”. The study considers the relevant literature and analyses data generated from interviews conducted with protest leaders in four research sites where protests have occurred, namely, Soweto, Harrismith, Khutsong and Balfour. It focuses on agency, ideology and the material conditions associated with the protests.

In the study it is suggested that apartheid bestowed the democratic order with a legacy of social (racial, class and gender) inequalities and an unevenly developed economy (Bond, 2000), and that these structural factors are important in understanding the protests. Social movement theory facilitates the study’s quest to understand how agency is activated, that is, the factors

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<sup>1</sup> See Tutu (1994) for the idealization of South African society as the “rainbow nation”.

that move protesters into action and how they understand and justify their own actions (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a; Della Porta and Diana, 1999; McAdam, *et al.* 2001). Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is used to understand contentious agency as a component of the class struggle. He was concerned with the development of a "counter-hegemonic" project that could unite social forces in the quest to effect fundamental social change (Gramsci, 1971). Neoliberal hegemony, defined as the unfettered dominance of the power of the global markets, is seen by some as a major factor in the failure of the post-apartheid state to "deliver" social and economic goods that can improve the lives of ordinary people in post-apartheid society (Bond, 2000; Ruiters, 2005; McDonald and Pape, 2002). Neoliberalism, closely associated with "globalisation" processes, has entrenched rather than removed uneven development and inequality in post-apartheid society.

The "new social movements", that is, organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) that emerged around the year 2000 in South Africa, have been projected as a bane to neoliberalism (Desai, 2000b; Desai and Pithouse, 2004), but others have questioned the effectiveness of this challenge and whether indeed some protests can be considered to be anti-neoliberal (Sinwell, 2010a), or even progressive (Bomke, 2010a and 2010b). This has provoked rebuttals in defence of the movements' anti-neoliberalism (Mngeni, 2010; Tissington, 2010). This study contributes to the debate by focusing on how leaders of community protests understand the place and value of their own struggles, and on that basis reflects on the nature of the challenge posed by the protests to neoliberalism. It borrows from discourse theory to explore the extent to which the post-apartheid protest movement challenges the dominant hegemony in action and in words because opposition does not only happen in the street but "also occurs in continuous contests over public discourses and their multiple meanings" (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 190).

### **1.1 THE WORKING CLASS CHARACTER OF THE PROTESTS**

It is necessary to define and clarify the use of the concept "working class" because it is central to the argument here. Marx (1970b) classically defined the working class or proletariat as a social category that has nothing to sell but its labour power. The premise of the study is that

protests and strikes are an expression of the organic capacity of the working class to engage in collective action and organisation that can effect fundamental change because of its historical and structural location in capitalist society (Grossman, 1985; Marx and Engels, 2005). This premise is at the centre of practical Marxism but the advent of “globalisation” and the changes that it engenders has raised new questions and new difficulties including the argument that the changing composition of the working class has greatly reduced the scope and applicability of this notion. It has been suggested, for example, that labour market bifurcation in South Africa has led to the fragmentation of the working class creating divisions between employed, unemployed and precariously employed workers (Moody, 1997; Munck, 1999; Standing, 1999). This has led to the argument that: “In Marxist terms, the [economic] growth path had the consequence of putting the unemployed, most of whom were unskilled and inexperienced, in an objectively different relation to productive forces than the employed” (Seekings and Natrass, 2005, p. 294). This raises the question of whether: “Can we still speak about THE working class in South Africa?” (Ceruti, 2010a, p. 78).

Using the results of a survey conducted in Soweto, Johannesburg, and Marx’s writings on the reserve army of labour, Ceruti (2010a, p. 78) notes that: “The different worlds of work mingle at the household level through mutual, if strained, support, in most households creating a bridge between the employed and unemployed.” Basing her position on Marx’s classic definition of the proletariat, she concludes that:

In Marxist terms, what the long-term unemployed share with workers is not whether they have sold their labour power or on what terms, but that they have nothing else to sell, whether they are near or far from labour markets and regardless of how appropriately embellished their labour power may be (Ceruti, 2010a, p. 81).

This formulation caters for what some researchers have noted as the rapid formation of an underclass in South Africa which they suggest is an important factor in the rise of the service delivery protests (Langa and von Holdt, 2010).

Moving from the bottom to the top of the structure of the working class we find analysts who assert that unionised workers constitute a labour aristocracy in the light of rising

unemployment and precarious forms of employment and hence the interests of these privileged workers diverge significantly from the rest of the class (Lehulere, 2005; Seekings, 2004; Webster and Von Holdt, 2005). COSATU's membership increasingly consists of workers from "skilled, supervisory and clerical categories" such as "teachers, actors, soccer players, pilots, bank officials, managers, magistrates, police officers and nurses" (Buhlungu, 2010, p. 106). These workers are viewed as less militant and less likely to exhibit solidarity with the rest of the working class (Lehulere, 2005).

The 2007 and 2010 public sector strikes in South Africa belie this claim as: "The teachers – those professionalised strikers in the public sector who are widely identified as middle class – were the only sector of the public strikers able to achieve a complete work stoppage, sometimes using extremely unprocedural means such as forcibly closing schools" (Ceruti, 2010b, p.12). In this dissertation the various changes in the world of work that have led to changes in class composition are noted, but without, as some commentators have done, detracting from the usefulness of Marx's classical definition of the working class that allows the inclusion of the employed, the unemployed, the precariously employed, as well as unionised skilled and professional workers.

It is important to note that the worker is a worker not only at work but also at home, as Grossman (1985, p.14) observes:

It is because of the oppressive conditions created by the process of capital accumulation under which the majority of the working class lives, and the exploitative relationship embodied in that process of accumulation, that the struggle of workers arises in the first place.

Capitalism creates both the people it employs and those that it chooses to leave unemployed. The worker, Marx observed, is free to work or to starve. All workers, employed and unemployed, and precariously employed, are victims of capitalism and thus share a common enemy and interest. But leadership and organisation is still necessary to organise political action and unity founded on this reality.

\*

We now turn to clarifying other terms that will be used frequently in this dissertation. The “new social movements” are the “single-issue” campaigning organisations that emerged around the year 2000 such as the TAC, APF, LPM and others that organised protests and demonstrations in support of their demands (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a). These are viewed as distinct from the “service delivery protests” or “local political protests” that occur in working class communities and that are organised by less durable or identifiable organisations (Booyesen, 2007; Alexander, 2010). The dissertation focuses on the latter because they have not been as extensively researched as the new social movements (see for example the seminal study by Ballard, *et al.* (2006a). When the local community protests dramatically erupted in Diepsloot and Harrismith in September 2004, they were labeled “spontaneous” protests as everyone grappled with their apparent sudden appearance or ferocity and the scant information available around their organisation; however, they are now generally referred to as the service delivery protests.

Ballard, *et al.* (2006a, p.3) define social movements as “politically and/or socially directed collectives, often involving multiple organisations and networks, focused on changing one or more elements of the social, political and economic system within which they are located”. This definition connects the discussion in this dissertation to social movement theory and can be applied to the different “waves” or “upsurges” of protest that have occurred at different periods in the post-apartheid era (Booyesen, 2009, p. 106).

## **1.2 PERIODISATION OF POST-APARTHEID STRUGGLES**

The new social movements are generally regarded as having emerged round about the year 2000 (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a), while the year 2004 marks the dramatic appearance of the service delivery protests (Alexander, 2010; Booyesen, 2009). Researchers identify a period of “lull” in protest action between 1994 and 1999 (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a), with some saying the lull might actually have been shorter in duration (Dawson, 2010), and others suggesting that there was no such lull (Bond, 2000). In this dissertation, I argue that a political lull should be understood as much more than just the absence of mass action; it also involves the level of confidence of the working class, its clarity of purpose, its social weight, and so on. From this point of view,

despite the continued occurrence of protests when the new order was ushered in, the political lull was deeper and longer because, as I will argue in Chapter 3, the transition from apartheid to democracy entailed a process of demobilisation of the working class movement qua working class movement as other classes (and politics) wrested leadership of the mass movement from the proletariat.

**TABLE 1: PERIODISATION OF POST-APARTHEID PROTESTS**

1994-1997	1997-1999	1999-2000	2000-2004	2004-2008	2008-present
Low level of strike activity	Ideological contestation over GEAR in Alliance; some strikes	Trade union anti-privatisation strikes	Miscellaneous strikes	Strike wave: Public sector national strike (2007); massive private sector strikes	Strike wave: Public sector national strike (2010); massive private sector strikes
"Lull" or reduced level of protests	Protests by "concerned residents" and "crisis committees"	Community and student protests in support of the unions; increase in community protests	Massive protests organised by the new social movements	Massive "spontaneous" and often disruptive service delivery protests; demarcation struggles	Xenophobic violence (2008); proliferation of community protests

Table 1 identifies the waves of protests and strikes in the post-apartheid era. The top row indicates action by the trade unions while the bottom shows protests by communities or social movements. In terms of civil society activation, it should be noted that in 1994 the new government encouraged and facilitated the creation of Local Development Forums or RDP

Committees, also known as Community Development Forums, in order to effect participatory development in line with the ideal of “people-driven, people-centred” development (Miller, 1996). What is important here is that this was also done “to effect the shift from ‘resistance to reconstruction’” (ibid, p. 2). I suggest that this development was a factor in the “lull” (Ballard et al. 2006), or brief respite in protest action (Dawson, 2010) or its unabated continuation (Bond, 2000) but characterised by its de-legitimisation, downplay and related ineffectiveness given the prevailing zeitgeist. Research suggests that these forums were unevenly developed and were soon frustrated by a lack of clarity as to their role, function and powers vis-à-vis the newly set up government departments. They eventually suffered the same fate of demise as did the RDP National Office (Miller, 1996; Naidoo, 2010).

In general, the table suggests the intermittent occurrence of protest and strike action during the apartheid era that is characterised by an identifiable trend of general increase in the frequency, intensity and ferociousness of such action. The variation in organisational forms, especially with respect to the organisation of community protests, is perhaps only understandable if located within the socio-historical context; for example, from my recollection, after 1994 there emerged a host of new community-based organisations and old ones being revitalised as democracy appeared to open new possibilities and created new problems for ordinary people. Many of the new organisations called themselves “crisis committees” or “concerned residents groups” reflecting the people’s impatience and desperation for development. SANCO was not able to effectively organise around these community frustrations (Zuern, 2006), it was ambivalent when the government launched the Masakhane campaign that sought to persuade and compel township residents to pay for their services in a context where neoliberal policy was provoking explosive resistance in working class areas, in one instance leading to a local government councillor being killed by a mob angry at the implementation of punitive credit control measures (Bond, 2002a). But these early resistance movements found a hostile political opportunity structure and could not easily shake the hegemony of the ANC Alliance (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a). Some of the crisis committees found their way into the newly-forming social movements as is apparent from the names of the community organisations that first affiliated to the APF, for example, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, Thembelihle Crisis Committee, Wynberg

Concerned Residents, Mandelaville Concerned Residents, etc. In other areas the struggles crystallised quite early around municipal border demarcation struggles, namely, Matatiele, Moutse, Bushbuckridge and later Khutsong (Duncan, 2010; Naidu and Narsiah, 2009). The spirit of the crisis committees and concerned groups can also be traced forward to the present “service delivery protests” as reflected in nomenclature such as the Harrismith Concerned Residents Committee that led the protests in Intabazwe township in 2004, and the Concerned Group that led the 2009 Piet Retief protests that saw two young men shot dead by security personnel (Sinwell, *et al.* 2009).

An interesting development in the organisation of post-apartheid working class resistance is reflected in the third column of Table 1: it depicts the anti-privatisation mobilisation and strikes of the labour movement. The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) managed to mobilise some working class communities, students, churches and other sectors of society to support its workplace struggle in Nelspruit and Johannesburg. A labour-community alliance was formed to fight against the Johannesburg City Council’s privatisation programme, the Igoli 2002 plan. The Anti-Igoli Committee, which later became the Anti-Privatisation Forum when it merged with the Wits Crisis Committee, the latter fighting privatisation at Wits University, was formed in the year 2000 (Ngwane, 2010). Reflecting its socialist vision and as a counter-hegemonic tactic to win working class communities, SAMWU “campaigned vigorously for the 50 litre per day free lifeline supply promised in the RDP” (Bond, 2002a, p. 250). This is an important moment when labour and community struggles found unity in a resistance campaign that was based on the development of a counter-hegemonic project seeking working class alternatives to privatisation and neoliberalism. In Cape Town, SAMWU members volunteered over weekends to fix water leaks thus saving the state money, winning community support and promoting public rather than private sector driven development solutions (van Niekerk, 1998; Wainwright, 2011).

The last column in Table 1 indicates the coincidence rather than conscious organisation of an escalation in community protests with a strike wave that culminated in the biggest public sector strikes seen in the country in 2007 and 2010 (Ceruti, 2010b). This underlines the absence of what SAMWU was beginning to achieve during the formation of the APF, namely, the development of a

project to unite labour and community struggles on the basis of a working class politics and platform of resistance. During apartheid days it was the unity of the working class movement across its different segments and the concomitant development of a counter-hegemonic project and vision that arguably provided the impetus for the victory against apartheid. The periodisation of post-apartheid struggles as reflected in Table 1 underlines the current absence of such unity and of such a project.

### **1.3 RATIONALE**

There is a need to locate the study of social movements and protest politics within the context of a conversation between academic and activist theorisation, that is, research that engages with social movements “as active processes that people engage with, experience and transform” rather than “as objects of study to be observed, described and explained” (Barker and Cox, 2002, p. 3). In this study I have used an ethnographic method that involved interviews with protest leaders and to a lesser extent my own experiences and reflections as an activist in order to generate a “critical insider” account. My aim is to contribute to the general scholarship on social movements, protests and theories of social change through critical engagement and an empathic relationship with my study’s subject matter.

Sinwell (2009a, p. 19) has pointed out that, “studies on [South African] social movements and the crisis over service delivery have tended to focus on the demands and public action of these movements, not on their internal dynamics.” Some researchers have gone some way towards closing this gap (White, 2010; Dawson, 2008; Runciman, 2009; Wasrud, 2010). But their focus is on the new social movements rather than the service delivery protests. This study contributes to this literature by focusing on “the subjective element, the element of will and self-consciousness” (Grossman, 1985, p. 14) of the protest leaders: what they think about their struggles and how their involvement in protest action has changed their thinking. Social movement theorists suggest that social movements are “bearers of new ideas” and provide “societies with ideas, identities, and even ideals” (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991, p.4).

Participation in social movement action changes the ideas and beliefs of individual participants (Fantasia, 1988), and consciousness can be affected in different ways because “people’s

concrete positions may expose different issues, articulate conflict differently, and therefore gain different insights out of the experience” (Ceruti, 2010a, p. 18). The exploration of the political ideas of individual protest leaders will shed some light on the type of “oppositional knowledge” generated and used by movements in the course of the protests (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 8). The study utilises a Gramscian framework to evaluate whether, how and to what extent such knowledge challenges the dominant ideas and practices in society.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

- How do post-apartheid protest leaders understand the nature and value of their protest action?
- What is the social content or meaning of the oppositional knowledge generated by protest leaders in the course of organising protests?
- What are the socio-historical, economic and political factors behind post-apartheid protests?
- To what extent do the protests represent a counter-hegemonic challenge to neoliberalism in South Africa?

The small sample employed in the study means that this study cannot answer these questions conclusively or even with a minimum degree of authority. Its contribution is to be found in the manner in which it poses the questions rather than answering them. The study should thus be regarded as exploratory, largely theoretical and laying the basis for further empirical research.

In-depth interviews with grassroots protest leaders were conducted in four research sites, namely, Harrismith, Soweto, Khutsong and Balfour. The interviews generated data that provides a basis for engaging with the literature and engaging with the questions asked here. The study explores the relationship between the daily concerns, the “bread and butter” issues, preoccupations and demands of the protest leaders on the one hand, and on the other hand, locates these within broader theoretical systems and societal processes.

In South Africa, there is a proliferation of issues around which people protest which are beyond the scope of this dissertation such as student, street trader, taxi fare, media freedom and anti-crime protests. This study limits itself to protests by working class communities and organisations around service delivery, local development and local governance issues. It sketchily considers strikes as an aspect of the rising militancy of the working class in post-apartheid society.

### **1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Only 4 research sites were investigated and the sample of respondents is gender biased with only 3 women interviewed. This is a serious problem which resulted from the method used to arrange interviews with my informants. The method did not give me complete control over who ended up in the interview sample. This failure to secure female respondents means that the sample sheds insight into male protest activists rather than females.

The research design required spending more time with fewer people in order to establish a good rapport with the respondents and thus provide a basis for deeper probing and understanding of their views. As a result 10 people were interviewed, with an additional 5 interviews conducted but not included in the analysis because they were interviewed only once and not twice like all the others. The unrepeated interviews were conducted in Standerton and Bushbuckridge. Logistical constraints made it difficult to visit these areas for the second time.

Given the broad theoretical framework and deployment of the concept of hegemony, a wide category, the study has had to be selective rather than exhaustive in assessing and presenting the ideas of protest leaders. Not enough detail is covered about the struggles and respondents covered. Space and research design considerations were limiting factors.

### **1.6 SUMMARY AND CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The study focuses on the views and opinions of protest leaders as a window into the burgeoning protest movement in South Africa. The study posits the adoption of neoliberal economic policies by the post-apartheid state as an important factor in the protests and as

representing a constraint to meeting the protesters' demands. The interview data is used to explore the meanings and ideological content of the protest leaders' ideas about struggle in the light of the economic, political and social conditions obtaining in the country. The protests are viewed as working class in character; it is suggested that periodisation is necessary to understand the protests, and that the study of movement discourses is important in exploring how protest action might challenge the dominant neoliberal hegemony.

The presentation is structured in accordance with academic requirements and for a clear explication of the arguments, findings and conclusions. Chapter 1 introduces the study. Chapter 2 is a general literature review while Chapter 3 focuses on the literature on the South African protests and presents the outlines of a theoretical framework. Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology of the study. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain the main findings from the ethnographic work. Chapter 5 introduces a few of the activists who were interviewed and provides some background information on the community struggles they lead. Chapter 6 explores the factors that may explain the protests ranging from problems of economic development, service delivery and governance, and other issues that appear to spur people into protest action. Chapter 7 looks at the impact of the protests and their significance from the point of view of the protesters and locates the discussion in a theoretical and historical context. Chapter 8 allows for the sharing of my experiences as an activist and protest leader. Chapter 9 is a synthetic discussion and concluding comment on the various aspects raised in the dissertation and makes tentative observations on the significance of the protests for social theory and the struggle for social justice in South Africa and in the rest of the world.

## CHAPTER 2: GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

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This chapter explores and develops the twin concepts of agency and ideology that are central to this dissertation. In the first section I borrow the tools of analysis developed in the specialist field of study of societies in transition from undemocratic to democratic rule. Consideration of the debates within this field allows me to question the view that protest action is destructive and undermines democracy; instead I refer to arguments by radical scholars of democratic transition who regard protest action as part of the necessary “activation of civil society” that contributes to the democratisation process.

Secondly, I briefly consider Marx’s ideas and theoretical vision on the centrality of the working class in effecting social change. The discussion emphasises the fact that Marx was not only an erudite scholar but was also a man with a mission, his ideas were interventionist rather than contemplative in intention; for him the “is” was tied to the “ought”. This characteristic of Marx’s work has given rise both to fervent adherents and critics of his philosophical system. His ideas are perhaps unfairly judged not so much by their discursive strength but by the success or failure of their application (and interpretation) by those who invoke them; nonetheless the clarity and incisiveness of his theoretical vision and insights have arguably stood the test of time.

Thirdly, I consider social movement theory whose emergence is partly tied to the decline of and antipathy towards Marxism and its political method. I argue that social movement theory admittedly falls far short of the grand objectives Marx set for himself, but it should not be judged solely by these standards but rather also by those that movement theorists set themselves. In this respect I argue that the social movements have achieved their goal of raising questions about the injustices of the present social order and helped to shape and legitimise a myriad of popular causes and actions by various oppressed and exploited social groups in society. The ideological parameters they have set themselves are often commensurate with their achievements.

The chapter concludes with an argument that points to the need for fundamental transformation of society's institutions and ideological structures if its various injustices are to be finally overcome. This argument takes us back to Marx's vision and the ideas of contemporary theorists in this vein are considered and deployed to buttress the argument for an alternative vision of how society should be run. The implication is that protest and other forms of resistance require its agents to develop an ideological orientation that is totalistic and all-embracing. This counter-hegemonic approach is contrasted to the piecemeal and reformist approach that is currently in vogue in the literature concerned with social injustices and social change.

## **2.1 DYNAMICS IN SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION FROM UNDEMOCRATIC RULE TO DEMOCRACY**

The transition from apartheid to a democratic society provides a natural point of entry into a discussion of South African society because this is perhaps the most significant development in the country's recent history. This approach allows us to locate the discussion within the field of "transitology", that is, the study of the transition of societies from undemocratic or dictatorial rule to democracies (Cho, 2008; Huntington, 1991), an area of specialisation within democracy studies and comparative politics. Post-colonial and decolonisation studies intersect with this approach.

Radical scholars of transitology focusing on Asia question the notion that just because a country holds regular elections, has separation of powers, a free press, Bill of Rights, and related political institutions, that this means that the elites in society have stopped dictating terms to the majority of people (Cho, 2008). They note how democratisation in countries such as Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines has tended to give rise to new forms of state where the monopoly over power and wealth by a few continues, with de-monopolisation of political, economic and social power frustrated by elites tied to the declining old order. The new elites who assume power find themselves constrained by neoliberal markets, and sometimes lack the capacity to govern effectively and be sufficiently hegemonic (ibid).

While some Western transitology scholars view mass mobilisation as somewhat antithetical to democracy (Huntington, *et al.* 1975), this is disputed by the argument that a high level of “activation of civil society” tends to contribute to the consolidation of democracy (Cho, 2008, p. 16). Democracies are not perfect systems, ordinary people will influence key decision-making processes to a greater or lesser extent according to the form the (democratic) state has taken in a particular society. This observation leads some authors to distinguish between participatory versus representative forms, substantive versus formal democracy, and so on (Young, 2000). But, whichever of these forms democracy may take, the “activism” of ordinary people, as opposed to their passivity, is viewed by radical transitologists as crucial in widening, deepening and making the most of democratic spaces. Protest action constitutes such contestation and activation of civil society.

## 2.2 ACTIVATION OF HISTORICAL AGENCY

This dissertation is being written during the tumultuous events in the Maghreb where dictatorships are falling one after the other (Petras, 2011). These developments echo the view that revolutions are instances of “the direct interference of the masses in historical events” (Trotsky, 2008, p. xv). They bolster the belief in the primacy of the agency of the masses in achieving massive historical change and provide a basis for updating and refining revolutionary theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it was Marx who laid down the first principles.

Marx (1970b) attributed historical agency to the working class. He located the struggle of the proletariat, a social category that emerged with the development of capitalist society, within a broader context of the immanent struggle of subalterns against rulers in all class societies, and in the resultant quest for human emancipation. For Marx, the struggle over wealth and power in society defines the history of humankind since ancient times. But this immanent struggle was no “concatenation of repetitive cycles”; rather, as Hegel had noted, it was “a relentless forward movement in the course of realising the idea of freedom” (Mészáros, 1995, p. 8). Based on his philosophical studies, Marx identified the proletariat, as the class:

Which has a universal character by reason of the universality of its sufferings, and which does not lay claim to any specific rights because the injustice to which it is subjected is

not particular but general... It cannot liberate itself without breaking free from all the other classes of society and thereby liberating them also (quoted in Kolakowski, 1978, p.129).

It was Marx's philosophical studies, later buttressed by his observation of the actual condition of the proletariat (see Engels, 1845), that led him and Engels to issue the evocative clarion call: "The proletariat have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries, unite!"

### 2.3 MARX'S METHOD AND THEORETICAL VISION

Engels, speaking at Marx's funeral, suggested that his departed comrade's major scientific contribution consisted of the discovery "that humankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc." (1883, p. 1). Further: "Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production" and "his discovery of surplus value suddenly threw light on the problem" (ibid). Lastly, "Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation" (ibid). It is apparent here how Marx engaged in "activist theorising" (Barker and Cox, 2000), he linked theory to practice and thus his ideas influenced practical politics in the world especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But is Marxism a spent force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Towards the end of the last century the socialist experiment appeared to implode in the face of economic and political challenges while capitalism proved durable and adaptable. Neoliberal ideology appeared victorious as almost all governments of the world eschewed social democracy and socialism. Marxism appeared defeated in the practical political sphere. At the level of theory, similar defeats were experienced as perspectives critical of the central tenets of Marxism proliferated and dominated literary society.

Mészáros (1995, p. xix) argues that “the actually existing Soviet system had nothing whatsoever to do with socialism.” Both this system and that of social democracy “far from being coherent and comprehensive socialist negations of the established order... represented *the line of least resistance* under their specific historical conditions, accommodating themselves as modes of social control to the inner demands of the incorrigibly hierarchical capital system” (Mészáros, 1995, p. xviii). Despite this observation, it is true that the Marxist theoretical system, and its application in political practice, has faced many challenges. It is in this context that social movement theory has emerged as the theoretical approach of choice in the study of late 20<sup>th</sup> century resistance movements.

#### **2.4 SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY**

The crisis of the Marxist political project and of social democracy and the welfare state saw the emergence of new social movements and their theorisation (Barker and Cox, 2002). Labour movements and social democratic parties proved incapable of effectively defending neoliberalism’s attacks on ordinary people’s living standards and the new social movements emerged to fill this gap and thus were conceptualised as different from and even antagonistic to these traditional forms of working class organisation (ibid). They were seen as representing the “new”: new ideas, new politics, new organisations, new visions. They were new in that their emergence coincided with the rise of the power of the global markets to dictate economic policy to national states (Chomsky, 1999).

The new struggles were conceptualised as falling outside the Marxist theoretical imagination. They were not led by organised labour, nor by left political parties; their focus was not on “class” issues but on the environment, racism, women’s liberation, rights of indigenous people, gay and lesbian rights, etc. Their form of organisation also seemed at variance with how the old mass organisations of the working class were organised; the new organisations consisted of loose de-centralised networks which somehow found one another in the course of action. Their lack of a clearly defined working class social base also meant that they seemed to disprove the Marxist notion of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject.

Orthodox Marxism, unsurprisingly, has a difficulty relating to the new social movements. They lead the resistance against capitalism but seem devoid of the qualities that would qualify them to be the new revolutionary subject capable of overthrowing capitalism. Their theorists, visions and methods do not appear adequate to the task of building a viable counter-hegemonic project (Williams, 2008). Their “self-limiting radicalism” (Cohen, 1985, p. 664), their issue-specific and local orientation (Wallerstein, 1990), their location in the realm of consumption (Buroway, 2003), refusal to orient to state power (Holloway, 2002), the focus on identity politics and cultural symbolism rather than on political and economic power (Touraine, 1985), and their horizontal and loose organisation, among other things, can be construed from a Marxist perspective as setting a glass ceiling in what they can achieve in respect of contesting capitalist power and hegemony. Thus: “In general, social movement theorists locate efficacious political action in oppositional activities and cycles of contention” (Williams, 2008, p. 8).

Orthodoxy suggests inertia. The criticism can thus be construed as reflecting more the failure of Marxism to change with the times rather than any inherent weaknesses in the new social movements. It could also be argued that whatever their shortcomings, they have played a role in historical developments, especially in organising civil society responses to the challenges of neoliberal globalisation. We should therefore not shy away from supporting the new movements’ efforts to influence social change, nor from benefiting from the critical application of concepts from this theoretical tradition. Ballard, *et al.* (2006a, p. 8) note the dynamism of social movement theory and perspectives such as the move away from a static structuralism, going beyond “political opportunities and threats, mobilising structures and framing processes” into “a more dynamic and complex framework” which now includes “the mechanisms and processes that bring about contentious action by connecting these factors” (*ibid*). For example, a study by Kröger (2010) into the Brazilian landless movement, the MST, reflects the dynamism of this body of thought and the ability of researchers working within this tradition to overcome some of the identified theoretical weaknesses and lapses in its development. Kröger’s conceptual scheme includes the relationship of the MST to the state.

Writing before the Kröger study, Williams (2008) criticises social movement theorists for excluding political parties and the state in their vision of social action for social change. Movements should involve themselves in state politics and engage in “generative politics”, defined as seeking to “transform the state and economy by developing new institutions” (ibid, p. 9). Protest action alone is not sufficient to pose a serious challenge to the hegemony of the ruling class, a different imagination and practice is necessary and political parties are important in this regard. There is a need for a generative vision of society that is counter-hegemonic, that “attempts to establish alternative forms of social organisation that break with the capitalist hegemonic forms and ultimately seeks to subordinate the state and economy to civil society” (Williams 2008, p. 8). Leading theorists used by radical social movement scholars are criticised for being inadequate to the task, for example: “Polanyi’s theory of the ‘double movement’ fails to answer key political, organisational and strategic questions and often does not even pose them” (Harvey, 2007, p. 55).

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What is the response of social movement theory to these criticisms? According to Eyerman and Jamison (1991), in the course of social movement activities, arguments are deployed, identities formed and new ways of thinking developed in a process of “cognitive praxis”. The power of a movement lies in the extent to which it is able to change thinking about an issue in society, for example, the civil rights movement in the USA highlighted and changed society’s approach to race and racism (ibid). People’s consciousness changes as a result of their participation in movement activities. Involvement in resistance movements such as service delivery protests, or strikes, changes thought about the issues being raised. For example, focusing on housing as an aspect of service delivery, Sinwell (2009a, p. 111) notes that:

After nearly 15 years of democracy, South African citizens have begun to demand houses from the ANC government. Despite large degrees of success around the delivery of housing ... citizens have begun to understand the fact that they have not been given housing as a failure of the ANC government to deliver to them.

This development is potentially dangerous to the ANC government because it faces fiscal and political constraints in its delivery programme. The housing crisis has been attributed to the imposition of the neoliberal vision on the country's housing policy (Bond and Tait, 1997). This suggests that the demands of the protesters probably cannot be met within the existing neoliberal policy framework thus opening the possibility of alternatives. The protesters expose the unstable class composition and compromise that the ANC has cobbled together and managed to keep intact since it took over 17 years ago. In the course of protesting there is development of knowledge and greater understanding of the issues, opponents and constraints faced. Thus protests can provide the basis for the development of a generative politics rather than dissuade from it, achieving an outcome irrespective of pre-existing ideological objectives.

This argument finds an echo in Marx's (1970a, p. 121) Third Thesis on Feuerbach: "The coincidence of the changing circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice." The protesters, by engaging in protest, change themselves; there is, in the Marxist theoretical vision, a process of development of class consciousness. As we will see below from the results of the fieldwork, the evidence suggests that engaging in protest action is without exception a life-changing and ideology-altering experience for activist leaders. But to what end are protesters changed by the protests? What is the ideological content of the oppositional consciousness that develops among the protesters? What are the methods used to develop and promote the counter-hegemonic ideas? What is the relationship between the theory and the forms of action engaged in by the protesters?

Henri Lefebvre's answers to these questions appear to straddle classical Marxism and social movement theory. He believes that capital's hegemony under globalisation has become so pervasive that it leaves little space for reforms: "The quest for a 'counter-space' overwhelms the supposedly ironclad distinctions between 'reform' and 'revolution'" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 383), rendering the struggle for reforms revolutionary. He suggests, against the old idea of the need for one great movement of resistance, that local struggles, despite their apparent lack of unity, should not be disparaged because they are an effective counter to globalisation's

homogenisation. These struggles render tangible and intelligible the abstract and remote process of globalisation making it “challengeable and changeable” because they lay a basis for understanding the bigger picture (Merrifield, 2006, p. 139). Local struggles “generalise as they particularise” and are driven towards fighting against the system itself (ibid, p. 140). But how does this understanding grow and spread through society? His answer: “Despite its spontaneous genesis, autogestion [grassroots militancy] will nonetheless unfold over the long haul, by hook or by crook, steadily and stealthily, pragmatically and politically” (Merrifield, 2006, p. 141). In other words, Lefebvre believed in a spontaneous movement or development towards counter-hegemonic challenge against the neoliberal order.

## **2.5 THE NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE VISION AND DISCOURSE**

Any fundamental opposition to the system requires devising mechanisms to challenge hegemony, to weaken the ideological hold of the ruling class over society:

Ideologies... are real historical facts which must be combated and their nature as instruments of domination revealed...for reasons of political struggle: in order to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing, in order to destroy one hegemony and create another, as a necessary moment in the revolutionising of praxis (Gramsci, 1988, p. 196).

There is a growing consensus in South Africa that neoliberal economic policy has been inimical to the interests of the majority of the people engendering, for example, the entrenchment of inequality, massive job losses, corruption and other social ills (COSATU, 2010a; Bond, 2003; McLennan and Munslow, 2009; Southall, 2010; Turok 2008). This realisation has been reinforced by the recent global economic crisis which appeared to conclusively prove the case against major aspects of the Washington Consensus and the destructive power of unfettered capital (Wallerstein, 2009). Similarly, the looming crisis of global warming and climate change has been understood as unresolvable so long as capital dominates global economic and political processes (Cock, 2007; Kovel, 2007). There is urgency about the need for an alternative vision to neoliberalism that will be counter-hegemonic in the Gramscian sense in the light of the

developing ecological crisis. The global crisis of neoliberalism offers no solace because history has repeatedly shown that “not even the gravest crisis of the most severe breakdown are of much help by themselves” to solve and transcend the problems of capitalism (Mészáros, 1995, p. xvii). Instead: “an appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies” (Gramsci, 1988, p. 220).

The first obstacle in the struggle for alternatives is neoliberal’s mantra: “There Is No Alternative – TINA” (Mészáros, 1995, p. xvi). This argument was given power by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparent triumph of capital over the world. It is imperative to move from TINA to THEMBA: “There Must be an Alternative’--THEMBA, the Zulu word for ‘hope’” (Bond, 2000, p. 90). Capital is highly adaptable and is able to absorb criticisms and changes that are hostile to it; partial criticisms in general do not pose a serious challenge to its rule. In South Africa capital adjusted rather well to the changes in the political system if profits are the yardstick (Southall, 2010); hence the need for an alternative.

Visionary thinking that “holds up a picture, however partial or fragmentary, of a radically altered scheme of social life and appeals to justifications that do not stick close to familiar and established models of human association” is needed (Unger quoted in Harvey, 2000, p. 187). Recent history has shown the futility of “reform[ing] capitalism without altering its capitalist substance” (Mészáros, 1995, p. xix) as seen in the collapse of Euro-communism and of Stalinist socialism. The “socialist movement” needs to eschew its defensive posture and challenge capital (ibid).

Intellectual trends that refuse on principle to proffer alternatives, or strictly limit themselves to localised and partial solutions, run the danger of playing into the hands of the ideologues of the ruling class because it leaves the door open for the ideology of “there is no alternative” to triumph. Harvey (2000) approvingly quotes the work of utopian theorist Unger but is critical of the fact that this writer does not go far enough; he attributes the reticence to a misled anti-authoritarian, libertarian thought. This reveals lack of understanding of the importance of putting definite proposals on the table in order to persuade and crowd out the arguments of your opponent. The “soft” left tends to prefer non-threatening Hegelian transcendence rather

than the “harsh either/or of the dialectic” (p. 188). Harvey invokes Montaigne’s aphorism: “No wind helps him who does not know to what port he sails (sic) ... but the problem is that without a vision of Utopia there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail” (p. 189). Mészáros (1995, p. 793) also suggests that defensive struggles are weakened if a political project going beyond capital is not developed because “without the proper target of the strategic offensive – oriented towards the socialist order as a hegemonic alternative to the existent – the journey itself is without a compass.”

Mészáros (2000, p. 38) argues against the post-structuralist critique of comprehensive theoretical systems such as Lyotard’s (1984) “little recits” theory of social change, stating that: “For without a comprehensive strategic framework into which the ‘little recits’ are inserted, there can be no guarantee whatsoever that the accumulation of ‘little by little’ will produce even a little good, rather than utter disaster” (Mészáros, 2000, p. 38). There is a need “to spell out, in as great a detail as possible, the positive alternative” because “negations alone are not enough... For the chosen target of social action, if positively defined, has a vital bearing on the feasibility of success” (ibid).

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The theorists quoted above are calling not so much for more action than for the framing of the oppositional action within a counter-hegemonic perspective, that is, within a world-view that challenges the dominant discourse in society. Foucault’s concept of discourse underlines the link between knowledge and power; that is, the fact that “how problems are constructed, explained, and understood is a source of real and considerable power in politics” (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 5). Foucault (1978, p. 101) notes that: “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.” The dominant discourse is thus open to contestation by the subaltern classes, but how exactly can this be carried out? It is necessary to develop oppositional or alternative knowledge systems and a “radical pedagogy” that educates “the populace that there is additional information they have not heard, that there are options other than those commonly

suggested, and there is action that can be effectively taken by those who disagree with the status quo” (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 11).

Opposition to the dominant hegemony can take two forms, namely, (1) a direct challenge or attack while proposing radically different alternatives, and (2) harnessing or appropriating aspects of the dominant discourse of the ruling class and using it against itself, in a kind of “ideational jiu-jitsu” (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 34). In practice, movements tend to frame their campaigns in combinations of both forms that constitute a continuum between challenging and harnessing hegemony rather than in dichotomous fashion. Although this hybrid approach can be most effective, there is a price to be paid in harnessing hegemony because it can lead, for example, to accusations of cooption, it might win very little and the powers that be can, in turn, appropriate aspects of the oppositional discourse (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 35). On the other hand, although direct challenge is difficult and seems unlikely to win “in the short run, challenging hegemony... holds out the possibility of substantive, long-range change as it attacks existing systems of thinking and being while proposing and building support for radically different alternatives” (*ibid.*, p. 33). Despite Foucault’s aversion to providing (grand) political solutions, his insights into the power of discourse are useful in the argument for the necessity of an alternative, counter-hegemonic vision. There is a need for a discursive or ideological basis to unite the myriad of local protests into a countermovement strong enough to effect desirable, radical social change.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have invoked the literature to argue that protest action should be viewed positively as an instance of civil society activation that is necessary in the establishment of a democratic society. I have done this by reference to the work of radical scholars of democratic transitions who bestow agency to the popular classes rather than to the elites as part of an effort to deepen and substantiate democracy by compelling society to address and improve the material condition of ordinary people. Many scholars have pointed out that capitalism, in its neoliberal guise, and as the dominant mode of production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, presents a structural obstacle to the realisation of a type of democracy that truly changes people’s

everyday life for the better. Social movement theory, together with other radical non-Marxist approaches, concurs with this diagnosis but has either proved incapable of developing strategies that address the problem holistically rather than in piecemeal fashion, or has generally shied away from delving into the realm of alternative visions. The chapter concludes with consideration of writers who argue for the need of exploring viable alternatives to neoliberalism. This chapter's discussion provides a general framework for considering the specifics of the South African case and the socio-historical context giving rise to protests.

## CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This chapter begins by alerting the reader to the increase in the incidence of strikes and protests in post-apartheid South Africa. Some observers of this phenomenon approvingly view it as strengthening democracy while others disapprovingly see protests as inimical to democracy and social progress.

In seeking an explanation for the increase in protests I first consider the literature that focuses on the structural conditions of post-apartheid society. The iconic characterisation of the transition from apartheid to democracy as an “elite transition” (Bond, 2000) implies the existence of a contradiction between the promises of democracy and the continuation of exploitation and oppression in the new order. I refer to the classical Marxist theory of the law of uneven and combined development to buttress the argument that it is this contradiction that creates the explosive tensions that find expression in protest action.

The next section links structure to agency by focusing on the ideological, organisational and leadership aspects of the problem. For Marx, the struggle to transcend the injustices of capitalist society required the agency of a working class movement. It seems to me that the dominant narrative of the South African struggle in the literature obscures the rise, identity and express agency of the workers’ movement in South Africa through its characterisation of it as (an aspect of) the internal anti-apartheid mass movement. A re-reading of Jeremy Seekings’ seminal study of the history of the United Democratic Front suggests that the dynamics leading up to the formal transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa involved the demobilisation of the workers’ movement.

Big business wanted to jettison apartheid as a form of state without sacrificing the capitalist system. It was therefore necessary to demobilise the mass movement as a condition for the historic compromise between the old and the new order, but even more importantly, to effect the political emasculation or blunting of the revolutionary working class and anti-capitalist edge of the movement. The nascent class-specific socialist vision had to be supplanted by the vision

of a non-racial democracy sans a well-defined alternative class project. While the tumultuous mass movement inside the country during the mid-1980s was more disorganised than coherently organised, its diffuse demands and actions posed enough of a threat to capital to compel Anglo American bosses to seek audience with the national liberation movement in exile. Tellingly: “He [Gavin Relly, Anglo executive chairperson] came back smiling, convinced that the [exiled] liberation movement leaders were patriotic sheep in Marxist wolves’ clothing” (Butler, 2007, p. 187). This happy encounter laid the basis for the re-definition of capital as a “social partner” of the democratic forces in the transition from apartheid and the re-building of the new democratic society. Thus was achieved the political miracle of a peaceful end to apartheid capitalism that left the structural capitalist-economic conditions largely unchanged.

I then explore the political consequences of this outcome by exploring the relationship between the concepts of democracy and development noting the questions and tensions that arise in their application in the post-apartheid order. Slow progress in development designed to improve the lives of the working class and the poor has given rise to questions about the nature and quality of democracy despite various official mechanisms designed to facilitate the participation of ordinary people in state decision-making processes at the local level. This has led to a sympathetic re-consideration by some writers of the richness of the grassroots democratic practice developed during the struggle against apartheid while contrasting this with the substantive paucity and formalism of post-apartheid democracy (Mangcu, 2008; Williams, 2006). This suggests that radical critics of South African democracy, especially in the light of the protest movement, evaluate it using a yardstick based on a vision of a different kind of democracy and society – a vision that was developed on the ground by ordinary people during the struggle against apartheid and that can be said to have been counter-hegemonic.

Finally, the chapter concludes by suggesting some key aspects that would constitute a theoretical framework for this study. I have not done enough work in this dissertation to claim that such a framework has been developed; to do so would require more time and extensive reading to develop the various strands of the argument before fitting them together into a coherent theoretical system. There is a lot that I must still learn and think through in order to

successfully undertake this feat. For example, I very recently came across the work of Matthew Grant (2011), a socialist activist scholar, in which he cogently argues for the primacy of Marx's theory of alienation (of labour) in our understanding of neoliberal commodification of the provision of basic services. Incorporating this argument in my theoretical framework would be crucial in laying the basis for answering the questions raised in this study. For now I hope the reader will be satisfied with what amounts to a mapping out of the territory before I embark on this promising scholarly journey.

### 3.1 THE PROLIFERATION OF PROTESTS IN POST-APARTHEID SOCIETY

This study arises out of what many commentators have noted as a remarkably high rate of protest action in South Africa based on official figures from 2004 to 2010 (Alexander, 2010; Atkinson, 2007; Booysen, 2007, 2009), and showing signs that "taken together with the strike statistics, 2010 will mark the acme of popular resistance in post-apartheid South Africa" (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010, p. 7). It should be noted that the official figures are not altogether reliable, especially the police statistics which contain a number of methodological flaws (Vally 2009), but they do suggest a very high level of protests as Table 2 below of protest and strike statistics suggests:

**Table 2: Protests in post-apartheid society from 2004 to 2009**

	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8	2008-9	Total
Peaceful or legal protest	7 382	9 809	8 703	6 431	6 125	38 450
Violent or illegal protest	622	854	743	705	718	3 642

*Source: Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010. Based on the research by Vally (2009) into police figures*

In 2010 the figures were pushed up significantly by the 3 week long public sector strike and other strikes in the private sector (Ceruti, 2010b). Service delivery protest figures were also high according to other sources (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2011). In 2011 there have also been significant community protests, including the tragedy in Ficksburg where a protester, Andries

Tatane, a school teacher, was killed in front of television cameras. More significantly, the first half of the year has seen a strike wave covering the major sectors of the economy. However, my intention here is not to interrogate the figures but to indicate to the reader the basis for the view that protest and strike action is very high in post-apartheid South Africa with, for example, comparisons with other countries been made and this country appearing to be one of the world leaders in this respect (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2011; Bond, 2010a).

This study takes as its primary subject matter this high level of “civil society activation” (Cho, 2008, p. 16) and seeks to understand its significance within a broader historical and structural context. It is noteworthy that there is a general coincidence between the frequency of strikes and that of local community protests (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010). This must be qualified by noting that the police figures include marches and pickets by striking workers in the overall enumeration of the protests, but other statistical sources that clearly distinguish between strikes and protests also point to this coincidence (Municipal IQ, 2010). The general trend, if one discounts fluctuations, is of a steep increase in both strikes and local community protests over the last few years; there is also an impression of an increase in the intensity and ferocity of such action. This trend can have serious political consequences as suggested by Ceruti (2010b) who argues that the coincidence of the rise in strikes and community protests with increasing dissension inside the ANC party in the period leading to 2007 resulted in the remarkable recall of the country’s head of state from his position. Significantly, she argues that during the 2010 public sector strike, more so than that in 2007, the striking civil servants associated themselves explicitly with the community protests – the strikers saw themselves as fighting against the same unresponsive state as the protesters (ibid).

Are the protests and strikes a positive or negative force of social change in a newly-democratic society? Researchers working within the framework of social movement theory suggest that movement activism, with a few qualifications, is good for South African democracy (White, 2008, 2010; Runciman, 2010; Wasrud, 2010). Some invoke the tradition of mass participation that characterised the anti-apartheid struggle in viewing protests as complementary rather than obstructive of democracy (Williams, 2006; Hemson, nd). Others suggest the employment

of a “double repertoire” on the part of working class communities whereby they use both the “brick” and the “vote” to press forward their demands on the democratic state (Booyesen, 2007 and 2009). On the other hand, parliament perhaps unsurprisingly views the community protests as primarily a problem (RSA Parliament, 2010). The remedial action government has generally taken in this respect has largely centred around improving the functioning of local government (CoGTA, 2009a, 2009b). The fact that the protests continue unabated suggests that the state has lost control of the situation in this respect. What went wrong? Some researchers have sought the answer in the political economy of the transition from apartheid to democracy.

### **3.2 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TRANSITION**

A seminal work on the subject of the political economy of the transition from apartheid to democracy aptly characterises the process of democratisation as an “elite transition” (Bond, 2000). The development of resistance among the popular classes in post-apartheid society is attributed to the adoption of a market-driven economic development model by the country’s new rulers (Bond, 2000; McKinley, 1997; Marais, 1998). Economic laissez faire appears to contradict the new democratic government’s human rights commitments and developmental objectives, such as the need to provide adequate public services at the local level (Fiil-Flynn, 2001; McDonald, 2000; Ruiters and Bond, 1999; Wasrud, 2010).

In South Africa, in addition to what others argue is a critique of stones and burning tyres, there is a developing consensus among a wide range of social movements, trade unions and progressive civil society that neoliberalism is the main problem in the government’s failure to fight poverty and improve the lives of the people (COSATU, 2010b). The problem is traced back to the government’s adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy (Department of Finance, 1996; COSATU, 2010a). This policy represents an ideological shift by the ANC away from the mildly redistributive Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) into a trickle-down model of development (Bond, 2000; Turok, 2008; Harvey, 2007). The move to GEAR was disastrous for the working class and the poor in South Africa with trade liberalisation leading to job losses; outsourcing and contracting out increasing the casualisation

and informalisation of labour; the intrusion of business methods into the public service creating severe strains on service delivery as, in the first few years of democratic government, less money was transferred from the national fiscus to local government; and the implementation of the principle of cost recovery in the provision of basic services consolidating a class-based system of access to services (Booyesen, 2009; McDonald and Pape, 2001; Ruiters, 2005; Wasrud, 2010).

Neoliberalism is an ideology, a political-economic project and a set of policies concomitant with it; it is also a method of running the state: an “art of government” (Ferguson, 2009). In practice there can develop uneven application of these different aspects of neoliberalism, for example, a neoliberal government like South Africa has significantly extended the social grant network despite its ideological commitment to fiscal austerity (Southall, 2010). Analysts point to adjustments that have been made to the policy due to the changing global economic situation, the upward pressure of working class action and internal jockeying for positions inside the Alliance (Daniel *et al.* 2010). McLennan (2009) notes the evolution of government public administration policy away from the RDP to the archetypical “hands off” form of the neoliberal state, and later towards the interventionism of the “developmental state”. But a close reading of these developments suggests that these are modifications of the same core neoliberal approach (McLennan, 2009; Everatt, 2009; Bond, 2010a), and that despite the rhetoric, a programme of massive redistribution of power and privilege in post-apartheid society is definitely not on the horizon (Butler, 2010; Friedman, 2010).

The post-apartheid neoliberal regime was superimposed on an extremely uneven social, economic and political terrain giving rise to “the constant tension between the institutionalised inequalities of apartheid and the promises of democracy” (McLennan, 2009, p. 23). Neoliberal policy, through its emphasis on allowing the free play of the markets, tends to be conducive to the old order elite hanging onto its privileges in spite of democratisation (Cho, 2008). Also, the ushering in of a new democratic order in this context creates new winners and new losers, and the balance in magnitude and social weight between these groups has a bearing on whether a new democracy stabilises or is destined to be perennially wrecked by crises (*ibid*).

Langa and von Holdt (2010, p. 14), suggest that in South Africa stabilisation and consolidation of democracy is not proceeding smoothly due to “violent forces of class formation that are shaping much of social life at a local level in townships and informal settlements.” They point to the formation of a “new elite which monopolises positions of power, privilege and control over resources in the state and local business” and “the formation of a precarious underclass” consisting of the working poor, precariously employed and the unemployed (ibid). This gloomy picture brings to mind the depressing tales of the failed post-colonial state that characterised many “liberated” countries in Africa. But South Africa is classified as a semi-peripheral country or emerging market because, unlike most post-colonial states in Africa, it has a relatively well-developed capitalist economy. The country has a developed working class with relatively strong and independent forms of union organisation, unlike many African countries at independence. South Africa combines in an unplanned and unique fashion aspects of the old and the new, the urban and rural, race and class, in a manner that established development theory might find challenging to conceptually grasp and, indeed, perhaps poses an even bigger challenge of political management to its political rulers. The turmoil and instability wrought by strikes and protests suggests this. In his theory of uneven and combined development and its corollary, the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky (1919) argued that such combinations of contradictory economic, political and social factors can lead to unexpected outcomes, including periodic crises that can shake society to its very moorings.

### **3.3 HISTORY OF DEMOBILISATION OF THE INTERNAL ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT**

It is necessary to cast an eye back to the last days of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa in order to understand the roots of present-day protests. In the previous chapter we noted the debate in the field of “transitology” where one side argues that the higher the level of activation of civil society, the deeper and more wide-ranging the process of democratisation (Cho, 2008). During the build-up to the new order and immediately after its realisation there was a marked lowering of mass action and civil society activation in the country (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a, Seekings, 2000). Some key actors during the transitions imply that demobilisation was a conscious political project, associated with Nelson Mandela’s reconciliation project, and

implemented to ease in the new order and avert a civil war that threatened to engulf the country then (Naidoo, 2010). The violence that characterised those times is proffered as corroboration for this thesis (ibid). But this thesis requires some interrogation in the light of the “transitology” debate on the relationship between the levels of civil society activation and of democratisation.

The argument for the desirability of demobilisation of the anti-apartheid mass movement – to avert violent confrontation – is not convincing. It is worth remembering that the term “black on black violence” was coined by the apartheid state and deployed as propaganda to undermine the “violent” freedom struggle and project itself as the armed restorer of law and order in the chaotic situation. But subsequent revelations indicate that the apartheid bosses were behind the violence all the time, arming and fomenting violence between the different “black” groups (Pauw, 1991; Bell and Ntsebenza, 2001). This suggests that the violence was constructed as a mechanism to discourage and suppress high levels of civil society activation (that was pushing for democratic change). Therefore the two phenomena cannot be viewed as identical because in practice one was deployed against the other. The mass democratic movement was largely non-violent, even if one admits of episodic periods and acts of violence (Zunes, *et al.* 1999), and its activation of civil society and organisation of mass action should not be evaluated, discouraged and condemned in the same breath as apartheid’s state-sponsored violence.

A study of the anti-apartheid movement reveals that “South Africa has... a heterodox political tradition” including socialist and non-socialist radical democratic ideas that denounced wealth inequality and sought a deeper transformation of society (Beinart and Dawson, 2010, p. 1). Many of the diverse ideas and organisations that enlivened and informed the anti-apartheid struggle inside the country were however eclipsed or taken over by “the ideological discipline of the ANC. After the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and COSATU in 1985, activists increasingly worked within the framework of a national liberation struggle”(Rosenthal, 2010, p. 12). After successfully securing hegemony over the internal and external anti-apartheid movement, the ANC was well-positioned to wrest political power from

the cornered apartheid regime. But the manner in which this hegemony was secured entailed a tightening of the political opportunity structure and the emergence of a dominant “master frame” making it difficult for certain ideas and practices to thrive. Seekings (2000, p. 290), in his book on the UDF, observes that this organisation “helped to secure the construction of Charterist near-hegemony. Non-Charterist strands of opposition politics were emphatically sidelined.” Charterists were supporters of the ANC Freedom Charter or “Congress” line. The civic and labour movements increasingly followed the political lead of the ANC on the good grounds that unity was “essential in negotiating an end to apartheid” (Beinart and Dawson, 2010, p. 12).

The ANC hegemony interrupted a process of growth and development of the mass democratic movement constricting the diverse and expansive goals of the movement into arguably a powerful focus on “freedom and unity” (Beinart and Dawson, 2010, p. 12). Had the process been left alone, on the other hand, it would have continued to slowly and unevenly develop concrete ideas and practices around the social and institutional arrangements that would become key components of the new post-apartheid society. For example, the UDF attempted to develop aspects of a counter-hegemonic project when it initiated its “people’s power” strategic framework and the related “people’s education” project (Seekings, 2000). It also developed a vision of participatory democracy that it wanted implemented in post-apartheid society that was based on a rejection of representative democracy because “parliamentary-type representation in itself represents a very limited and narrow idea of democracy” (UDF statement quoted in Seekings, 2000, p. 295). The repression of the 1986 State of Emergency frustrated the UDF’s “generative” political initiatives compelling it, for example, to “accept both the ANC’s lead in embracing negotiations and the goal, at least initially, of a representative democracy for all South Africans” (Seekings, 2000, p. 296). But “even before its accession to formal power... the strategies and tactics of the UDF were not adopted by the ANC” (ibid, p. 32). Ultimately this resulted in political outcomes that arguably fundamentally diverged from the vision of some of UDF leader in the mid-80s of “the form of post-apartheid democracy”(ibid, p. 295).

By 1990 the movement had been severely weakened or demobilised leading to the lament that: “If the formal transition had begun in mid-1986, rather than early in 1990, the impulse towards a more participatory form of democracy would have been far stronger, for better or worse” (Seekings, 2000, p.296). The contrast between developments in 1986 and 1990 marks, I would argue, the beginning of the demobilisation process or lull in the latter year. Much later, a trade union leader who became the cabinet minister in charge of the short-lived RDP office, appears to corroborate this view:

In the process of tackling so many challenges, we robbed the country of an enormous contribution that all other sections of society could make. Government would give people jobs, houses, social security, schools and clinics and knew what was right for the citizenry. People who had participated in the fight for change now became passive bystanders” (Naidoo, 2010, p. 240).

It can be argued that the argument above proves less the (physical) demobilisation of the workers’ movement than the pruning of its radical ideas and the quashing of the (creative) political ferment that appeared to grip wide sections of the population. If this is indeed true then I am willing to stand by that aspect of my argument that emphasises an ideological shift by the movement away from fundamental (counter-hegemonic) transformation into the present order, an outcome which the burgeoning protest movement suggests is far from satisfactory from the point of view of the majority of people in the country. Jacquin’s (1999) study of the political dynamics in relation to the labour movement suggests a similar process whereby this component of the workers’ movement had its radical-socialist aspirations and plans severely pruned and scuttled during the democratic transition. There was a decrease in the number of strikes that can be contrasted to the steady increase that began about the year 2000 and rising up to the 2010 pinnacle.

### **3.4 DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The demands of protesting communities are mainly about service delivery or “development” and “poor representation of grassroots interests by their councillors” (Booyesen, 2009, p. 113). It is both an economic and political problem and it focuses attention on the relationship between

development and democracy. Development is a ubiquitous concept that derives some of its power from its “double meaning as process and outcome” (Barchiesi, 1996, p. 7). It is both a journey and a destination, and as such is capable of locking people in a permanent state of “development”. This is achieved by “developmentalism”, that is, “the way in which the promise of development is utilised as a legitimising device across a range of capitalist formations... [it] took an autonomous life, coming to constitute one of the many tools through which the capitalist state could build consent, hegemony and acceptance” (ibid, pp. 8–9). Development is a contested terrain and developmentalism is an ideological construction that is deployed in the course of the class struggle.

The new democratic ANC government started off with a form of developmental “populism” where promises of “people-centred” and “people-driven” development and state-led redistributive policies prioritising basic needs were unequivocally made and codified in the RDP (ANC, 1994). Development was envisioned as a national project that required the participation of the people led by a government of national liberation with democracy seen as an essential aspect of development (Bond, 2000). The shift to a neoliberal developmental model contradicted this approach in that capital and markets were now seen as the active and central ingredients in the development process (ibid). However, the problems did not just begin with GEAR in 1996, they were discernable already in 1994, during the heyday of the RDP, when communities were required to form local development forums which, from the word go, failed to live up to expectations of a truly “bottom-up development” process (Miller, 1996). The enthusiasm of the RDP office and working class communities notwithstanding, the new government appeared ambivalent towards community participation in development processes (ibid). A form of “anti-politics” (Ferguson, 1994) became an essential aspect of the process with development conceived largely as a technical process that required the application of the most efficient means to attain development targets – “delivery” supplanted the emphasis on democratic “process” (Miller, 1996, p. 2). “Civil society began to lose its special place in the language of development” and was seen by those in power as a nuisance and even a threat because it “would delay service delivery” (Mangcu, 2008, p. 124).

Seekings (2000) argues that the participatory model of democracy developed by the UDF was not adopted by the new democratic government but aspects of it found its way into the RDP and other legislation, for example, local government is an avenue for the participation of the citizenry in government affairs according to the country's constitution (RSA, 1993).

Assessments that have been made of the actual operation of community participation processes and structures such as ward committees, IDPs (integrated development programmes) and *imbizos* (large community gatherings), set up in line with the legislation governing the operation of local government (RSA, 1998, 2000) suggest that they are more form than substance. Williams (2006, p. 3), observes that these formal democratic processes are "a limited form of democracy [that] give rise to an administered society rather than a democratic society" since there is no real debate of policy or of social programmes by the (working class) electorate and government officials **and leaders**. Another study concludes that these processes allow ordinary people "to demand accountability" from "their elected representatives and sometimes quite senior officials" (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a, p. 33). However, they are "consultative rather than participatory" **and "invariably... become conspicuous for the issues they leave out, and for the voices they did not hear"** (ibid). The government itself has attributed the protests to the failure of these **formal participatory** structures to provide an adequate communication channel between the state and the citizenry (CoGTA, 2009a).

The failure of formal participatory mechanisms has led some commentators to question the vision of the participation model proffered by the modern state to the people. It is suggested that these "invited" spaces of participation are constrained by the dominant developmental discourse that pertain therein which presents people with limited choices because they are within the framework of the state's preconceived neoliberal plans (Miraftab and Wills, 2005; Sinwell, 2009a). The very idea of service "delivery" is seen as suggesting a passive populace in the face of an active state. It is for this reason that **people** form their own "invented" spaces, such as social movements and community organisations, where they discuss and develop their own approach (Miraftab and Wills, 2005; Miraftab, **2006**). Social movement activity, including protest action, is thus a form of "invented" space that should be understood not as disruptive but constitutive of participatory democracy because it represents a form of contesting power

and exerting influence (Hemson, nd). "Community participation in South Africa is informed by the memory of community struggle – a radical form of participation – against the racist apartheid State" (Williams, 2006, p. 4). The implications of the apparent demand for "a radical form of participation" raises the issue not only of the model of democracy but of the content of the decisions that would be made if such weight were given to ordinary people over matters of governance, that is, the type of developmentalism that would be espoused and its implications for policy. Would it be trapped within the strictures of capital accumulation or would it be a (potentially) counter-hegemonic form that challenges the primacy of capital in the social metabolism? Sinwell (2009b) observes that it is not a given that invented spaces will generate radical developmental ideas, he bemoans the fact that when some social movements and community organisations fail to question the structures of the system and operate within, for example, given official budgetary constraints, the result is a zero-sum game of competition among different sections of the community. On the other hand, it is sometimes possible for critical ideas to be generated in the context of official invited spaces (ibid). But it can be argued that the "radical form of [democratic] participation" (Williams, ibid) developed in the South African townships in the 1980s was counter-hegemonic in relation to the then existing sociopolitical and economic order.

### **3.5 PROTESTS, THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Observations by some researchers suggest that the hegemony of the ruling class in South Africa is under threat because of the strikes and protests taking place in the country. Alexander (2010), for example, titles his paper on the protests a "rebellion of the poor". There is speculation that the level and scope of the protests might escalate culminating in a mass revolt and/or major re-alignment of political forces inside the ANC Alliance and the country (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010; Booysen, 2009; Everatt, 2010; Pillay, 2009). The protest movement and political dynamic in the country can thus be construed as moving towards the day of reckoning with neoliberal capitalism. From this point of view, the protests pose a real threat to the neoliberal hegemony in South Africa.

But this might just be an impression if we consider that some researchers have questioned the actual effectiveness of the South African protest movement in the struggle against neoliberalism (Bomke, 2010a; Desai, 2008; Pithouse, 2006; Sinwell, 2010a). They point to the absence of a conscious and consistent political project tied to action on the ground and delivering telling blows on the neoliberal order. They question the ideological content of the protest movement and point out that no platform or programme specifically challenging neoliberalism and proposing a coherent set of alternative policies has so far emanated from the South African movements (Sinwell, 2010a). The fact that many protesters end up voting for the ANC is also a bone of contention (ibid). Other critics have also been discouraged by the perceived weakness of the movements: the fragmentation and isolation of the protests, their episodic nature, the lack of unity between unions and movements, and the apparent decline and demise of some social movement organisations (Harvey, 2007). From this point of view, there has not developed a strong enough challenge to neoliberal hegemony in South Africa.

This study inserts itself within the context of this debate. It seeks to get a clearer picture of the nature of the protests, the factors behind them, and their impact and significance through focusing on how the protest leaders understand their struggle and how they wage it. Agency and ideology is related to the material conditions which the protesters seek to change. Following Gramsci (1988) and Eyerman and Jamison (1991), the protest leaders interviewed are theorised as the grassroots “organic intellectuals” or “movement intellectuals” of the protest movement. Their ideas are engaged with in the light of the thesis that a counter-hegemonic project needs to be consciously crafted and popularised by the movement intellectuals in the course of struggle. In developing its theoretical framework the study seeks to explore whether and how such a characterisation can be applied in the South African context by engaging with the following questions: Is the idea of developing a counter-hegemonic to neoliberalism useful in understanding the ideas of the protest leaders interviewed? If so, which ideas, mechanisms and forms of oppositional knowledge are deployed by the protest leaders to contest the dominant discourse of the neoliberal hegemony? How can the ideas of the protest leaders be characterised? What processes are involved in their formation and articulation? Can the discourse of contestation deployed in the course of leading service delivery protests be usefully

understood applying the typology of harnessing (appropriating) versus directly challenging the dominant ideology? (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008) Which theoretical approaches and research methods are best suited to answer such questions? Is the distinction between activist theorising as opposed to academic theorising useful in this respect? (Barker and Cox, 2002).

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have pointed the reader to the South African literature on post-apartheid protest action that emphasises the proliferation of the resistance movements. I have dwelled on those structural aspects that might explain this phenomenon focusing on the inadequacy of the economic and social improvements in the lives of ordinary people in contrast to the promises and aspirations that accompanied the democratic transition. My main argument is that the vision of the new democracy and new society developed during the anti-apartheid struggle by the mass movement has been tampered by the historic compromise made between capital and the apartheid regime (the old order), and the leadership of the national liberation movement (the new order). Finally, I attempt to pull together the many threads arising from the literature I have referred to in this chapter and the preceding chapters to argue that a theoretical framework for understanding the roots and possible prognosis of the post-apartheid protest and strike movement would need to incorporate the major themes I have raised, and in particular, their relationship to the question of the development of a counter-hegemonic project; that is, the struggle for a radically different type of democracy and society.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

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The main aim of this study is to explore the ideas of struggle expounded by the organic intellectuals of the South African working class community protest movement using Gramsci's theory of hegemony as a conceptual lens. Gramsci (1971) viewed ideas as both a product of spontaneous resistance to capitalist conditions of existence, and as the raw material necessary in the development of alternative visions and counter-hegemonic proposals to (capitalist) class society. Organic intellectuals have a duty to develop those ideas – Gramsci called them “good sense” – that had the potential of being used to liberate the dominated classes. This is important because under normal circumstances lived experience tends to generate “common sense” ideas that are consonant with the status quo and the dominance of the ruling classes in society (Buroway, 2003, pp. 206 – 207).

Barker and Cox (2002) argue that movement activists engage in a form of theorising they call “activist theorising”, as opposed to academic theorising. This type of theorising, among other things, is action-oriented and characterised by ideas that are not static but are always in formation, motion, application and modification in response to the rhythms of the unfolding struggle (ibid). This suggests a research methodology that is able to conceive reality in fluid movement and that can grasp the ideas of the activist leaders in their transience and development. The ethnographic method is best suited for this (Adler and Adler, 2003).

The study focuses on agency, ideology and the socio-economic conditions. It explores the nature of, the factors behind and the impact and significance of post-apartheid protest action from the point of view of the protesters themselves. Since the protests can be regarded as history in the making, there is a need to combine ethnography and a historical method in order to understand them in motion. Beinart and Dawson (2010, p. 9) draws attention to “the value of historical methods in grappling with these issues of mobilisation, changing ideologies and consciousness, and their implications for political analysis.” This means the data generated using the ethnographic method must be located within a historical perspective and, in the

South African context, be understood against the backdrop of the transition from apartheid to democracy.

Sayer (2000) has developed “structural hermeneutics”, an approach that seeks to connect qualitative in-depth data generated using ethnographic methods with broader social structures and processes such as globalisation, democratisation and class formation. This allows micro level processes to be located within the macro thus avoiding subjective interpretism, that is, conclusions based solely on the meanings and perceptions held by respondents (ibid).

However, I have been mindful of the critical view that “in ethnography, theory is properly deployed in the service of description rather than the other way round” (Graeber, 2009, p. 510).

#### **4.1 PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE BETWEEN RESEARCHER AND RESEARCHED**

The ethnographic method can yield qualitative data rich in nuance and detail about the respondents, their way of life and how they understand their protest action (Robben and Sluka, 2007). To decipher meaning requires the researcher to be close to, familiar with and even intimate with the people, organisations and movements involved in protests. Participant observation, in-depth interviews and life stories (biographies) are some of the ethnographic techniques that are relied upon by researchers with such objectives (ibid). Proximity to the subject matter is key in such studies.

Barker and Cox (2000, p. 3) have a problem with studies of social movements that lack intimacy or proximity with their subject matter. They are concerned that there exist “a certain ‘distance’ between much social movement theory and actual social movement practice.” They refer to McAdam (1996, p. 339) who points out that:

Reflecting the influence of... broad structural theories, most recent empirical work has tended to focus on the role of system-level factors in either facilitating or constraining movement activity. Consequently, we know comparatively little about the lived experience of activism and the everyday strategic concerns of movement groups.

As a corrective this study attempts to penetrate the “lived experience of activism” through the use of an ethnographic actor-oriented approach that is designed to reveal the “everyday strategic concerns” of grassroots leaders of the South African protest movement. As part of this endeavour, and given the researcher’s involvement with social movements as an activist in the past, the study secondarily employs the autobiographical method in order to shed additional light on the subject.

The rapport between researcher and the respondents, especially after they learned that I was an activist like them, was useful but raises the methodological and ethical question of how much distance or commonality of interest should be allowed between the researcher and the researched. One view is that distance is necessary between the two parties because “our research needs to be value-free, and that as researchers we need to be neutral observers of the social world” (Ali, *et al.* 2004, quoted in Sinwell, 2009a, p. 34). Ethnographers have disputed this view of social science suggesting that the researcher needs to be as close as possible to the respondents in order to really understand the social processes shaping their behaviour (Wolcott, 1999).

It is generally accepted these days that social research is a social activity and as such enters the field with certain interests, pre-occupations and prejudices. Total detachment from one’s subject matter is regarded as a practical impossibility. There is also skepticism about the use and efficacy of procedures that supposedly increase the possibility of detachment. At the same time suspicion still exists about researchers who over-identify with their subjects, who “go native” in such a way that their findings might be seen as shaped more by their sympathies rather than by scholarly commitments. To solve this problem Sinwell (2009a, p. 34) suggests that it is possible that “one can be involved with the movements they are studying but at a certain distance,” and this is possible, according to Lichtenburg (2002 p. 127), if “we are willing to keep an analytic lens focused on the groups we study,” because, “closeness and analytic distance are not mutually exclusive” (*ibid*). In his study of South African social movements Sinwell (2009a, p. 28) characterises himself as an “activist-researcher”.

## 4.2 INTERVIEWS

The primary technique used to collect data in this study was the in-depth interview because it allows for the exploration of taken for granted knowledge that normally is “not readily articulated” and where people involved in the same activity are likely to have “multiple perspectives” (Johnson, 2002, p. 105). The interviews were conducted with activists involved in organising protests at grassroots level in their communities. Altogether 15 activists were interviewed, 10 were interviewed twice, between August 2009 and May 2010, in two- to three-hour interview sessions. The interviews may as well be described as conversations because of the informal and intimate tone I tried to cultivate. They were conducted at the activists’ homes where I thought they were more likely to feel relaxed and in control. A set of prepared questions based on the research objectives was used flexibly to guide the interview process (Please see Appendix 1). A small electronic recorder was used to tape the interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were used during analysis.

The interviews went well attaining the objectives of the research project. The respondents seemed relaxed and were willing to share their ideas and experiences with the researcher. In my assessment there developed goodwill, rapport and a spirit of “comradeship” between me and the respondents within the constraints of the researcher-researched relationship.

On some occasions joint interviews were conducted. This happened more or less spontaneously but proved useful in that I could observe the respondents interacting and, for example, points of agreement and disagreement sometimes arose in the course of their conversation which added further light on the subject matter.

Many more hours were spent with respondents over and above the couple of hours of an interview session. Breaks during and in between interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher and the respondents to go for a walk, drive, eat or just sit around talking. This contributed to building rapport and kept the atmosphere natural and relaxed and provided additional space for reflection on the issues under discussion. In some cases respondents took me on informal and often informative tours of their area.

The main consideration in selecting the research sites was to target those areas that experienced protests during the service delivery protest phase that began from about 2004. Harrismith was chosen because it was the first in the Free State wave of protests; Khutsong because it was the biggest and most significant of the struggles around demarcation and no less because of its victory; Balfour was selected because in 2009 it was perhaps one of the most prominent of the recent protests and the only area that was visited twice by the country's president as a result of protest action. Soweto represents new social movement mobilisation that occurred during an earlier period and thus served a comparative purpose; I also chose it because of my intimate familiarity with the area and the struggles and organisations studied here, namely, the LPM and SECC.

The method of selecting respondents can be described as random but purposeful. Grassroots leaders were sought, but who exactly ended up being interviewed depended on a number of factors some of which were outside my control. Some were introduced to me through contacts I knew beforehand, others not. My aim was to interview grassroots leaders of the community protests but not necessarily the committee member or office bearer. In the end it was mostly committee members who got interviewed as it is such people that were considered "grassroots leaders" by those who facilitated contact. In some instances, without prior contacts, I simply drove to the area and convinced people to take me to a local protest leader, and they did.

In Soweto I had more control over who got interviewed and I selected the most active female leaders in their respective organisations. They had to be women because in all the other areas the respondents were men creating a problem of gender bias in the sample. I also knew them beforehand. The fact that the vast majority of the respondents are male is a problem for the research and I tried to compensate for this by consulting related research studies with a gendered perspective to inform my analysis (namely: Jolaosho, 2010; Runciman, 2010; Tissington, 2010).

The aim of the interviews was to find out how the respondents had personally got involved in the protests, their political history, their experiences organising protests, their views on the

protests, their motivations and their visions of the future. I wanted to understand the protests from their point of view and to try and penetrate beneath what we read in the newspapers and in academic accounts of protest action. I was hoping for a balanced and holistic understanding of what makes people protest and also to give space for the respondents to reflect on their own experiences in some detail. It soon became clear to me that many people and communities faced similar conditions of poor service delivery and the question was why some organised protests and others did not. It was also interesting to find out about the history of a person before and after their involvement in protest activism.

Barker and Cox (2002) argue that “activist theorising” involves movement activists developing theories, rationales and explanatory frameworks to make sense of their activism. It is this general frame of reference or store of knowledge that an individual activist will use when he or she strategises, makes tactical decisions, inspires people in a speech or mobilises others to partake in protest action or related collective activities. This knowledge is constantly changing because it is “knowledge-in-struggle” (ibid). In this study I call it the “theoretical vision” in the same spirit that other researchers have emphasized the importance of “ideas and idea-makers in social movements” (Schurman and Munro, 2006, p. 1). I imagined it would be possible to elicit this knowledge in a conversation with an activist especially one who plays a leading role albeit at grassroots level. My assumption was that participation in the local organisation of protests requires leadership activities that will involve aspects of what Barker and Cox (2002) call activist theorising. It is these theories or ideas that I wanted to elicit from my respondents and to relate them to the political and social circumstances that informs political action and which such action in turn seeks to shape.

The method of conducting two interviews interspersed by several months’ time gap introduced an aspect of movement to the interview data as it captured changes in the situation and in the thinking of the respondents over time. It suggested the existence of stable and transient attitudes and opinions held by the respondents. The interviews conducted during the second round seemed slightly more comfortable, interesting and illuminating than the first ones. During the 5 month gap between the first and second interviews I began preliminary analysis of

the interview data and, as a result, the second set of interviews seemed more focused and efficient. Respondents were more relaxed because they were by now acquainted with the research project and had thought a bit over some of the issues. This was evident in the clarity of their responses among other things. The interviews were less laborious because I did not ask new questions but rather went over the same ground delving into a few areas of emphasis. The respondents were eager to talk and their answers seemed fluent, well thought out and had more depth.

Some respondents' thinking developed noticeably between the first and second interviews, and this was especially the case with the youth. In some areas there had occurred some developments in the situation, for example, in Balfour there had in the meantime occurred another protest. Historical and intellectual developments impressed upon me the fact that some research designs tend to take a still picture of a moving social process. In some instances it felt as if a lot had changed in a mere 5 months although there was also an overbearing sense of continuity especially in relation to the failure of the authorities to address the problems raised by the protesting communities. The palpable development in some respondents' thinking has great relevance for this study's theoretical framework which postulates a process of "cognitive" development (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) or "conscientisation" (Freire, 1972) as a result of people's involvement in protest action.

In order to protect the respondents in terms of the confidentiality of their responses I have used pseudonyms rather than their real names in my report.

#### **4.3 OBSERVATION**

The second field trip to Balfour coincided with President Zuma's visit to the area ostensibly to pour soothing water on the then burning township. On the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2010, the excitement was palpable in Balfour as the people moved in noisy droves to the local stadium. As guest of one of the respondents who happened to be a PAC youth leader, I was privileged to sit with his party comrades at a section of the pavilion shared with ANC, SACP and other community members. There was good will between the different political groups. I felt I was able to look at the president from the vantage point of the community members and activists

on the ground (on the pavilion) and shared some of the emotions and views that characterised their reception of the great man. Although I missed the chance of interviewing other people besides my informants, I was able to fleetingly interact with and in some instances chat with many community members including older residents and women.

In general, I tried to keep a watchful eye on what was happening to and around all the respondents in order to gain additional insight into the world they occupied. Their interaction with other members of the community could be revealing. Some of them appeared to be highly regarded by community members including by state officials or civil servants. I also observed apparently mundane but revealing interactions such as when I accompanied an activist to the Khutsong police station to meet with an officer dealing with death threats against the activist concerned. In another instance I met a respondent at the school premises after he had been recently reinstated as a teacher after being expelled for leading protests. This encounter elicited emotions and insights which could not have been accessed in a sedate interview situation. There are many instances I can cite of such interactions all of which underline the importance of observation in gaining additional insight into the research subject matter.

Although I was not able to follow the standard ethnographic method of spending months and even years in a research site, I was able to benefit to a limited extent from an approach in line with this method. Respect for research ethics required that I should be honest and make clear that my role as researcher took precedence over that of an activist in the course of the interaction. I felt, perhaps as an activist myself, more like an insider who wanted to go outside to assess properly rather than the usual attempt by the researcher as outsider trying to gain admission into a sub-culture. Sinwell (2009a) explores this reversal of roles in his study of social movements and community organisations in Alexandra township.

#### **4.4 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

I did not imagine myself one day sitting down and analysing my experiences as an activist before embarking on this research, hence I did not keep a journal to systematically record my observations; although with hindsight I wish I had! My recollections therefore rely on memory

and this is methodologically problematic. Human memory can be highly selective. But it occurred to me that it would be foolhardy to simply ignore my experiences as an activist given its relevance to this research. Also, my history of activism could not simply be wished away. It thus made sense to try and put the memory of my experiences to good use notwithstanding the problems associated with doing so.

The use of autobiography as an ethnographic tool is accepted in research circles provided certain basic guidelines are followed (Adler and Adler, 2003). For example, it is necessary to employ more than one method in order to triangulate one's findings: "Some ethnographers combine the intimacy of autobiography with the more general approach of talking to others who have gone through the similar traumas or events" (ibid, p. 43). Hence the autobiographical account in this dissertation should be seen as complementary to the interviews. South Africa has seen a spate of best-selling books, mostly biographies and autobiographies by prominent political actors, whose narratives have in many instances shed additional light into the struggle against apartheid and arguably the dynamics, events and characters that shape post-apartheid society (for example: Gevisser, 2007; Kasrils, 2010; Lujabe-Rankoe, 2006; Naidoo, 2010; O'Malley, 2007). This suggests that scholarship can benefit from the use of biography or autobiography.

#### **4.5 PRIMARY SOURCES**

Various documents were collected that had a bearing on the protest areas covered by the research. These included pamphlets, memoranda of grievances, letters, notices, press clippings, statements and other written material produced in the course of struggle. Official documents belonging to organisations such as constitutions, minutes and the related were also consulted where possible. These documents were accessed according to availability and expediency in terms of the time and effort it took to get an item. They are however supplementary rather than central in the research design. With respect to trade union protests and those of the "new social movements" I utilised primary and secondary sources in the form of organisational documents, published research and commentaries. With respect to local

community protests or service delivery protests, I relied on actual field work conducted in the chosen case study areas and recent published research.

#### **4.6 SECONDARY SOURCES**

The Centre for Civil Society compiles a daily monitor of all protests taking place in South Africa based on newspaper reports (CCS, 2009). This is a useful source and it provided me with an ongoing sense of what was going on in the country with respect to protests. I also noted newspaper reports of protests which gave a clue on the place of protests in the public discourse in so far as the print media was concerned.

There is a slew of published and unpublished research that has been conducted into protests before and after the demise of apartheid. I was particularly interested in post-apartheid research reports and came across quite a few academic theses and dissertations focusing on the “new social movements” (e.g. Cooper, 2009; White, 2008; Wasrud, 2010). This work helped to fill the gaps arising out of my research design in respect of information and analysis of the “new social movements”. Ballard, *et al.*'s (2006a) work on this phase of protest activity in South Africa was very useful. I also consulted some sources on trade unions and strike action to find information on strikes. The University of Johannesburg's Centre for Sociological Research conducted “rapid research” into the 2009 post-election wave of protests in South Africa whose findings were made available to me before publication by Professor Peter Alexander. I have followed the work of Luke Sinwell, the editor of the resultant report, and benefited from his insights and critical commitment to the movements. I also benefited from attending and presenting my work in progress in research seminars organised by the Centre for Civil Society and the Centre for Sociological Research. Interaction with the work of other researchers in the field helped locate this study in a genealogy of scholarship.

#### **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using a method of generating themes from the resultant data rather than based on the researcher's schedule of questions. The idea was to avoid further superimposing my research categories on the data but rather allowing it to speak

for itself. Each interview generated a number of themes or headings under which I then grouped the quotations. This was a painstaking exercise and relied a lot on interpretation and cross-referencing between the interview transcripts. But I think it was a worthwhile exercise because it forced me to view the data differently and arguably approximated the meaning and significance of the data from the point of view of the respondents said.

After the categorisation of the quotations I then wrote summaries of the information emerging from each category. It is these summaries which constitute the heart of what I call my research findings. I have built my argument in this dissertation based on these findings relating them to other research reports, theories and perspectives on the subject matter. It seems to me that I can vouch for the usefulness of this exercise because in some important instances there is commonality between what I have found and that by other researchers. Perhaps more importantly, the findings in a number of instances have questioned my preconceived notions and expectations. This research has helped me to question some of my previously held beliefs on the subject matter and encouraged me to be self-critical. In other words, I have learned something new from the process. That, I think, makes it all worth it.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT PROTEST**

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This chapter presents to the reader profiles of five of the activist leaders interviewed and brief descriptive overviews of their community struggles. Due to space limitation only the most important aspects related to the questions, concepts, theories and debates considered in the study are presented. Further details on the case studies are found in the subsequent analytical chapters of the dissertation.

### **5.1 COMRADE "MARTHA MBATHA"**

#### ***LANDLESS PEOPLES MOVEMENT, PROTEA SOUTH, SOWETO***

*This indomitable woman lives in a shack and has led struggles in this community for more than 2 decades. She was the national chairperson of the Landless Peoples Movement (LPM) during its heyday. She has faced tremendous challenges as a leader including attacks by panga-wielding men who cornered her in her shack in this shack settlement on the outskirts of Soweto.*

*Mbatha works as a street sweeper at Pikitup, the Johannesburg City Council company. She qualifies for a housing subsidy but she cannot leave the community without a leader and go live in a nice house while the people still live in shacks. At the moment she is organising a campaign to connect electricity to the shacks and ESKOM is negotiating with the community. Meanwhile she continues to organise locally and works to revive the national networks and organisations of the LPM. Under her leadership the community connects itself to the electricity grid, and this move has forced ESKOM to open negotiates. She is also part of efforts to revive the LPM.*

### **5.2 LAST OUTPOST: THE LANDLESS PEOPLES MOVEMENT IN PROTEA SOUTH**

The story of the LPM is that of the rise of the "new social movements" in post-apartheid society. The LPM was one of these movements that took the political scene by storm at the turn of the millennium with a countrywide membership and potential support base (Greenberg, 2004). It excited the imagination by raising land question which is a burning issue. It also struck a nerve in the wake of the ruinous land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe (Bond and

Manyanya, 2003). But the movement made waves for a couple of years and then self-imploded due to a serious organisational crisis.

The LPM was formed by organisations and communities struggling against farm evictions and other rural injustices before its organising drive in the urban areas.<sup>2</sup> The LPM had enough ammunition given the dismal record of land redistribution in South Africa. But its rapid growth and prominence did not match its political management skills and it collapsed under its own weight, and the hostile political environment it found itself in. Its leadership failed to cohere its affiliate structures and its close relationship to the National Land Committee (NLC), an NGO that housed this movement, was poorly managed.

Mbatha is one of the last living embodiments of the LPM. She laments how other leaders left the organisation in the lurch.<sup>3</sup> This disappointment with people and organisations that she has worked with is nothing new to her. She was one of the people who formed the first ANC branch in the area ostensibly believing that this would help her impoverished and neglected community. Disappointment with the ANC led her to social movement politics and she became a local and later national leader of the LPM. The change of organisational vehicle is ostensibly part of her journey as Moses of her community.

The LPM rejected the “willing buyer, willing seller” principle and it won the National Land Summit in July 2005 to this position (Atkinson, 2009). Its campaign for land in the urban shack settlements found resonance but these also require an urgent focus on service delivery and local economic development to satisfy basic needs such as water, electricity, housing, health care, roads, and so on. The LPM attempted to straddle the divide between rural and urban land needs. Mbatha’s activism in the urban context has centred around resisting forced removals and organising the ‘illegal’ installation of electricity as part a campaign for the provision of basic services.<sup>4</sup> The latter provokes clashes with the authorities and with local Soweto residents who resent these connections. The shack dwellers’ tactic of messing up the electricity mini-sub-

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Mbatha, LPM national chairperson, Protea South resident. Interview.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Mbatha, LPM leader and activist.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Mbatha, leader of LPM in Protea South.

stations in retaliation when authorities cut their illegal wires has not endeared them to the Sowetans who suffer the blackouts. The strategy works because Eskom leaves the wires alone and has opened negotiations with the community on electrification.

A few years ago her community successfully resisted forced removals. The government built a relocation camp consisting of shacks built in a tight format reminiscent of a concentration camp nearby, but the community successfully resisted forcing the government to dismantle the new shacks. The community later employed the services of a pro bono lawyer to force the government to develop the area. I was present in a community meeting when the lawyer gave his last report to the community explaining that they had lost the case because the judges were retreated from passing judgment on “political” matters leaving the matter of their right to land and proper housing to the political process, a tendency of the South African judiciary noted by some researchers (Wasrud, 2010). The intersection of Comrade Mbatha’s life with the Protea South community’s struggle for a better life undoubtedly contains many lessons for both scholars and political practitioners alike.

### **5.3 COMRADE “MAVIS GWALA”**

#### **SOWETO ELECTRICITY CRISIS COMMITTEE, SOWETO**

*This young activist was the administrator of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) from 2001 to 2010 where she was central in the operations of the organisation. She spent the last year as organiser but then suffered a stroke that left her incapacitated.*

*She lives in Orlando East with her mother, brother and her son. In 2007 she was a ward councillor candidate in a local by-election in which she came third to the ANC.<sup>5</sup> She has been with the SECC since its birth and was the living nerve centre of its 20 or so branches in Soweto and its networks. Her ideas are socialist in orientation and one of her plans before she took ill was to develop a programme to train female comrades so that they can play a more central role in leading the struggle.*

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<sup>5</sup> Mavis Gwala, SECC administrator, organiser and leader. Interview.

#### 5.4 THE SOWETO ELECTRICITY CRISIS COMMITTEE

The SECC, a new social movement, began its history in the year 2000 campaigning against electricity cut-offs in Soweto. Its tactic of “illegally” connecting those cut off due to non-payment was distinctive. It also organised marches in support of its demands including the invasion of the Johannesburg mayor’s house that culminated in a year-long trial involving 67 members (Bond, 2002a). Its militant acts fit the description of the “symbolic, massive, disruptive and pioneering protest act” that defines the efficiency of contentious agency (Kröger, 2010, p. 110). It framed its campaign as one for electricity for all and criticised the ANC and ESKOM for putting profit before the needs of the people and explicitly challenged neoliberalism. Its initial prominence is explicable from the perspective that: “Protest is most likely to be successful where it represents a view which is in fact widespread in the society, but which has somehow not been called to people’s attention” (Anderson, 1969, p. vi). The new government’s sudden enforcement of cost recovery policies gave rise to widespread dissatisfaction providing a favourable political opportunity structure.

Egan and Wafer (2006) have mistakenly described the SECC organisation as consisting of “anarchist” local organisations as if this label fits all local decentralised, grassroots-based organisations. The SECC has adopted socialism as its vision, but the tendency has been to attribute ideological choice and clarity to leaders and deny the rank and file of this ability when assessing the new social movements in South Africa (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a; Friedman, 2010). It is reasonable to expect leaders to represent more clearly and forcefully the guiding ideas of an organisation but research into the APF, to which the SECC is affiliated, suggests that there exists a widespread if uneven socialist consciousness in the ranks of this organisation (Runciman, 2010). The SECC, as the research into the APF attests, provides political education programmes that aim to ingrain a socialist consciousness and overcome the unevenness. The form of organisation of the SECC can be regarded as modeled on the historical “civic” form of organisation of the anti-apartheid era (Mayekiso, 1996). The civic is constituted by regular meetings of people who live in an area and can attend by walking from their homes. This horizontal grassroots structure is meant to promote autonomous action and responsiveness to

local conditions while allowing unity of purpose across localities. However, the system is centralised in so far as it is unthinkable for a branch to hold a major event such as a march without involving the “office” or centre and calling on the support of other SECC structures.<sup>6</sup> Major political positions are taken centrally with branches bringing their mandates to the discussion. SECC activists always bemoan the lack of support between branches because for them the adage “unity is strength” is more sensible than the idealisation of fragmented or autonomous groups. The SECC cannot therefore be reasonably understood to consist of anarchist groups or sentiments.

The SECC arguably provided the “master-frame” (Kröger, 2010) for tackling the electricity crisis affecting working class and poor communities in Soweto and beyond resulting from the government’s cost recovery policies. The authorities responded by granting concessions which included a moratorium on cut-offs, the scrapping of electricity arrears in Soweto, the Vaal and East Rand townships and the provision of a basic amount of free electricity (Bond, 2002a; Egan and Wafer, 2006; White, 2008). It can be argued that the SECC “succeeded in forcing key issues, such as urban services ... onto the national agenda” as other social movements have done (Beinart and Dawson, 2010, p. 30).

The SECC was arguably a pioneer among movements in the post-apartheid era in sharply and explicitly criticising neoliberal policies, in particular cost recovery, in the provision of basic services and organising practically around this on a mass scale. The demand for services was later taken up by many working class communities throughout the country and generalised as service delivery protests. The latter are arguably addressing the same conditions that set off the SECC in the first place. Recently the SECC has, like other new social movements, experienced a decline and has experienced internal organisational problems, but it continues to organise despite an increasingly ageing membership and a nagging sense of making slow progress.<sup>7</sup> It participates in local government elections through the Operation Khanyisa Movement, an electoral coalition with other APF-affiliated new social movements. It is also re-

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<sup>6</sup> Mavis Gwala, SECC administrator, organiser and leader. Interview.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

orienting itself to take up new issues such as its innovative attempt linking the demand for clean energy for all to the struggle against global warming and climate change.<sup>8</sup> During its heyday it was unique among the new social movements in calling for an end to capitalism and for socialism. This approach represented a direct challenge to the dominant discourse. As we will see below, the service delivery protests have tended to opt for harnessing or appropriating rather than directly challenging the hegemonic discourse as a method of ideological contestation.

### **5.5 COMRADE “SIPHO MATLALA”**

#### **INTABAZWE TOWNSHIP, HARRISMITH, FREE STATE**

*Matlala was born in 1962 in Intabazwe township, Harrismith, a small Free State town on the busy N3 highway half-way between Johannesburg and Durban. His father was well known as “Mdala” in the community (the old man), a community leader famous for his love of education and founder of 3 schools in the township. Mdala was once a mayor under the old system but resigned as the anti-apartheid struggle developed.*

*This middle-aged, well-built, visually impaired man lives with his wife on Matlala Street, named after his late father. But Matlala junior has proved to be a community leader in his own right who, like his father, has a vision for the betterment of his community including having some very specific development proposals which he introduced into the local protest movement. He was among the leaders of the Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents Committee that organised the September 2004 protests in Intabazwe. For his troubles Matlala and other protest leaders were arrested and charged with sedition, treason and public violence. This was a grave affair in the wake of the death of Teboho Mkhonza during the protests.*

*Matlala makes a living ferrying children to the local schools. He identifies closely with the now defunct Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents and says it tried but ultimately failed in its mission to bring development to Intabazwe and Harrismith. He blames the local political leadership for many of the ills besetting his hometown.*

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<sup>8</sup> Mavis Gwala, SECC organiser. Interview.

## 5.6 HOMICIDE IN HARRISMITH: THE 2004 INTABAZWE PROTESTS

Many people claim that there was no warning before the police started firing live ammunition at the crowd gathered along the verge of the busy N1 highway on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2004 (Mokoena, 2004a). Afterwards Teboho Mkhonza, a 17-year old high school student, lay dead. The death catapulted the small township of Intabazwe into the national and international limelight. Here was a community that had waited patiently for improvement in their lives, and when it became clear that the wait was in vain, took to the streets, only to be answered by state repression (Mokoena, 2004a; Moya 2004; Pather, 2004; Rantao, 2004).

The then Minister of Police, Charles Nqakula, came in response to the tragedy and promised to bring development in the area. The case against Matlala and 12 members of the residents' committee dragged on until they were acquitted a couple of years later. The development promises made were slow in coming.<sup>9</sup>

Intabazwe signaled the bursting of the dams of anger in South African working class townships. Its eruption was followed closely by Memel, Vrede, Warden, and a few other small Free State towns (CDE, 2007). After that the protests spread like an intermittent fire throughout South Africa, and they have never stopped. But it was the initial incidence of protests in Free State towns that raised the first questions and laid the basis for the debate, for example, the protests were regarded as largely spontaneous because of their sudden appearance and the lack of information about their organisation and, importantly, as the result of intolerable conditions which pushed working class people into struggle (e.g. Pather, 2004; Rantao, 2004). But someone had to organise the mobilisation and, in Intabazwe, it was the Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents Committee (the "Concerned" as it was known to residents).

The three Concerned committee members interviewed told a sad story of community defeat and disintegration of the committee and the cooption of key leaders by the local power structure. But the erstwhile protest leaders considered their role in the protests as a proud moment in their lives, they had dared to take on the establishment.

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<sup>9</sup> Siphso Matlala, activist and resident of Intabazwe, Harrismith. Interview.

Their story begins with the birth of Intabazwe township as a result of forced removals of African peasants and labour tenants off the land by the apartheid government.<sup>10</sup> This process was extremely painful and has left psychological scars on some people such as Solly Mkhize, one of the respondents.<sup>11</sup> His grandfather lost a herd of cattle to an Afrikaner farmer. One of Sithole's earliest memories as a child in the early 1960s was of his dying grandfather taking the family to a local farmer named "Pitshiza" (crush 'em). His grandfather had given the cruel "Boer" his cattle for safekeeping as people were being driven off the land. Sam remembers dogs being set on them "and that was the last time anyone ever said anything about grandfather's cattle in the family".<sup>12</sup> The Intabazwe community was economically vulnerable and this concerned local community leaders such as Matlala's father who campaigned to build schools in the area observing that the ample employment available at a local company discouraged locals from attending school.<sup>13</sup> His fears proved well founded when the German factory closed shop in the 1980s leaving many people unemployed. Further farm evictions added to the Intabazwe population as white farmers hastened to avoid the democratic government's promulgation of laws that protected the rights of rural people. The influx resulted in a spatial configuration characterised by a core residential area consisting of apartheid-style "4-room" houses and a penumbra of shacks that cling precariously onto the edges of the township. The demand for basic services such as housing, water and electricity is particularly urgent for the shack dwellers and during the eruptions their plight was central to the community's demands.<sup>14</sup> But even for those living in brick houses life is difficult given the high unemployment rate, poor infrastructure and lack of community facilities.

The "will to organise" originated when people lost faith in the mayors and councilors ever improving the area. They were also concerned that Harrismith town was getting run down, "small things like traffic lights not working", and this was seen as one reason the town was

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<sup>10</sup> Solly Mkhize, activist and resident of Intabazwe, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Siphon Matlala, activist and resident of Intabazwe, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>14</sup> Siphon Matlala. Community and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

failing to attract investment into the area.<sup>15</sup> The alleged immoral and arrogant escapades of a local ANC power figure also alienated people. There was dissatisfaction with the fact that municipal decision-making processes took place in QwaQwa. Harrismith, QwaQwa and Kestell had been bundled together to form the Maluti-a-Phofung local council after the December 2000 local elections (Mokoena, 2004b). This arrangement was said to have resulted in the political and economic marginalisation of Harrismith. The concerns that proliferated in the township soon found expression and organisation in a group of future protest leaders that coalesced around Matlala and other core activists who began meeting regularly at another activist's house. Word soon reached the local political leadership about the incipient rebellion and, intolerant of criticism, they sought to quell it through questioning the bona fides of the emergent leaders and developing other means to undermine the challenge. Under pressure to justify and legitimise themselves, the new leaders circulated a petition in the area in order to underline the fact that the grievances they raised emanated from the community.

The community started holding regular meetings demanding improvement of the area. One employment creation idea that the committee organised around was a call for the establishment of a transport "logistical hub" whereby goods being moved between Durban and Johannesburg would be temporarily stored in Harrismith. This was based on research conducted in Texas, according to Matlala, where such an innovation contributed to local economic development. The Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents committee campaigned around the provision of basic services, job creation and demands and proposals around local development. Interaction with the local political elite was frustrating as the latter regarded themselves as the people's elected representatives and the residents' committee illegitimate. The township youth was brought on board through youth representation and the inclusion of youth demands in the committee's platform. The local "white" businesspeople supported the platform of the Concerned but they were excluded in order to avoid the adversary playing the race card.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

A week before the cataclysmic event the “Concerned” had organised a march to the mayor’s office which became a sit-in because of the mayor’s absence. Anger galvanised some committee members, urged on by community anger and the youth, to plan the fateful march to the highway with the aim of forcing the mayor’s hand. Matlala and others disagreed with the planned action but were drawn in as the debacle reached crisis proportions. When the arrests followed they too found themselves in a cell with about 75 others. The case eventually boiled down to serious charges against 13 accused, mostly committee members of the Concerned.

No one was ever charged for Teboho Mkhonza’s homicide but many commentators blamed faulty policing methods and police brutality (Mokoena, 2004a; Moya, 2004; Omar, 2006). This tragic event had huge ramifications for the struggle in Intabazwe. The gravity of the situation meant that the modest residents’ committee found itself suddenly playing in the big league. The establishment responded robustly to the challenge with the ANC doing everything to stamp out the rebellion, according to my informants. It fought to re-assert its power and authority partly through discrediting and isolating the committee. The latter had been conceived not so much to provide a political alternative to the ANC than to press forward the people’s demands on the government. Most of them were ANC members anyway and some had cut their teeth in the anti-apartheid struggle and identified with the liberation movement. But the situation that had developed, including the burning down of the local ANC offices as the crowd marched home in anger after the shooting of the youngster, was construed as a revolt against ANC rule, as the charges of treason and sedition suggested. The Concerned leaders were not politically prepared for the relentlessness of the ANC response. They faced a total onslaught of repressive and hegemonic moves from the local state. The committee was infiltrated, carrot and stick tactics were used including offering jobs to some committee members, making the lives of others difficult through dirty tricks and attempts at socially ostracising them. The threat of violence was real:

The ANC tried everything, last year I was physically attacked at night and got 8 stitches. It was a political attack...<sup>17</sup>

Some concessions were granted to the community but not enough but the committee proved too weak to withstand the pressure. Its members admit defeat but they claim that its spirit lives on. They claim that it has become a measuring stick for the authenticity and effectiveness of subsequent local developmental interventions in the area.

There are some new ones calling themselves the Harrismith Development Forum, they took our ideas, all the demands as is. But they criticise the Concerned by saying we were fighting the government and they are not fighting the government.<sup>18</sup>

In this respect we can see some evidence of Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) suggestion that social movements succeed when they change the way people think about issues and about themselves, they change the "cognitive praxis". It is interesting to note that it is a former leader of the Concerned committee that spearheaded the formation of the community development forum this time adopting a non-confrontational stance vis-à-vis the ANC government. Its membership is drawn largely from active local ANC members. But despite this non-adversarial framing of its struggle it has, since its existence, led 2 marches demanding development in the area.

It might look quiet, but there is movement in Harrismith. Matlala had earlier declined to join the Harrismith Development Forum wary of opportunism and manipulation, and still faithful to the memory and dream of the Concerned. But he recently relented and was persuaded by popular acclaim to assume leadership of a newly-formed sub-committee that will address issues and problems facing disabled people in the area. Matlala, slightly apprehensive and trusting nobody after the betrayals that characterised the Concerned experience, is reluctantly back in action and seems, despite his protests, to like it. The struggle continues in Intabazwe.

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<sup>17</sup> Solly Mkhize, member of Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents committee, Intabazwe, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>18</sup> Siphon Matlala, community leader and activist, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

## **5.7 COMRADE "JACOB MBATHA"**

### ***KHUTSONG TOWNSHIP, MERAUFONG CITY, GAUTENG.***

*Mbatha is a key leader of the struggle in Khutsong. This tall, dark high school teacher was catapulted into national prominence when he was elected chairperson and spokesperson of the Merafong Demarcation Forum (MDF) the body which led the re-incorporation struggle. Mbatha and the MDF waged a veritable war against the authorities which sometimes reached semi-insurrectionary proportions. Schools closed down and Mbatha, a teacher in a local government school, was victimised and fired from his job.*

*Khutsong won its struggle and Mbatha is a happy if still driven man today. He got his job back although he complains about the low pay. He is ready to the MDF, now renamed the Merafong Development Forum, in a challenge to the ANC in the 2011 local government elections if necessary. This will happen, he says, if the ANC continues to impose unpopular leaders on the community. But a hegemonic move by the ANC whereby local branches were allowed to nominate candidates put paid to these plans, although subsequently there were widespread complaints not only in Khutsong about how the people's favoured candidates sometimes lost to less popular candidates. Mbatha is chairperson of the local SACP branch and says he is still loyal to the ANC despite his bitter complaints about the lack of service delivery and development in the area. He points out that the people who live in shacks in Khutsong were retrenched from the mines in the area. A true people's government – locally an MDF-led council – would approach the mine-owners and say to them: "Hello, it's payback time, time to use all the accumulated profits to pay for the development of Khutsong and the surrounding economically depressed areas."<sup>19</sup>*

## **5.8 VICTORY IN KHUTSONG**

Khutsong is the jewel in the crown of post-apartheid protest, it is the small irrepressible working class community that took on the might of the ANC government in a head-to-head fight to the finish, and won. The protest leadership navigated complicated organisational

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<sup>19</sup> Jacob Mbatha, community and protest leader, Khutsong, Merafong City. Interview.

loyalties and political fissures and united the community in a relentless struggle that lasted half a decade. The struggle of Khutsong, a township attached to Carletonville town, in the Merafong City municipality, was provoked by the politically clumsy manner in which the problem of overlapping municipal and provincial borders was addressed in the area (Kirshner and Phokela, 2010). On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2005, the National Assembly passed a law that put the municipality under the jurisdiction of the North West province, disregarding the views of residents elicited in a public consultation exercise (Naidu and Narsiah, 2009). Representative democracy appeared to trump participatory democracy (ibid). This act, experienced as a kind of forced removal by pencil by the Merafong broader community, bred intense resentment and resistance. A fierce struggle ensued.

The MDF was formed to organise the resistance. The boundary dispute escalated into a political test of strength between the ANC and the residents, and later found echo with the anti-Mbeki movement inside the ANC that helped Zuma become president. There are several other demarcation struggles in South Africa, notably Moutse, Matatiele, Bushbuckridge and recently Balfour (Duncan, 2010). These disputes arise around historic provincial political identities and the uneven capacity of provinces to provide administrative and developmental services to communities.

Despite losing its case at the Constitutional Court, the Khutsong community's wish was granted. The fierceness of the revolt and the political threat it posed to ANC hegemony, especially with respect to electoral support, helped this struggle to victory. Internal power struggles inside the ruling party were also a factor.

The MDF was formed through an initiative taken by the local ANC and SACP activists who invited community organisations across the spectrum to unite on a "non-party partisan" platform. The MDF's legitimacy lay in the wide support it enjoyed in the area: "It deserves mention that the protest was not characterised by a disaffected faction within the community but was supported by a range of civil society formations such as the South African Communist Party, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, local businesses and churches" (Naidu and

Narsu, 2009, p. 25). The issue was amenable to building unity and the Khutsong protest leaders recognised that inclusivity and wide support were important in the success of the struggle.

The fact that the majority of MDF supporters were ANC members and supporters raises the question of how it was able to withstand the ANC's use of its authority over its members to undermine the resistance. The answer lies in the central role played by local SACP leaders whose leadership of the struggle had the unintended consequence of making the Khutsong SACP branch the fastest growing and biggest branch in the country.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that the Moutse SACP branch also grew in size when it led the struggle there (Duncan, 2010). The community demonstrated its anger by boycotting the 2006 local government elections with less than 20% of the community turning up at the polls in response to a call by the MDF. The campaign was extremely militant involving marches, stay-aways, barricades, consumer boycotts, attacks on government property, burning down of councillors' houses, and so on. The ANC was under pressure to neutralise the rebellion and regain its hegemony and leadership over the area. It relented and was rewarded in the 2009 national elections when the victorious community voted overwhelmingly for it. ANC support and hegemony was restored.

To ensure closure during the aftermath, the ANC gave some MDF leaders influential positions in the national and provincial legislatures, perhaps corroborating Langa and von Holdt's (2010) observation that protest leaders end up being "recycled" back into the ANC. But Comrade Jacob Mbatha refused to become a parliamentarian. A Moutse SACP leader who, as a consequence of the demarcation struggle, ran against the ANC and became a ward councillor was expelled by the ANC, but the SACP has "managed to close one eye and look with the other eye" (Duncan, 2010, p. 8). According to Mbatha, "the feeling of the forum was that if the ANC does not change, if [it] does not perform we will contest as the Merafong Demarcation Forum in Khutsong against the ANC."<sup>21</sup>

The anger has subsided but the dissatisfaction continues in Khutsong. At the heart of the demarcation struggles was a yearning for economic development and improvement, for service

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<sup>20</sup> Jacob Mbatha, local SACP branch chairperson, chairperson of MDF.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Mbatha, SACP and MDF chairperson, Khutsong, Merafong City.

delivery, jobs, a future; and the realisation that uneven development might lock the community in an economically depressed province. There was also indignation as people felt that their fate was being decided above their heads by the government. The issue united the community across political tendencies, age, gender, class and race, but research suggests that working class women and youth in the area expected the outcome – the victory – to be “more than a GP (Gauteng) number plate” (Phokela, 2010, p. 4). The unity forged in the course of the struggle somewhat dissolved after the resolution of the issue: some leaders got their high positions, the struggle for survival and for service delivery continued for the majority:

As I said service delivery is very, very poor; very, very poor. There is unemployment even though we are there living in the hub of finance in Gauteng.<sup>22</sup>

Broer, you can see, service delivery. Poor, poor, poor, poor, poor, in Merafong.<sup>23</sup>

Not everyone is happy with the transformation of the MDF into a developmental structure. Some people felt that it was time to close shop with Young Communist League members, for example, suspending their participation.<sup>24</sup> They are suspicious of the political intentions of some MDF. There is uneasiness about the successful re-establishment of ANC hegemony in the area and the possibility of using the momentum of the demarcation struggle to fashion a new political project for the area. Others critical of the fact that the Khutsong victory was engineered within the hegemony of the dominant neoliberal framework of the ANC government (e.g. Sinwell, 2010a) would applaud such a development. Would a new project contain greater counter-hegemonic content than the first challenge? It is difficult to say but whatever happens, the struggle will continue in Khutsong.

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob Mbatha, MDF chairperson, Khutsong, Merafong City. Interview.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Mandla Magwaza, member of Young Communist League, Khutsong, Merafong City. Interview.

## 5.9 SANDILE SITHOLE

### **SIYATHEMBA TOWNSHIP, BALFOUR, MPUMALANGA**

*Sandile Sithole is an easygoing young adult who grew up in Siyathemba Township. He is a Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) party organiser and in this role is an ally of local ANC and SACP activists in organising the protests that have gripped this small township recently. Sithole's blood is PAC and he is passionate about the struggle to liberate Africa from the shackles of colonialism and imperialism. The local protests have fired his political imagination and been a life-changing experience. He is a young lion hungry for revolutionary politics and for radical social change that will benefit the African people and the working class, and not least, benefit the Siyathemba community.*

*Sithole, though committed to radical militant action, is very thoughtful about how best to win the struggle in Balfour in the future; political education and engaging the authorities in sustained negotiations might be the best way forward. He also thinks that introducing a common currency in Africa would dislodge imperialism's grip on the continent. He represents the vanguard of the protest movement in South Africa: the township youth.*

## 5.10 BALFOUR BURNIN'

Balfour distinguished itself by waging repeat protests within 6 months of each other and on both occasions spurring the president of the country to visit the area. The first protest happened around 20 July 2009, and the second one on 8 February 2010 (Masondo, 2010; Tau, 2009). At first the Balfour struggle was projected as one for service delivery and for development. But in between the two major protests the struggle is increasingly being framed as a struggle for re-demarcation back into Gauteng and away from Mpumalanga province (Duncan, 2010). This demand was there in the first place but has received greater emphasis especially after the visit of the minister of local government, Sicelo Shiceka, who made some

promises in this respect.<sup>25</sup> People view Mpumalanga as corrupt and Gauteng as more efficient and developed.

There is continuity between the first and second protests with the community demands kept the same for the sake of consistency and as a tactic.<sup>26</sup> However, some changes can be noted, for example, observers noted the unmistakable anger and impatience of the crowd during President Zuma's second visit (Langa and von Holdt, 2010). This was partly the result of the failure of the government to bring improvements after the first protests despite promises made by the president (Masondo, 2010).

The protests in Balfour were marked by violence by protesters and by the police (Sinwell, Kirshner, *et al.* 2009). During the first protests the local council office got burnt down and during the second protests the local library was razed to the ground (Alexander, 2010). Some researchers have explained this as indicating "continuity between the apartheid past and the democratic present in the symbolic meaning of library or clinic as a structure that represents authority, and an authority that is indifferent to subaltern voices. Burning it down is a symbolic disruption of that authority, an assertion of the anger and grievances of the community" (Langa and von Holdt, 2010, p. 27).

Although the violence provides space for the "subaltern groups who have been structurally denied agency over their lives [to] celebrate the recovery of agency", it also "represents ...the disempowerment or subordination of the community" (*ibid.*, p. 29). Liddell Hart (quoted in Zunes, *et al.* 1999, p. 210) warns that:

The habit of violence takes deeper root in irregular warfare than it does in regular warfare. In the latter it is counteracted by the habit of obedience to constituted authority, whereas the former makes a virtue of denying authority and violating rules. It becomes very difficult to rebuild a country and a stable state on such an undermined foundation.

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<sup>25</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth leader and activist, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Thami Sosibo, youth leader and activist, Siyathemba township. Interviews.

<sup>26</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth activist leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour.

This critical assessment of the repertoires of resistance chosen by communities in struggle is legitimate but it raises some questions. For example, researchers have observed a strong correlation between police provocation or weak crowd control methods and the eruption of protests into violence (Duncan, 2010; Omar, 2006; Sinwell, Kirshner, *et al.* 2009). Other commentators have specifically questioned the moral outrage expressed surrounding the burning down of the community library in Balfour as somewhat hypocritical and missing the point of protest (Buccus, 2010). This follows the logic that: “A protest movement needs to be shrill, obstreperous, undignified, and careless of the pattern of existing legitimacy which it is seeking to destroy in the interest of a new pattern which is waiting to emerge” (Anderson, 1969, p. viii). This is opposed to “educational movements [that] have to be low-keyed, respectful of existing legitimacies – tying into them wherever possible, and chary of arousing counter-protest” (*ibid.*). But even so, the burning of buildings and violence against people crosses a certain line. An investigation into community attitudes to the burning of the library in Siyathemba yielded mixed responses suggesting divisions or ambivalence in the community on this issue (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010). A similar conclusion was reached in an assessment of the use of violent methods during the anti-apartheid struggle: “Often the targets of the rioters were public facilities for Africans, which created rifts within the black populations at a time when unity was of crucial importance” (Zunes, *et al.* 1999, p. 229).

The fact that during the Balfour protests there were attacks on shops owned by Somalians has raised concerns about the relationship of the protest movement and violence motivated by xenophobia (Langa and von Holdt, 2010). However, my respondents cut a clear line of demarcation between the two: they denounced xenophobia and attributed it to opportunistic elements.<sup>27</sup> The problem of violence and of xenophobia will be examined further in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

## 5.11 CONCLUSION

The experiences reflected upon in the above suggest that post-apartheid protest movements are a response by working class communities to a perceived failure of the state to improve

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<sup>27</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth activist leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour.

living conditions. This also applies in the case of the demarcation struggle where the underlying issue appears to be threatened community access to state services. The latter case brings to the fore the question of democracy, but this is true with the other cases in so far as communities expect their needs and views to be taken into account by the democratic government. The relationship of democracy and development is explored further in the next chapter.

The lack of an organisational link between the struggles considered here, indeed their isolation and fragmentation, suggests that there exist general conditions and circumstances that spawn protests in post-apartheid South Africa. This dissertation postulates that working class communities have a spontaneous receptivity to collective organisation and action that is inherent and inherited – it arises out of the structural location of the working class in capitalist social relations and is a result of a history of collective struggle against apartheid capitalism. There exist general conditions and common problems that affect different communities, but also, there are specific and localised issues and circumstances that trigger and shape protest in each community. There is a need therefore to account for both the specific and the general on the one hand, and on the other hand, to explore and theorise the dialectical link between these two aspects (Mészáros, 1995). This is the challenge which the subsequent analytical chapters grapple with.

The dissertation's central question is whether the protests represent a counter-hegemonic challenge to the neoliberal state. Most of the demands in the cases considered here are directed at the state. This state-oriented collective action is mostly not accompanied by an explicit or fundamental critique of neoliberal capitalism, except in the case of the SECC and to a lesser extent the LPM. These differences in ideological orientation appear to coincide with the different character of the struggles of the "new social movements" and the "service delivery protests". On the surface the former appear to be more programmatic, generic and ideologised in nature, while the latter seem spontaneous, elemental, ideologically pragmatic and area-specific. But the strategic vision required in challenging the state and ANC hegemony as, for

example, was successfully done in the case of Khutsong, suggests that it would be simplistic to characterise these differences as being between struggles that are anti-neoliberal as opposed to those working within the neoliberal framework (in the literature also expressed variously as: revolutionary versus reformist, class conscious versus spontaneous, ideologically advanced versus backward, invented versus invited, immanent versus imminent, etc.).

If we agree that the protests ultimately represent a collective response by working class communities to the disintegrative effects of the neoliberal economy, it is likely that protest will continue unless neoliberalism or the form of government is significantly changed in the country. I say this in view of the failure of the current hegemonic maneuvers of the ANC government to successfully integrate the masses into the neoliberal consensus up to so far. From this point of view, the protest movement represents the beginnings of a journey that is likely to lead to a search for alternatives in the future, but some of these alternatives will be more progressive than others as evidenced by the worrying coincidence of protests with xenophobic attacks in some cases (Everatt, 2010). Therefore, a useful question to ask with respect to the ideological thrust of the post-apartheid protest movement is: What form does the contestation of the dominant (neoliberal) discourse take? Do the struggles mostly harness the hegemonic ideology or do they directly challenge it? The case studies considered here arguably demonstrate that ideological contestation is a dynamic process and each case has to be studied in some detail in order to answer such questions. It is on the basis of these answers that we can develop a basis for an overall assessment of the extent to which neoliberalism is under threat from the protest movement in post-apartheid South Africa.

## CHAPTER 6: FACTORS BEHIND THE PROTESTS

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In this chapter an attempt is made to distill the experiences of protest action in the different areas investigated in the course of the study and to identify the salient factors characteristic of the protests. The title of the chapter suggests that these factors are viewed as the causes of the protests but this is not the case. The establishment of the relationship of causes to effects is difficult because of the complexity of social phenomena and human motivation: there are simply too many intervening factors that confound this relationship.

The chapter begins by considering the legacy of apartheid and the anti-apartheid struggle in post-apartheid society and thus locating the present within a socio-historical context. In this first section I identify continuities and discontinuities across the old and new society. What emerges is that just as structural conditions obtaining during apartheid days have carried over into the democratic society, so have ideas about society and about struggle. Protest action was the method used during the struggle against apartheid and its use has been revived with a vengeance in the new order albeit under different political circumstances. It is noteworthy that some of the ideas and visions that informed the struggle against apartheid are being revived and revitalised in the new era.

Working class communities have inherited a legacy of poor services and lack of development in their areas from the old order. The next section suggests that it is frustration with this unwanted legacy that has spurred many people into action rather than a rejection of the new order or the ANC government. Similarly, unhappiness at the slow rate of housing construction is behind the protest as evidenced by the fact that it is mostly people who live in shacks who appear to be the most dissatisfied. The following section looks at dissatisfaction with local government as a factor and argues that the political is closely linked to economics in so far as political criticism arises exactly because of the failure of government to improve people's lives. The dissatisfaction is so widespread in certain communities that, as the next section points out, the organisation of protests tends to take the form of local alliances that unite diverse and significant sections of the community concerned. Such developments immediately raise the

question of hegemony and entail the ANC as both government and political party waging a rearguard battle to reclaim its hold and control over the people. I conclude by the observation that long after the protests have subsidised and ANC hegemony re-established, the memory and legacy of the protests continues to influence local politics in many areas.

## **6.1 THE (ANTI-) APARTHEID INHERITANCE**

Apartheid is gone but its shadow looms over post-apartheid society. Continuities have been pointed out between the old and new South Africa in terms of the political-economic structures (Bond, 2000; Marais, 1998), state approaches to service delivery (McLennan and Munslow, 2009), repertoires of protest (Langa and von Holdt, 2010), gender inequality (Miraftab, 2006; Ruiters, 2008), and so on. South Africa is a divided and unequal society that exhibits vast differences in wealth between different geographic areas and classes of people (Statistics South Africa, 2000, 2007 and 2010). Capitalist development in South Africa has been characterised by uneven and combined development and this was particularly exacerbated by the legislative framework and harsh reality of “apartheid, as a formalised system of state repression and deprivation” (McLennan and Munslow, 2009, p. 23), with many townships beginning their lives as labour reservoirs and often set up through forced removals and mass evictions (Bonner, 1979; Huddleston, 1956). Like all other capitalist economies, South Africa has experienced economic imbalances and periodic crises resulting from the over-accumulation of capital and its mode of insertion into global capital circuits (Bond, 2000). Authors have noted the “combined” nature of capitalist development in South Africa (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010, p. 25) characterised by “a mix of market and non-market coercion [that] permitted a permanent system of racialised, gendered ‘primitive accumulation’” (Bond and Desai, 2006, p. 1). The struggle against apartheid involved efforts to radically change and liberate South African subaltern classes from this political and economic yoke. It was in the course of this struggle that the oppressed and exploited developed their (diverse) political and cultural traditions and identities. An exploration of how this rich inheritance has been carried over and activated in contentious agency in the different circumstances of the post-apartheid era can yield valuable insight into the complex factors behind the escalating protests and strikes in the country.

Present protest has a lot in common with mechanisms of contention characteristic of the anti-apartheid struggle including similarities in the issues taken up, their framing, repertoires of resistance, songs, symbols, etc. (Beinart and Dawson, 2010; Runciman, 2010). These continuities were identified and explored in the life stories of the protest leaders interviewed. All the activist leaders interviewed were old enough to have been there during the height of the struggle against apartheid, the 1980s, or to have heard about it first hand from people who were there. The communities that served as research sites were variously involved in and affected by the struggle against apartheid and this experience was spontaneously referred to by almost all the activists interviewed. In Balfour, for example, I was shown an empty stand where a local (apartheid) councilor was lynched by a mob during the fiery 1980s. A youth informant justified the use of protest as a “tradition” of African working class communities:

We were able to topple Botha with his arms, with the same tradition we believe in. From 1913, from generation to generation, we conquered Queen Elizabeth. Hitler. That is the tradition that we use to defeat the enemy. In 1976, tyres were burning, it is a culture, Zuma knows that we must express our anger.<sup>28</sup>

Respondents generally located the present protests within a broader narrative of a struggle against colonialism, apartheid and capitalism. The story of their lives began with the struggle against apartheid. Their siblings, neighbours and communities had been involved in the resistance and they related how this affected them. Some told heart-wrenching personal tales of hardship under apartheid, using these elements to frame today’s struggles.

The remnants of apartheid, the scars of apartheid; there has never been an attempt to address these, especially when it comes to the poorest of the poor, the people who live on the farms, they are the forgotten people.<sup>29</sup>

The youth idealised the armed struggle and the militancy of the anti-apartheid struggle. Criticism of the ANC invariably began with a reference to the struggle against apartheid,

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<sup>28</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth leader and community activist, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Solly Mkhize, community leader and activist, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

followed by the observation that what people fought for had not been realised. The lack of development, the poor services, the shortage of jobs, the poverty, all these are regarded as evidence that expectations have not been met. The people struggled “for nothing”. But why do people choose to use the old methods of the anti-apartheid era? The response was uniform: that is the only way to get the government’s attention. Protest is the only language they understand. And not just any kind of protest, you had to be militant, you had to be disruptive to impress your earnestness on the authorities.

The only time that they take you seriously is when they see the anger of the community, and they can see one voice, they see the damage [that can occur] if they don’t solve the problem.<sup>30</sup>

We all met talking about this matter, from here where are we going. We decided we must start another protest so that they can see that we are serious.<sup>31</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that the basic problem in South Africa, as in many developing countries, is the failure of “political citizenship” to translate into “social (economic) citizenship” (Friedman, 2010; Webster and von Holdt, 2004). This bedevils the state-citizenry relationship given the fact that the legitimacy and hegemony of the post-apartheid state is arguably based on the ideology of developmentalism, the idea that the transition to democracy entails a shift from a racial to a developmental state that “delivers” improvements in the lives of its loyal citizens (Barchiesi, 1996). This was the promise of the RDP: “a better life for all” (ANC, 1994). The failure to honour the promise makes senior government officials worry that the ferocity of the protests may suggest a deeper alienation from the state:

But it is the rage of sections of the protesters and the extent of violence and destruction they wreak that is striking. It reflects a far more fundamental alienation of people from our democracy. It suggests an acute sense of marginalisation and exclusion... the nature and scope of the protests we are witnessing are not part of a healthy, growing democracy (Carrim, 2010).

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<sup>30</sup> Thami Sosibo, youth activist, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The protest leaders are aware of the grave implications of their actions and do not celebrate the attacks on state property, rather they argue that there is no other way given the unresponsiveness of the authorities to the people's grievances.

We don't like the fact that the library gets burnt and the people rioting. It is because that is the only language they understand. What must the community do? It is the only way you will get listened to.<sup>32</sup>

Other analysts, recalling anti-apartheid repertoires of protest, strike a sympathetic and less alarmist tone: "Protest, to be effective, has to target an accessible target with the appropriate symbolic value. When rage is felt against a government then government property will always be a potential target for protest" (Buccus, 2010). But Langa and von Holdt (2010, p. 29) point to a more fundamental danger:

The readiness to resort to repertoires of the past in attacking state property and responding with violence to the violence of the police... suggests that the legitimacy of the state, which was so fundamentally undermined in the struggle against apartheid, may not have fully stabilised in the constitutional democratic post-apartheid order.

This observation and concern should be **qualified by** noting that according to official figures most protest action is relatively peaceful (Vally, 2009). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that police involvement is often a common factor in the eruption of violence during protests (Sinwell, Kirshner, *et al.* 2009).

The anti-apartheid movement, some analysts have **argued**, was one of the greatest non-violent campaigns for change in history (Zunes, *et al.* 1999). **These** authors insist that it was the strategy of non-violence rather than the "armed **struggle**" and notions of "people's war" that wrought victory in the struggle against apartheid (*ibid*). The use of violence, on the other hand, was counter-productive in that it could be constructed to justify state repression and to demonise the struggle (*ibid*). In any event recent **reflective** accounts suggest that the armed struggle was far more effective in gripping the fertile imagination of the militant township

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<sup>32</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth and community leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

youth rather than actually delivering physical blows against the enemy (Naidoo, 2010; O'Malley, 2007).

The struggle against apartheid bestowed the present generation with a rich tradition and repertoire of struggle in the form of the non-violent methods and tactics of resistance, mobilisation and organisation that proved so effective against apartheid. It is argued here that an important aspect of this inheritance is a theoretical vision that attributes agency, the power to change things for the better, to ordinary people.

The dream that it is possible to have a better life for all is another inheritance from the past. Some protest leaders pointed to the change of policy from the RDP to GEAR as proof that the ANC government had abandoned the redistributive path and opted for neoliberal economics.<sup>33</sup> Hence the ascendancy of a culture of capitalist individualism as opposed to the collectivism and solidarity that was characteristic of the anti-apartheid struggle. The move to neoliberalism signals a change of vision and, concomitantly, of political culture in post-apartheid society. But the dream lives on.

## **6.2 POOR SERVICES**

Overcrowding exacerbates the problem of backlogs in the provision of basic services such as houses, water, electricity, sanitation and transport in working class areas. In Balfour, it is youth and young adults who suffer the most from the shortage of housing (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010). Many residents are forced to erect additional "backrooms" or shacks in order to accommodate burgeoning households as families grow. Tenants desperate for accommodation compete with non-paying family members for a room at the back underlining the intrusion of the market into familial relations and the organisation and use of domestic space. The unplanned increase in the number of residents in an area affects service provision, strains the infrastructural system and leads, for example, to low water pressure and power failures. In some townships, such as Orlando East, Soweto, the authorities have, in response to the burden of intensive electricity use, embarked on a campaign to cut off electricity cables supplying

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<sup>33</sup> Solly Mkhize, community activist and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

backyard shacks.<sup>34</sup> Shack dwellers need electricity as much as anyone else and sometimes, as in Protea South, Soweto, they connect themselves to the grid without arranging with the authorities concerned.<sup>35</sup> Access to electricity supply is precarious in many townships as a consequence with unaffordable bills and backlogs in connections engendering illegal connections. Research suggests that the number of cut-offs as a credit control measure competes with that of new connections to water and electricity supplies (McDonald and Pape, 2002). While this finding has been strenuously contested by the authorities, recent research indicates a preponderance of service cut-offs even among constituencies the government itself defines as the poorest of the poor (Everatt, 2009). This illogic derives from the prioritisation of cost recovery over access – a neoliberal mantra. Service cut-offs have triggered protests in many South African townships such as Soweto giving birth to new social movements such as the SECC (Bond, 2002 and 2004). The advent of service delivery protests or what Alexander (2010) terms the “rebellion of the poor” can thus be seen as an extension of these struggles for access to basic services.

The failure of the government to deliver basic services has been attributed to constraints that derive from the backlogs of apartheid on the one hand, and the failure of neoliberalism to address these, on the other. Fiscal austerity, privatisation and cost recovery are aspects of neoliberal policy that impinge directly and negatively on service provision from the point of view of the working class and the poor (McDonald and Pape, 2002; Wasrud, 2010). Some protest leaders articulated the link between their immediate struggle and the underlying structural constraints that are attributable to the neoliberal hegemony. The suggestion that the ANC government is developing a “class system of service provision” (Ruiters, 2005) expresses the link between struggles around services and the operation of the underlying structures of capitalism.

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<sup>34</sup> Mavis Gwala, resident of Orlando East and organiser of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Martha Mbatha, resident of Protea South and community leader. Interview.

### 6.3 HOUSING

Housing is central to quality of life. About 15% of households in South Africa live in shack settlements while many others inhabit backyard rooms and informal structures attached to the back of a brick and mortar house with, for example, in certain areas in a township like Soweto at least 20% of the people live this way (Beall, *et al.* 2003). The leader of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shack dwellers' movement, has graphically described life in a shack settlement:

Our bodies itch every day because of the insects. If it is raining everything is wet – blankets and floors. If it is hot the mosquitoes and flies are always there. There is no holiday in the shacks. When the evening comes – it is always a challenge. The night is supposed to be for relaxing and getting rest. But it doesn't happen like that in the *jondolos*. People stay awake worrying about their lives. You must see how big the rats are that will run across the small babies in the night (Zikode, 2005).

It is easy to understand the anger, frustration and sometimes despair associated with this kind of life. People feel neglected, resentful and have a strong sense of injustice, the feeling that things should not be this way.<sup>36</sup> During the days of apartheid such areas were called “squatter camps” and inhabitants were harassed and stigmatised by the authorities. This treatment was designed to control and meant to engender a collective inferiority complex but it also gave rise to a political culture of collective resistance to apartheid authorities, a tradition which is apparently being revived in post-apartheid society.

Researchers have noted that “a substantial proportion” of protests emanate from informal settlements (Booyesen, 2009). At 43% the Dipaleseng municipality (Balfour) has a very high proportion of people living in shacks (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010). In the small towns investigated here, shack dwellers constituted a significant proportion of the protesters and their main demand for housing was shared with and often prioritised by the protesting broader community concerned. While the ANC government has built an unprecedented 1-million

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<sup>36</sup> Martha Mbatha, resident of Protea South informal settlement. Interview.

houses since independence, the quality of the housing has been poor because of the emphasis on product quantity rather than on broader developmental goals, and arguably also due to the neoliberal approach which was discernable in 1994 already when “the promised minimum standards for housing were replaced by an ‘incremental’ process and inadequate ‘basic services,’ and a strong state role in housing was negated in favour of market-driven approach” (Bond, 2000, p. 66). Analysts, for example, have noted how the neoliberal framework inclines private contractors to maximise construction income and minimise land costs leading to low-income subsidised housing projects being located in remote areas (Bremner, 2000). This outcome increases the cost of providing basic services including transport. Poor workmanship is also a major problem and drain on resources with the government compelled to rebuild thousands of badly constructed RDP houses (Ndlovu, 2010).

#### **6.4 LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Hart (2009, p. 3) has argued that from 1994 until 2000 local government already reflected some of the policy problems and tensions which appear to be now besetting the whole system:

Local government had come to embody some of the key contradictions of the neoliberal post-apartheid era – namely the tensions between fierce fiscal austerity combined with massive new responsibilities for local government and pressures to commodify basic services on the one hand, and invocations of local participation, social justice, and democracy on the other – with all of this playing out on viciously uneven terrains carved by the racial geographies of apartheid, and opening to the global economy.

This quotation reflects some of the tensions between the democratic imperative and credentials of the new state and the strictures of neoliberal economic policy. The lack of democracy and responsiveness to the views of the people, first indicated when GEAR was heralded by government as “non-negotiable” back in 1996 (Bond, 2000, p. 44), has been a great source of tension and grievance at the local level with many analysts studying the protests emphasising the political problem of lack of participatory democracy concomitantly with, and sometimes more than that of service delivery (Friedman, 2009; Booysen, 2007; Buccus, 2010). Neoliberalism as an “art of government” (Ferguson, 2009, p. 173), despite government policy

and rhetoric to the contrary, has tended to marginalise the voice of residents as the business sector took over or was contracted to reorganise the running of public services and utilities (Wainwright, 2011). The research findings in the present study suggest that there is a lot of dissatisfaction with lack of accountability and community control of local governance processes and it is often this frustration that leads to mobilisation against the local authorities. The dissatisfaction is closely related to lack of service delivery and development; there is a link between the political and economic problems.

The failure of the authorities to respond positively to community demands often leads to protest. In all cases covered here the decision to protest is often preceded by repeated attempts to engage the authorities (Booyesen, 2009; Sinwell, 2009a). Communities look to government and do whatever is necessary to facilitate the improvement of their condition. They vote, attend meetings, fill government forms and generally use all the available channels to raise their concerns and suggestions; for example, attending *izimbizo*, ward committees, community policing forums, community meetings, Integrated Development Programme (IDP) processes, etc. But research suggests that these official channels of “participation” or “participatory democracy” often do not achieve their purpose (Ballard, *et al.* 2006b; Hemson, nd; Williams, 2006).

Corruption was mentioned by all respondents as a major concern in the operation of local government. Government officials and political leaders are accused of rigging tenders, and using local government resources and jobs to enrich themselves. People were not opposed to the system of tendering as such but to its use to benefit individuals unscrupulously. There was strong opposition to the perceived illegal diversion of public funds into private pockets, such as when money is stolen, a friend is given a job, or a development project is done shoddily or not completed because of profit-mongering contractors. A related problem is that of “conspicuous consumption” and the envy and resentment kindled when politicians or officials suddenly act as if they have struck it rich. This is particularly resented in small towns where everyone knows each others’ personal histories. Langa and von Holdt (2010) suggest that the practice of showing off is a function of a rapidly changing society and social structure and the resultant

need to ostentatiously signal the rank, power and status of social actors. The rapidity and extent with which some individuals have amassed vast amounts of power and influence in the new democratic order is truly amazing, as evidenced in this story of a “man of power” (Hunter, 1953) in Harrismith:

He has powers I don't know how, people in the township idolise him, most of them. He used tenders, he was once HOD [Head of Department] of local government and housing. He would appoint a constructor to build houses and he would have shares in that and if you refuse to give him a slice you don't get the tender... His wife specialises in catering, if there is an event automatically it is his wife who caters. He has a mortuary, before you can get a job you must first work at his mortuary and he will pay you when he likes. Even the traffic cops, when he has a function at his house each and every traffic cop must bring a present. I am telling you. You are playing. He is a king!<sup>37</sup>

A few of the respondents questioned the structure of local government and the nature of democracy in the country pointing out what they regarded as serious flaws mainly around the councilors having too much power. They put forward ideas on how the system could be improved. Almost all the respondents blamed the ANC directly or indirectly for failure to control corruption and not providing enough oversight over local government such as making sure that the right people were appointed for the job, monitoring them and generally running a government responsive to community needs. Everyone imagined that it was possible to run a government like that.

## **6.5 ORGANISATION OF THE PROTESTS**

In the literature, movement organisations such as the SECC and LPM are understood to have more or less well-defined organisational structures and identities as “new social movements” (Egan and Wafer, 2006; Greenberg, 2004). But less well known is the organisation behind the local community protests with details in this respect only recently coming to light. We have already established through presentation of the 3 case studies here that, in all the cases some

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<sup>37</sup> Sipho Matlala, community and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

form of organisation is created that takes charge, calls meetings, compiles grievances, leads the community into protest and negotiates with the authorities (Sinwell, Kirshner, *et al.* 2009). In the case of Balfour and Standerton, youth forums were formed that successfully mobilised the community in an inclusive manner that involved political parties and community groups.

Workers, because of their structural location in capitalist society, spontaneously respond to calls for collective action (Grossman, 1985). But conscious organisation, no matter how rudimentary, is necessary in carrying out mass action. What emerges from the case studies are the broad outlines of working class community organisation, its form, its methods, its politics, its durability, etc. Although each area presents with its own peculiarities, a few common or distinctive features are discernible across the protest areas studied.

Firstly, the protest movement tends to enjoy, or aspire to win, the support of a substantial section of the community. This is important for the effectiveness of the campaign. It also reflects the veritable battle for hegemony that ensues between the protesters and the local ruling political elite with numbers important in that game. The interview material suggests that most community protest movements tend to enjoy widespread if not majority support at some point in their history. It is exactly the loss of this support, or the inability to activate it into protest action, that signals the decline of a movement. The power of community campaigns such as in Khutsong lie in their ability to sustain unity and support among a large section of the community for long periods despite the hegemonic machinations of the local political elite. The organisational form of community protests can be viewed, from one angle, as an alliance of local organisations.

Secondly, the form of organisation of a protest movement, or at least its leadership structure, is not static. It changes over time and in response to changing conditions and challenges. The basic form of organisation that appears common is the “civic form” or broad community movement or front whereby all members of the community, irrespective of political affiliation, are said to belong. The specific organisational structures and committee procedures that are constructed to effect this differ from place to place and over time. Often existing organisations determine the form of the unifying body according to their strategic objectives, experience and

engagement with each other. In Balfour it was the Dipaliseng Youth Forum that at first broached the issue of protest. Later this body was dissolved and another, the Dipaliseng Residents Association, was formed to lead the second round of protests.

Thirdly, the community organisations have a delineable life span or biography. The history of some community organisations that organised protests, such as the Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents, have a history which can more or less be neatly divided into stages, namely, conception, growth, climax, decline and dissolution. A correspondence between the development of the organisation and of the broader movement of struggle in the community is discernable. The reasons and factors at play in the life cycle of a given movement require detailed research which was not possible in this study. But some insights were gained such as the fact that even if a movement disappears, it is possible to find subsequent traces of its influence, for example, in the case of Harrismith some of the old protest leadership is today active in the new local development forum. In Khutsong the political fallout arising out of the upheavals of the demarcation struggle continues to influence local politics in this small Gauteng township. Protests create a political legacy.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have identified the various factors that lie behind the protests not as causes but as influences that intersect with others in triggering the protests. Working class communities have a lot to protest about and the question is not whether but how, who, and when protest is organised. The point is made that neoliberalism as a policy framework can be blamed for the structural constraints it imposes that inimically affect people thus galvanising them into protest. The anger of the people is mostly directed at the state with implications for democracy and for the ANC as the ruling party in that it is likely that in the long term its hegemony will be seriously undermined.

## **CHAPTER 7: THE IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROTESTS**

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Harvey (2007) has raised the question of whether conditions exist in South Africa for the formation of a “countermovement” to challenge neoliberalism. His inquiry is based on a critical application of Polanyi’s (1944) theory of the “double movement” whereby society is compelled to resist the incursion of the profit motive into all aspects of life as a means of protecting itself from the wholesale commodification of goods and services by an unfettered market system. A study into the struggle against the installation of pre-paid water meters as a mechanism of cost-recovery in Phiri, Soweto, leads Harvey (2007, p. 243) to the conclusion that indeed such an oppositional movement is needed but has not seen the light of day due to the “organisational, political, programmatic and strategic weaknesses” of the new social movements such as the APF and the failure of the labour movement, in particular COSATU, to involve itself in community struggles. The focus and timing of Harvey’s study means that he has not adequately considered the recent exponential rise in service delivery protests and the recent scholarship around this. Alexander and Pfaffe (2010, p. 24) conclude their study into the Balfour protests by observing that even though the “rebellions of the poor” have not culminated in “a broad mobilisation against the government” there is a potential for this in the future. Booysen (2009) suggests that the demands and issues that the protests seek to address are escalating from the local to the national level and is particularly intrigued by the protesters’ continued electoral support for the ruling party. This chapter builds on this scholarship and the questions raised therein so as to arrive at an assessment of the overall significance of the protests.

### **7.1 IS THE ANC LOSING SUPPORT?**

The ANC is an important factor in the successful transition to and consolidation of democracy in South Africa because of its role during the national liberation struggle and its dominance as the ruling party in post-apartheid society (Southall and Daniel, 2005). It is thus possible and necessary to consider the political implications of the protests from the point of view of the ANC. As a leading political party in a democracy the ANC is undoubtedly concerned about

whether or not it is losing power as a result of the protests – the protesters' alienation might translate into loss of electoral. Voting trends suggest continued electoral dominance of the ANC combined with a significant section of its potential voters keeping away from the polls rather than voting for alternative parties (ibid.).

Most of the community activists interviewed were card-carrying members of the ANC and SACP or the youth leagues of these organisations. Their loyalty to the ANC was tested by the experience of confrontation with the ANC government. They were no longer the same people they were before they engaged in protest action. Most said they still support and vote for the ANC, but in the course of protesting they developed a new political identity as the people who struggle against the ANC government and party. This change in outlook and orientation to the party is significant because some of these people heretofore identified closely with the ANC and were part of its grassroots activist base.

It is not the ANC we know the one we have now. It is another ANC we don't understand. Remember the statement by Smuts Ngonyama when he was in Luthuli House, he said he didn't struggle to be poor. We said he is mad but he was saying what is happening to the ANC today. People don't go to ANC to build the ANC but to serve their own ends, look at the story of the tenderpreneurs.<sup>38</sup>

We think we are step ladders, once they are up there they don't see us.<sup>39</sup>

The political orientation of the protest leaders interviewed and generally the protesters' demands across the cases investigated, suggest that the protests are motivated by a belief and a hope that the ANC can still be made to deliver. This partly explains the continued loyalty to the ANC by its disillusioned members and supporters. This hope averts the danger of disillusioned working class citizens – “recognising that the dream of freedom and happiness is unattainable” – from withdrawing from public engagement into passivity and apathy instead of choosing the “more hopeful and activist” alternative response of collective protest (Ruiters,

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<sup>38</sup> Mandla Magwaza, community activist and leader, Khutsong township, Merafong City. Interview.

<sup>39</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth and community leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

2004, p. 12). But, for the protesters, the hope in and loyalty to the ANC might also act as a brake on their developing a fundamental critique and rejection of the neoliberal system that the ANC manages.

## 7.2 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROTESTS

It has been argued that the protests have generally yielded positive results in terms of raising issues that require the attention of society and the authorities, and therefore contribute to strengthening South Africa's young democracy (Beinart and Dawson, 2010; White, 2008). But others are not convinced that enough is changing in the lives of ordinary people and to the social structures and power relations that engender inequality, poverty and other social injustices; the protests are seen as not having achieved much beyond highlighting the issues and providing a basis for an intellectual critique of government policies (Sinwell, 2010a). How do the protest leaders answer this question?

The protest leaders generally felt that not much had been achieved in terms of service delivery and economic development in their areas. Also, their communities continued not to have control over decision-making processes involving the local state. The only exception was the pride felt by the victorious Khutsong protest leaders, but they also felt that the struggle for development and service delivery had to continue, and that there was a need to increase community control and influence in the running of local government.<sup>40</sup> Despair was conveyed by Harrismith activists who felt that they had lost the battle including witnessing their beloved organisation, the Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents Committee, being liquidated:

So what was achieved by Concerned? They did some things, for example we complained about street lights also we said graves must be fenced in with precast, so they did that fence and the high mast lights. We told them that down there in Mohlakeng where the RDP houses are, that there must be at least two primary schools, a clinic and a police station; those kids walk long distances going on foot coming across to Vulindlela school because sometimes when it rains these kids don't go to school.

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<sup>40</sup> Jacob Mbatha, Merafong Development Forum leader, Khutsong. Interview.

They promised and said it would happen but nothing happened. They fooled us with a mobile clinic but in the end it didn't happen. What did we achieve, it is this graveyard, high mast lights, what else? Okay, they also paved the road down to Mohlakeng, the taxis didn't go there before because the road was not okay now they drive down taking people there.<sup>41</sup>

The [ANC] government made sure that they crush the Concerned in many different ways. Recruiting individuals, buying out some paying them R30 000, there was a plan to cut off my tongue.<sup>42</sup>

President Zuma's visits to Balfour are viewed as an achievement by the local activists there. But even on the day of the visit a feeling of frustration was expressed by the youth activists interviewed. They were excited with Zuma's visit but they were unsure whether the community was getting anywhere with its struggle.

We believe that Zuma can come and leave and nothing happens. That is why we say it will develop through struggle.<sup>43</sup>

The youth as I told you, is the backbone of the struggle, they are the people who **make** these things to happen, they shake Zuma and make him come here. Sicelo [Shiceka] came. It is us the youth, we are active and vibrant, we won't stop. We can see **the** future in Balfour, we will develop slow, slow. We are under the spotlight, the country is watching us.<sup>44</sup>

The Soweto activists interviewed indicated that their movements had been around for a while and they had fought over a wide range of **issues**, and they had tasted victory and **defeat** at various points, but they were still there in the struggle. **But like** the demise of the **Harrismith** committee, the demise of the LPM organisation was a severe blow for **Martha Mbatha**, the Protea South community, and the landless in South Africa who were looking to this organisation

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<sup>41</sup> Siphso Matlala, community leader and activist, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>42</sup> Solly Mkhize, community leader and activist, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>43</sup> Thami Sosibo, youth and community leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

<sup>44</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth and community leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

for leadership. There was little she could point out as specific achievements on the land question, the issue remaining largely unresolved as far as she was concerned.<sup>45</sup>

The SECC activist leader interviewed listed some achievements of the organisation such as the partial victory when the authorities cancelled residents' electricity debts in Soweto, Vaal and the East Rand, a concession made at about the same time that this organisation was most active in leading the mass mobilisation around services in Soweto (Bond, 2002a). My informant also mentioned the SECC's campaign against the installation of pre-paid water meters in Soweto. The matter was taken to the country's Constitutional Court where the judges ruled against the residents who had heretofore enjoyed favourable judgments in the lower courts (Bond and Dugard, 2008; Harvey, 2007). This defeat weakened the SECC's water campaign but the struggle continues because the law is not the final word on questions of class struggle.<sup>46</sup> The SECC activist's assessment of the achievements of protest action was tied to the notion of a counter-hegemonic project (socialism) and thus gave the impression of being informed, in addition to countable (delivery) gains, by broader ideological objectives. While some researchers have emphasised the need for social movements to win tangible gains for their members (Friedman, 2010; Ferguson, 2009), the activist appeared to place equal or concomitant value on "the development of socialist human beings through collective struggle" (Lebowitz, 1992, p. 181).

### **7.3 THE RECOVERY OF AGENCY**

The Khutsong activist leaders felt that they had achieved more than a victory against being relocated into the North West, they had also helped advance democracy in South Africa.

We wanted to teach [ex-President] Mbeki that he must not, once he has been put in power by the people, start to see himself as God; you are the government of the people you must listen to what people say.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Martha Mbatha, LPM leader, Protea South, Soweto. Interview.

<sup>46</sup> Mavis Gwala, SECC administrator, organiser and leader. Interview.

<sup>47</sup> Mzwandile, community and protest leader, Khutsong, Merafong. Interview.

And the community is very excited that they are back where they belong, that the Freedom Charter was adhered to by the ANC that the people shall govern.<sup>48</sup>

But even in struggles where tangible victories had not been achieved, activists felt their protests had achieved something; for example, despite the despondency about the outcome of the struggle in Harrismith, including some activists carrying the burden of the death of young Teboho Mkhonza on their shoulders, there was some pride and a feeling that the defunct Concerned had left its mark on Harrismith politics, indeed, nationally and even internationally.

Everyone agrees that Concerned was the foundation of the struggle for delivery... We took a stand and bravely so when everyone was not thinking about it, everyone was tamed by the regime. So it takes courage to come out in public and say enough is enough. In terms of awareness country-wide I think it played a big role. It had national impact.<sup>49</sup>

It was bad because some members of the community labeled us as people who caused Teboho's death... We experienced the pain and we still carry it with us because we never intended that a child should lose his life. But what is even more painful for us, the leadership, is that his death was in vain.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, even a relatively new struggle such as Balfour prides itself on its legacy even as it is still embroiled in the process of struggle. The youth activists interviewed felt that their area was making history, had shaken the government and twice the president of the country had come down. This gave them hope that they would prevail.

In fact, in all the riots nationally Balfour is the one which is the focus and which they are concerned with. Development is coming, we can see, and we are hoping. It is just that the years are passing by and others will benefit from our sweat. I can see development

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<sup>48</sup> Jacob Mbatha, community and protest leader, Khutsong, Merafong. Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Solly Mkhize, community and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>50</sup> Themba Motloun, youth and community protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

in 5 years. We will be better. You won't phone and find us at 10 or 11 a.m. sitting around – we will be busy doing things.<sup>51</sup>

We put Balfour on the map. This little township, the whole president came here twice. *Siyabangena* (we are making our mark).<sup>52</sup>

Despite a relatively brief involvement, these youth have experienced struggle and this has affected their outlook. During my second visit I thought I detected visible political and personal development in terms of the political thinking and personal orientation of the youth leaders. Ayerman and Jameson (1991, p. 3) have argued that social movements are involved in a “cognitive praxis”, that they change the thinking of participants and sometimes of society itself. All the activists interviewed talked about and sometimes displayed personal changes in outlook as a result of their involvement. Such involvement, especially at leadership level, is arguably a life-changing experience for many people. The effect appeared to be the development of a deeper understanding and commitment to the struggle for “development” and betterment of the people’s condition. It can also be regarded as activating agency: “Subaltern groups who have been structurally denied agency over their lives celebrate the recovery of agency, however brief, in protest and collective violence” (Langa and von Holdt, 2010, p.29).

Recovery of agency can involve a sense of empowerment resulting from intellectual development, discovering new ideas, gaining confidence, honing leadership skills, mastering local development issues, developing a political identity as a champion of community interests. Becoming what Lefebvre termed the “spontaneous revolutionary” (Merrifield, 2006, p. 140). Violence might not be central to the process because often non-violent skills are required of grassroots leaders especially once they start engaging in discussions with the authorities:

My involvement in the 2004 protests was mainly to mobilise the youth to make sure that they had a common understanding, but my role was bigger because we had to sit

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<sup>51</sup> Sbusiso, youth and protest leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

<sup>52</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth and protest leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

down with these people, argue with them, give them facts, state facts, refute their arguments and all that jazz.<sup>53</sup>

The heightened awareness and increased sensitivity of the activists is an important aspect of the activation of their agency. The job of the agitator, according to Marx, is to “make the actual oppression even more oppressive by making people conscious of it, and the insult even more insulting by publicising it” (quoted in Kolakowski, 1978, p. 129). The agitator needs to feign infuriation in order to infuriate his or her audience. “Fires can't be made with dead embers, nor can enthusiasm be stirred by spiritless men (sic),” once wrote James Baldwin, American freedom fighter and author (1972, p. 418).

Other writers have approached the question of agency using the idea of “voice”: participation in movement activities helps break the silences in the sense suggested by Paulo Freire (1972), those who did not speak begin to do so, raising and engaging with issues that affect their lives (Gibson, 2007; McKinley, 2004; Pithouse, 2006). Steve Biko (2002) famously said “Black man (sic) you are on your own” in a statement that brings together self-definition and agency. A similar sentiment was conveyed by the activists who also felt that no one could help their communities except themselves:

So the most motivating factor was just to see change, the important thing is change and I happen to see that change will not happen and for that change to happen a person must stand up and fight for that change, it doesn't mean fight as in fight but to see to it that change happens.<sup>54</sup>

There will be change but it will not come from the people in power, they have demonstrated that. There will be no change from them, the change will come from the people on the ground. We must organise ourselves, we must make the change.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Themba Motloun, youth and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>54</sup> Themba Motloun, youth and community protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>55</sup> Solly Mkhize, community and protest leader, Intabazwe, Harrismith. Interview.

#### 7.4 WHAT TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT?

Conversations with protest leaders suggest that community demands can be captured in three terms: service delivery, development and state responsiveness. We have looked at service delivery and the issue of a responsive state above, but what do the protest leaders mean when they talk of “development”, a highly contested concept (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). Some researchers have established the axis of this contestation by positing a distinction between “imminent” and “immanent” development (Sinwell, 2009a). This approach follows Hickey and Mohan’s (2004, p. 168) distinction between “a project that seeks directly to challenge existing power relations [immanent development] rather than simply work around them for more technically efficient service delivery [imminent development].” The ANC government has tended to confine itself to improving existing delivery systems, putting in more resources and improving state-citizen communication channels, but has largely eschewed tampering with the (neoliberal) “economic fundamentals” which arguably would involve a re-configuration of class relations. The government has repositioned itself as a developmental state, but as one commentator has surmised, this amounts to “development through social regulation” which, while a welcome shift, does not break out of the neoliberal framework (McLennan and Munslow, 2009, p. 33).

The community activists interviewed projected themselves as people who are passionately concerned with the development of their communities and some of them articulated developmental visions and proposals for their communities. Development was defined in holistic or broad terms rather than in narrow economic terms. They spoke about general societal development, overcoming historical legacies, personal development, skills training, education, sports, and so on. They deployed a developmental discourse that sought to constitute a “general interest”. They spoke about the development of the township and the local town or city, the public and private sectors and the interests of different social groups in the community. Of interest was the tendency to compare their townships with other working class areas, as opposed to upper middle class suburbs, in their formulation of the level and kind

of development they want. Soweto was invoked by several interviewees as an example of a township where there is development, where “comrades are doing their job”.<sup>56</sup>

Some activists suggested that protests despite their necessity or inevitability may be inimical to development. They felt that the turmoil and chaos of protest impedes development. The ideal situation was a harmonious relationship between the community and the government allowing for a dialogue around development.<sup>57</sup> The failure of existing mechanisms to facilitate such discussion has been documented (Ballard, Bonnin, *et al.* 2006; Williams, 2006). Indeed, some of the channels set up in the aftermath of the protests to facilitate negotiations between protest leaders and the authorities, such as in Balfour, failed the test resulting in further protests.

The protest leaders’ ideas on development might contradict or go beyond what the government has on offer. As the quotation below suggests, there can be dissonance between what is on offer and what people want:

I told one father who said X [the local ‘man of power’] helped us by employing our children to be traffic cops. I told him that we can see that but not all the children must become traffic cops. Some children are clever, why don’t we send them to universities and technicons, some can study engineering, become chartered accountants, then we can bank and invest with children from this township.<sup>58</sup>

The following quotation suggests a frustration with existing power relations, patronage and developmental practices at the local level:

Why should we go and beg councilors for jobs? Why can’t you go directly to the contractor, and get employed? The contractor does not know where you belong politically. It means even if you are not interested you must now go and get [ANC] membership so that you can get the job.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jacob Mbatha, community and protest leader, Khutsong, Merafong. Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth and protest leader, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

<sup>58</sup> Siphso Matlala, community and protest leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith. Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

On the local level, development projects appear highly politicised and linked to power games and hegemonic moves. This rests uneasily with the idea that development is an avenue through which community and citizen empowerment can be achieved. Those who hold power tend to resist giving it away, at least from the point of view of the protest leaders. Working class communities tend to be constructed as recipients of delivery and development rather than as active participants in their own development. They are thus relegated to demanding rather than designing a better future; to appealing rather than planning. This is the crux of Williams' (2008) call for going beyond protest politics and developing a "generative" politics. There is evidence to suggest that some protest leaders, such as those in Harrismith, developed ideas and proposals for the development of their areas that were arguably directed by and responsive to local needs. But the local political leadership was unable to positively engage with these ideas because it perceived a threat to its hegemony and political survival as the local power elite. Some concessions were made by the local state albeit viewed as too little by some protest leaders thus confirming the view that the demands made by subaltern communities on the state are generative in that they sometimes succeed in diverting resources to the poor (Appadurai, 2004).

Working class communities need to be subjects rather than objects of development. In the new South Africa: "All the dominant institutions were structurally weighted against the public alternatives to market-driven reconstruction" (Wainwright, 2011, p. 2). During the policy shift from RDP to GEAR, public entities such as the World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organisation and the South African government treasury constituted the "institutional support structure for private business as it took over or was contracted to carry out the re-organisation of public services and utilities" (ibid). Working class communities find themselves marginalised from state development processes that attribute agency to capital rather than to the citizenry. The neoliberal vision is a negation of the RDP's vision of "people-driven, people-centred" development (ANC, 1994).

## 7.5 A MOVEMENT FOR COUNTER-HEGEMONIC CHANGE?

To conclude this chapter we go back to Harvey's (2007) question about the need for a countermovement and his despondency in the light of the weaknesses and decline of the new social movements such as the APF, LPM and others. But the recent exponential rise in community protests that Harvey's study does not really cover has led other researchers to see a potential – provided the service delivery protests combine with other political and social forces, including with the old movements, trade unions and far left organisations – to develop into a national movement against the failures of government (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010; Bond, 2010a; Everatt, 2009). Others are less hopeful, pointing out the episodic and fragmented character, the violence, the xenophobia, and other shortcomings of the service delivery protests (Langa and von Holdt, 2010; Sinwell, 2010a). What side should we take in this debate in the light of the evidence from the case studies in this study?

The ANC is facing the challenge of some of its grassroots activists leading protests against itself. While the challenge has not yet taken the character of calls for the replacement of the ANC, this party is losing its prestige and some of its support among ordinary working class people. The protests are an expression of frustration and anger at bad living conditions and bad governance; the ANC is invariably fingered as the culprit. But the protests also represent a high level of activation of civil society from the perspective of democratic studies. The tendency for the victorious democratic forces to rest on their laurels once the dictator has been removed is a familiar tale. In South Africa this pattern is apparently being broken. But the protests do not as yet represent political opposition to the ANC as much as wishing to get the attention of and exert pressure on the ANC and the state to improve people's lives. This is suggested by the continuing electoral support the ANC enjoys and the fact that most protest leaders continue their association with the ANC.

While many protest leaders feel that they failed and cannot come up with a list of tangible achievements, there is a sense of pride that their communities took up the struggle and stood for what is right. Agency is celebrated and a historical consciousness is exhibited. These feelings of solidarity, of community-oriented altruism and self-sacrifice are important

ingredients in the development of a movement of struggle for progressive social change:  
Polanyi's (1944) countermovement.

## CHAPTER 8: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

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In this chapter I tell the story of my life mainly focusing on those aspects that might further illuminate the questions raised in this dissertation; I also hope this chapter helps to define myself more clearly as a scholar activist in relation to the research topic and methods. The chapter opens with a brief note on the methodology of autobiography, followed by my life story and then concludes with some general points arising from the account that I think are worth noting in relation to the study.

### 8.1 METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

The aim of this autobiographical account is to shed more light on the leaderships and organisation of protests in post-apartheid society using the method of “auto-ethnography” (Adler and Adler, 2003, p. 43). Actor-oriented ethnography aims to understand the dynamics of social action and to decipher the meaning attached to it by the subjects involved. The fact that several researchers have explored aspects of my life-story in their quest to understand South African social movement activism justifies the use of autobiography (Alexander, 2003; Cashdan, 2000; Rosenthal, 2010).

The interaction of history and memory is a fascinating and vexed subject (Gqola, 2010), and selection and interpretation is inherent in historiography (Mills, 1959). The material included in this chapter is presented in order to provide some background on how I came to be involved in protests and social movements in post-apartheid society. My aim is not to set any record straight but rather to explore aspects of my life that touch upon the questions of agency, ideology and the circumstances that inform protest action. There is no attempt to theorise my life-story and it is left to the reader to decipher the meanings, perspectives and prejudices underlying its telling. The story can be used by other researchers as a primary source rather than as a research report of an auto-ethnographic study. The chapter is short because my story does not constitute the focus of this research, and my wish is that the research study should not be judged solely on the basis of my personal involvement in protest action.

The story is in chronological order divided into major “phases of my life”, focusing on my activism rather than on other aspects of my life. Scholars of memory argue that memory is not linear, rather it can be conceived as cyclical or helix-like because what we remember is relevant to what we are and what we are shapes what we remember (Gqola, 2010). I have tried to separate my opinions as much as possible from fact but time constraints did not allow the use of references. I hope this account will provide a clue to the factors and dynamics behind my activism and political outlook.

## **8.2 BIRTH, FAMILY, STUDY AND WORK**

I was born in 1960, the year HF Verwoerd became prime minister of South Africa, on the 16<sup>th</sup> August, to Zanele Ngwane (néé Mahamba-Sithole) and Lawrence Ngwane at King Edward Hospital, Durban. I was the first born to my medical nurse parents. Three other children followed. My father was political and named his children after political figures: Trevor Lincoln Nkululeko, Cecil Phambili-ma-Afri ka, Castro and Victoria. I was named after anti-apartheid activist Father Trevor Huddleston and Abraham Lincoln, seen as a slavery abolitionist by my father. I am not sure why he thought Cecil John Rhodes was a hero. My parents lived in Lamontville, a working class township on the coastal city. Later they moved house to Nquthu, Zululand, to work at the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital, an Anglican mission establishment. It was in this intimate, small hospital community that I grew up.

A flamboyant, Scottish, liberal-minded medical doctor, Anthony Barker, and his doctor wife, Maggie, ran the hospital. They tried to build a strong sense of community in the hospital. Anthony was affectionately called “uBhaka” by everyone in the small rural town and he energetically built an impressive model of community medicine that attracted many young doctors in training to hone their skills there. Liz Clarke, who was my second mother at the hospital, helped document conditions in Nquthu at the time (Clarke and Ngobese, 1975). Bhaka was a radical anti-racist and he made sure that a black Jesus Christ hung over the altar in the hospital chapel. A charmer, uBhaka was very popular with his patients and staff, and went out of his way to affirm the local Zulu culture including being fluent in the language, and adorning *ibheshu* (loin skin) every Christmas Day and then proceeding to do the Zulu dance, *ukugiya*, to

large, highly appreciative audiences. Unsurprisingly Bhaka was not liked very much by the apartheid masters especially his non-racial ethos that encouraged interracial sports, community and social including intimate relationships to thrive at the hospital. Later, the inseparable couple had to leave, working for a while at the Alexandra clinic, Johannesburg, before retiring overseas where they died together as they lived, knocked over by a truck while cycling in tandem.

My father taught me how to laugh a lot, drink, love freedom and hate the apartheid police. "*AmaBhunu yizinja*" ("Boers" are dogs) I remember him saying. He named the family dog, "Betsy" after Verwoerd's wife. When Verwoerd died he came back from work before time very excited shouting "*Ufile uVerwoerd!*" (Verwoerd is dead!). One day he and his friend were detected using the "whites only" footbridge at the Glencoe railway station. Accosted, their defence was that they couldn't read. He always clashed with the Afrikaner ticket examiners when we travelled long-distance by train. He and my mum earlier travelled to and worked in some African countries before settling down. Because of this, for years the Special Branch would visit our house and interrogate him. Unfortunately, my parents divorced and he died after remarrying and settling down in Madadeni township, Newcastle.

My mother had to single-handedly put up with my adolescent growth pangs, drinking and messing around. I was active in the local youth club organised by my late friend Lucky Mavundla who also wrote plays which we staged locally and around the province. We also organised choirs, trips, sports and other events during the school holidays as some of us were in boarding school. It was fun. There was strong sense of community in Nquthu, regarded then and now as the archetypical rural hinterland. Politics was low key. Our plays had a vague anti-establishment tone. Someone used to visit me and inconclusively tried to recruit me into the ANC underground. Inkatha (Freedom Party) also tried to recruit me but I refused. At one point I remember my mother organised that I join my aunt Victoria Chitepo in the ZANLA military camps in Mozambique. She is the widow of Herbert Chitepo, assassinated leader of ZANU before Mugabe. The plan didn't work and I ended up spending several weeks stuck in a university in northern Swaziland near the Mozambican border. Two of my Nquthu friends were

later killed by apartheid agents, one of them Peter Dlamini (Pauw, 1991, p. 1). But even so I don't think I was particularly political during my teenage years.

I attended the local Roman Catholic primary school before graduating to a Catholic boarding school in Mariannhill, near Durban. The 1976 student uprising happened while I was there and I remember a little commotion and we were all sent home. Some students, including myself, were not admitted back. *AmaRoma* (the "Romans") thought I was a troublemaker. I was always falling foul of the rules. I moved in with my father to do Matric at Siyamukela High School, Madadeni township. The teachers there were not as conscientious as the nuns and monks in Mariannhill, but I managed to scrape through my Matric. A "mistake" in my exam results by the Department of Bantu Education delayed my attending university by a year and I got a local teaching job and later worked as a clerk at Thembalihle township, now renamed Sithembile, in Glencoe, a small Northern Natal town, in the township manager's office. The latter managed the black township: operating the bucket sanitation system, the beerhall, issuing lodgers' permits to above age children in their own homes, administering Section 10 urban rights, raiding residents' houses and the hostel at night, etc. My spare time was filled with tennis, karate, ballroom dance, youth club organisation, drinking, etc. At 17 years I was naïve politically, but I noted the power of the apartheid edifice and its loyal adherents' conscientious application of its rules. After about a year I left to study.

Fort Hare University is in Alice, a small town in the middle of nowhere in the Eastern Cape, hence a "bush college". I enjoyed it there because I like studying. Some of the mostly Afrikaner lecturers were bizarre taking pride in terrorising the students with low grades. Students dropped courses like flies, and square roots of the number of students enrolled for a course passed, and you were told this on the first day by your lecturer. This was so especially in subjects such science, accounting and others deemed too difficult for blacks by apartheid. There were some exceptions such as Mike Shum, a Public Administration lecturer, I think the course was actually called Bantu Administration, who used to teach us dependency theory and plied me with radical books to read over the holidays. He wanted me to do honours with him after completing my BA but I refused, I wanted to make money in the big world not at Fort

Hare. In 1982 we were all expelled during the “student disturbances”. In 1980 we had also been expelled when a student strike inspired by the Frelimo victory in Mozambique broke out. This time the student body was angry. A pact was made that we were never going back to Fort Hare in protest against the ill-treatment received from the Ciskei police under Brigadier Charles Sebe, a psychopath and brother to Lennox, the president of the Bantustan under whose jurisdiction the university fell. Students had been rounded up inside a rugby stadium and badly beaten before being taken to jail. I somehow escaped that fate but on the day we were expelled my suitcase was ripped open by a police dog set on me to hurry me out of my room. I too vowed never to go back to that heartless place.

At Fort Hare I got a clearer idea about life under apartheid despite the overall cocoon of my middle class existence and carefree youthful attitude. Though I was not politically inclined, when there was a student strike we all boycotted classes, we instinctively acted as one although I think you could get hurt if you dissented. There was exhilaration during such strikes as we all felt freed from the onerous, authoritarian routines of the place. It was really exciting sitting in the great hall for hours and hours listening to political speeches and debates by the orators of the day. I think the basis for unity and a collective sense of purpose in the student protests emanated from a perennial sense of collective grievance that students felt given the heavy handed treatment everyone received from the university authorities. There was also a seething (underground) opposition to apartheid rule. Police brutality and the dangerous antics of the Bantustan police chief were blamed on apartheid. All major boycotts inevitably ended in mass expulsions.

Leaving Fort Hare, I immediately got a job at a government research institute that had recruited me at university for holiday jobs. The National Institute for Personnel Research was an Afrikaner-run state social research body which served the mines and factories, and at that time it fell under the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. They specialised in developing psychometric tests for black workers. My job was to conduct research in factories from a management point of view and this was presumably used to improve productivity. I joined a liberal-leaning team publishing a print media quarterly review where I covered Black Business;

black entrepreneurs were still fighting against the government's "one-man one-shop" policy in the urban townships. Meanwhile I completed my undergraduate studies through UNISA and moved to study Sociology Honours full-time at Wits University in 1985.

Anti-apartheid uprisings and protests were happening everywhere in 1985. There was a strong mass movement which was gaining confidence and momentum and coalescing around the demand for one person one vote. At Wits University I was exposed to the student side of things. But as a resident in Meadowlands, Soweto, I came across elements of the mass movement. I was not particularly active but I identified strongly with the movement. I liked collecting political posters and T-shirts. I sometimes attended meetings at Regina Mundi. It was the spirit of the times and everyone felt themselves to be part of the movement.

Increasingly I was drawn to Marxist thought on campus. I got drawn into politically-charged academic discussions and activities against apartheid because of the sheer power of the sweep of the brewing revolution. I started to develop a conscious analysis of society and a clearer political attitude to apartheid and capitalism. Before that my anti-apartheid attitude was a second nature attitude, mother's milk ideology imbibed at home and in the course of life. My earlier political involvement was in some respects accidental or organic rather than based on conscious commitment. But this assessment might be influenced by my later "fanatical" political orientation to the socialist struggle.

One day on Wits campus I got arrested with 4 other students and spent two weeks in "Sun City" (Diepkloof prison). One of them was fiery student leader Firoz Cachalia, later ANC provincial minister of police (of all things). The jail was full of comrades and in my cell the leader was "Comrade Ambi", Amos Masondo, the Johannesburg mayor. He was impressive, running regular political education classes inside the jail and he got me involved in this activity. I left the prison committed, in my heart rather than to anybody, to do everything possible to fight the system.

The township was in turmoil. Opposition to apartheid was gathering momentum. This was the year COSATU was formed, it was also the heyday of the UDF. In the township almost every week-end you saw funeral convoys of busloads of singing comrades and the constant hazard of

having your car commandeered to provide transport much sought after by mourners intent on getting to Avalon Cemetery. At about this time I listened and was greatly touched by a speech delivered by Faried Essack, UDF leader, at the Central Methodist Church. It was a kind of “aha” moment and I think it made a lasting impression; my heart burned with the vision of a non-racial and equal society and the hope that this was possible through struggle.

I found love, a permanent room-mate and a life partner when I met Miranda in a weekly Sociology tutorial I taught. We were opposed to marriage as an institution from a radical feminist perspective. Our partnership, “blessed” with four children, has contributed a great deal to the person I am.

### **8.3 INVOLVEMENT IN LABOUR, TOWNSHIP AND SOCIALIST POLITICS**

At Wits University I came across socialist theory and activism. Neo-Marxist scholars and revolutionary socialists were doing their thing in lecture halls and some in the unions and community organisations. I gradually developed my own understanding and position on the major issues around the struggle using the benefit of my interaction with and observation of the comrades. Discussions and debates with students helped. I was allowed to conjure and teach a second-year Sociology course which I called “Class and nationalism”, where I focused the students’ minds on debates around the relationship of class and national struggles, the role of the working class in struggle, the SACP and its theory of colonialism of a special type and two-stage theory, and so on. I was never convinced by the SACP’s theory of two stages of revolution, despite my initial support for the party, whereby the struggle against apartheid capitalism, a term used in those debates of yesteryear, was divided into two distinct phases; the first one for democracy, and then later followed by a struggle for socialism. One of my students was Comrade Winnie Mandela and one day, when it was her turn to give a presentation to the class, she came dressed in ANC colours and read out what seemed to be a message from the ANC underground to the masses. Well, the masses were half there because her lecture attracted an audience much bigger than the usual Course 2 gang. She was impressive on that day.

Meanwhile I began to come across some serious underground socialist intellectuals with a practical if highly theorised orientation to the struggle. There were a number of Trotskyist underground groups that existed and I soon joined the Socialist Workers' League, although I kept regular contact with at least two or three others. At the time there existed a strong left current that was opposed to the "Stalinism" of the SACP and suspicious of the class credentials and programme of the ANC. But most of them were resigned to working inside the ANC because the working class looked to this organisation for unity and leadership.

In the township support for the ANC was growing. In my case township politics beckoned as I was forced out of my Yeoville flat by the apartheid police in 1989 in what must have been the last application of the Group Areas Act before Nelson Mandela's release. This was the second time that I fell victim to this apartheid law. The first time I got kicked out of a nice room in a block of flats in Braamfontein in 1987 and had to move to the Salvation Army in Mofolo, Soweto. There is no point in relating every apartheid humiliation I suffered since I moved to live in Johannesburg. On my first arrival in "Jozi" I had to get my papers in order and had my private parts publicly examined at the pass office. "*Ukhuphe!*" (take it out!) was the cry at that godforsaken place in Albert Street. Once in the township I rented a backroom at Central Western Jabavu in Soweto now living with my partner. My insertion into practical community struggle, armed with Marxist ideas, was to mould me into the political being I am today. I soon linked up with the local ANC comrades and became active in organising the local civic. We were a sub-branch of Jabavu and once a week I had to attend the branch meeting in White City Jabavu, then a cauldron of civic activism. The Soweto Civic Association had its headquarters in Ipelegeng Community Centre, Jabavu, a church-owned place where community organisations could have offices and hold meetings. There were other meetings I attended such as those of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO); I also came across the Federation of Transvaal Women meetings. The SAYCO meetings I attended were secret in character and everyone had to learn simple safety procedures as a precaution. While the civic meetings appeared more "open", the content of the discussions was highly political. The overarching framework and the daily substance of civic work was the struggle against apartheid.

Meanwhile, on campus some students and staff members were organising a literacy project for campus workers. The Wits Workers' School, as the project was later to be known, had its humble beginnings in weekly video screenings for university workers, mostly cleaning, gardening and security staff (McKeever, 2001). Later, as more and more workers attended the videos screenings, mostly on the history of the workers' struggle, which were always prefaced by a brief explanation and short discussion at the end, the workers raised the question of the need for education so that they could understand the videos better. Some workers wanted "only" to learn English, others to complete their Matric, others to be able to read and write, and so on. From the word go the underlying philosophy was a very strong pro-worker politics, what those days was called "workerism", as opposed to "populism", although we never thought of ourselves in those terms. The Workers' School experience was great and when academic corridor politics forced me out of my Sociology job, I paid my whole attention to this project and worked there for 4 years.

The political violence of the early 1990s compelled us to form self-defence units in Jabavu. This was during the attacks by Inkatha forces and the "third force" ("CCB") death squads in the townships. We managed to arm-twist some uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) guerillas who had recently returned from exile to train our township recruits. At its height the defence unit in CWJ had a couple hundred members, and about 50 of us trained most mornings, doing road work and fitness exercises. Our uniform was the frock, everyone asked their sister, mother or wife to give them an old dress and this is what we wore when we were patrolling at night or going to war. When we were out in full force, mostly late at night, we must have been a sight to see! It was a serious business but fortunately our CWJ unit was never called upon to engage in major combat except for minor skirmishes mostly with the police. During full combat readiness situations the volunteer army became conscript as every man living in the township was press-ganged into joining the defence unit. Our weapons were mostly spears, knives and knobkieries although a few guns were organised through the criminal network. The White City comrades had underground MK structures and so had a bit more firepower. The cry was always for guns but the ANC largely failed to provide these.

In 1990 the ANC was unbanned and we were soon drawn into the task of rebuilding this organisation that had been banned for 3 decades. The intention of the ANC was to hegemonise the township struggles, the civic movement and the myriad struggle organisations that existed. This was not difficult at all because the ANC was idealised and lionised in the township. Most of the first ANC recruits in the newly launched branches came from the civics, the youth and women's structures, and other active organisations in the community. The line was for all organisations to fall behind the ANC as the leading and unifying movement that fought the hardest and would lead the consummation of the struggle for liberation. This was not a big problem because everyone instinctively wanted maximum unity in the face of the apartheid monster in what was clearly the final battle in a long and bitter war. I remember when Mandela was released there were so many people it looked like the whole of Soweto converged at the FNB stadium. With hindsight, the apartheid masters and captains of industry also needed to negotiate with an ANC that commanded authority over the rebellious masses.

The excitement of Mandela's release was also felt at the Workers School. After four years with the workers' school, my socialist group organised me a job as national education officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union. I worked there from 1991 to 1993 and saw how the trade unions operated in the period leading up to independence. I enjoyed my work but was always ducking the darts and arrows of the trade union bureaucracy who wanted to purge "ultra-left" elements from COSATU. This coincided with the unions being drawn into tripartite discussion forums with the government and business to work out future cooperation in the new South Africa. The ANC, together with its alliance partners, the SACP and COSATU, were being sucked into the vortex of partnership with the capitalist class.

COSATU suggested a platform that would bind the ANC and provide the basis for an election manifesto as it became clear that the new South Africa was in the offing. This idea was conceived as an accord, the Reconstruction and Development Accord, later the RDP. This development led to an ignominious end to my career as a trade unionist as I got expelled for writing a paper challenging the Accord's politics and its wisdom. Although I won my appeal and

went back to work, I was a moving target and within a few months I had been fired again. That was in 1993.

Meanwhile we had bought a house in Pimville, Soweto, and for a while I was unemployed there. I used the idle time to do community and political work in my new neighbourhood. I joined the local ANC branch and the civic. There was a great frustration with the political negotiations as they largely turned people into spectators. But when the breakthrough was made everyone worked hard to ensure an ANC victory. It was all very exciting. A year later the structures were called upon to select candidates for the country's first local government elections. The ANC needed the civic to nominate some candidates from its structures and I was nominated. Although I had declined nomination by the ANC my group felt that I had to accept the civic's. We were hoping that there would be more political space on a SANCO ticket. In December 1995 I was elected ward councilor for my area, Zone 5 and 7, Pimville.

As new councilors we were eager and excited to help create a new society. We even debated a new appropriately revolutionary name to replace "councillor". The buzz word was the RDP. Local areas were called upon by the government and the ANC to set up "community development forums", CDFs, to co-ordinate and organise community involvement in local economic development projects (Miller, 1996). In Pimville, I chaired a local development forum that supervised all development projects in the area. Our job was to ensure that projects ran smoothly, that local labour was employed, that workers were paid our locally stipulated minimum wage (R50 a day), materials were purchased from local suppliers, etc. Later the state became less encouraging and a debate that suggested a contradiction between democracy and development ensued. My ward won the best community budget presented to provincial Local Government MEC Sicelo Shiceka when in the first two years of democratic councils a participatory budget process was in operation. Later a top-down neoliberal modus operandi snuffed out these state-sponsored experiments in people's power.

As a councilor I was forced to address the problem of widespread electricity cut-offs in my ward. The civic seemed unable to help the people. We soon developed a system of meeting regularly with ESKOM to address individual cases of cut-off, a concession we won after we had

staged a march, mainly as the Zone 5 and 7 SANCO sub-branch because the Pimville branch seemed reluctant to act on this question. These weekly sessions of negotiating case by case with ESKOM went on for a while but were time-consuming and difficult. We had appointed electricity monitors who visited those who were cut off and compiled the cases to be presented to ESKOM. On average we had 20 cases a week and I acted as chief negotiator/pleader.

In 1997 the Johannesburg City Council had begun plans to introduce privatisation in the provision of municipal services which the unions opposed because it meant job losses and wage cuts. The unions made means to reach out to communities and sensitise them to the dangers of privatisation. Many voices in opposition were raised as the issue found an echo in the earlier opposition to the abandonment of the RDP and its replacement by the neoliberal GEAR policy. I contributed by writing an article by invitation in the Sunday World condemning the city council's privatisation plans. The ANC responded by suspending me. A disciplinary hearing found me guilty of bringing the party into disrepute and I was given the choice of publicly withdrawing my statements or serve a 2 year suspension. My constituency said I shouldn't withdraw anything and in any case I wouldn't have. I served my last year in office as an independent; the ANC was loath to run a by-election, there had been too much bad publicity already.

#### **8.4 "ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE"**

Rejected by the ANC, I found myself drawn by the "new politics" of the anti-globalisation movement. Conditions were ripe to bring to a head the long simmering struggle around electricity in the township and I was free to throw myself into the movement without fear of ANC censure. Matters came to a head in the electricity struggle when an open air mass meeting held at Pimville Square in 1999 decided to take the bold step of adopting the Operation Khanyisa tactic in the struggle. Deciding to re-connect ourselves was a repertoire of action destined to lead to confrontation with the authorities and resulted in an open break with SANCO and the ANC in the area. The SECC was formed at about this time and it also adopted this position. The SECC was formed when different areas in Soweto, such as Pimville and Orlando East, decided to join hands in the struggle against ESKOM. Inspired by and invoking

the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid, Operation Khanyisa was constructed as a defiance campaign where people connected themselves as a form of direct action and protest against cost recovery in the struggle for electricity for all.

The Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), a left-wing NGO, employed me and soon funded the workshops that led to the setting up of the SECC. One of the first workshops was addressed by Denis Brutus and Patrick Bond, both vocal and visionary advocates of the new struggle against neoliberalism, the World Bank, IMF and the WTO. The APF, like the SECC, was formed when George Dor, an AIDC staffer, proposed a workshop on Igoli 2002, the council's privatisation programme. This was done under the aegis of the Campaign Against Neoliberalism in Southern Africa. The workshop, held at COSATU house, was a success and it was decided to form the Anti-Igoli 2002 Forum with the aim of winning community support against privatisation in the light of the government's projecting the unions as "selfish" and arguing that privatisation would benefit the community. The meetings of Igoli 2002 were held at SAMWU offices and many organisations attended such as SANCO, SECC, Industrial Aid Project (representing the churches), South African Students Congress, SACP Johannesburg branch, the Democratic Socialist Movement, etc. (Ngwane, 2010). At about the same time the workers at Wits University were facing massive retrenchments as the university also embarked on a privatisation programme called Wits 2001. Soon meetings of the Igoli 2002 committee included NEHAWU shop stewards from Wits. I personally knew many of the workers, the "aunties" who were going to lose their jobs, from during my days on campus. A conference organised by Wits University and the Johannesburg City Council called Urban Futures, aimed at exploring and promoting the neoliberal perspective on local government and education, provided the opportunity to forge a unified platform against privatisation. A meeting held at COSATU House on 23 October 1999 united the two struggles and the APF was born. It started off as an initiative to unite two struggles and two constituencies – organised labour and the community. Later the APF evolved into a movement of communities fighting for access to basic services as the ANC-SACP-COSATU-SANCO leadership exerted pressure on the unions and SASCO to pull out. Much later some comrades in the APF would boast about the non-union character of their movement, including movement analysts who praised the "new

social movements” for going it alone; but I would say both misread what in essence was a lost opportunity – a moment when employed and unemployed workers, labour, community and students, united against the neoliberal policies of the government.

The history of the APF and my role in it deserves a separate work on the subject. This is because this organisation achieved a lot and failed in many respects so that much can be learned from a proper and hardnosed accounting of what happened in the APF. I was both secretary and organiser for 3 years of the APF’s early existence. I resigned from my job at AIDC to allow me to help build the new organisation. Later, I focused on my role as organiser. During this time I attended numerous anti-capitalist movement events abroad including attending the first four World Social Forums held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I was greatly impressed by the World Social Forum (WSF) and enthralled by the slogan “Another World is Possible”. It seemed to me that that was exactly what the world needed, a vision of a world different from the one existing. I became very active in the African Social Forum, a continental chapter of the WSF, and attended numerous meetings during and in between WSF meetings to discuss African movement matters. It was in the African Social Forum that it became increasingly clear, at least to me, that there were several political currents in the WSF which left it more or less politically rudderless and impotent. As the pressure on me inside the APF mounted and the African Social Forum appeared to lose its way as NGO-type politics took over, I decreased my participation. On reflection, perhaps I shouldn’t have given up my activism at this level. In any case when I tried to re-connect with the movement during the WSF held in Kenya I was compelled to join people who were openly protesting against the organisers because the local populace was excluded by the high entrance fee as well-funded mainstream NGOs dominated the event, commercial interests reigned supreme and there was too close for comfort cooperation between the organisers and conservative elements of the Kenyan state. Part of the protest action against our own beloved forum included storming the gates to allow poor Kenyans access to the venue and the crazy but thoroughly enjoyable invasion of an up-market restaurant inside the event grounds and allowing scores of street children to have a free meal (Hlatshwayo, 2007). I am still inspired by the WSF but in the light of these contradictory experiences my gaze is perhaps less starry-eyed.

Later I resigned from the APF job and joined the SECC as organiser in 2005 as internal politics deteriorated in the former. The second half of the decade was a difficult time for the SECC and the social movements as these organisations experienced decline and internal feuding. I worked there for 4 years before requesting time off to study full-time: whose result is this dissertation. This represents a break in my activism and a time to reflect and find new strength for the struggle ahead. Movement organisations such as the SECC and the APF continue with their work and, in my opinion, need to face up to the challenge of connecting with the wave of local protests proliferating all over the country. They also need to re-connect with organised labour and with unorganised and unemployed workers. This is work that I want to put my shoulder to going forward. *Aluta continua!*

## **8.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I think my life story sheds some light on how people form and participate in movements. My intimate and long-term involvement with the SECC from its formation to its maturity as a movement organisation suggests that a lot of thinking or intellectual work is involved in building a movement (Barker and Cox, 2002; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Schurman and Munro, 2006; Woerhle et al. 2008). Here I will briefly focus on my experiences during the early days of building the SECC to draw out some insights relevant for social movement theory.

The story begins with a sudden increase in the number of electricity cut-offs in some South African townships as a result of the implementation of cost recovery policies by the democratic government. But Soweto distinguished itself in its response when a group of activists came together and developed ways of thinking about the issue which ultimately gave birth to the SECC, an electricity social movement. Some researchers have argued that sometimes little attention is paid to the “ ‘protomobilizational’ ” phase of collective action” (Schurman and Munro, 2006, p. 1), and my story arguably underlines the correctness of this observation about movement-building. The formation of the SECC was a culmination of a series of meetings, workshops and interactions over a period of between 3 to 6 months before political action in the form of mass meetings, demonstrations and marches were undertaken in the name of the new movement. Part of this process involved conducting research into the issue working with a

university-based research institute (Fiil-Flynn, 2001), inviting and getting the advice of seasoned academic-activists such as Dennis Brutus and Patrick Bond, and so on. It can be argued that during this period a “master frame” for the struggle around electricity was being developed whose content (eventually in its complete form) included a critique of neoliberalism, privatisations and cut-offs, on the one hand, and suggestions about what could be acceptable, alternative approaches to the provision of services to working class communities, on the other hand. At a popular level these ideas were expressed in the form of slogans such as “Electricity is a right not a privilege” and “Free basic services for all”. Furthermore, the idea of life-line progressive tariffs was adopted by the new movement and socialism adopted by the new movement as its vision.

The above suggests the importance of intellectual work in the building of movements. Such work has to be critical, not only must it oppose policies or actions that attack the community, but it must also critically evaluate ways of thinking about the issue or problem at hand and accordingly reject or adopt certain approaches and solutions to these. For example, when the SECC adopted the slogan “free basic services for all” this entailed rejection of the then popular demand in Soweto for a flat rate system and adoption of the life-line progressive block tariffs. Movement intellectuals had to be convinced and to convince each other about this position, that is, they had to change the way they normally thought about the issue as part of the “cognitive praxis: involved in movement-building (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

When I became part of the original SECC group of activists during its “protomobilisation” phase, I was already a socialist and thus inclined to thinking about the electricity issue in certain ways. The collective “framing” of the issue that ensued had to take into account and was influenced by the ideas that activists brought into the brewing intellectual pot. The result was the development of a core of activists who became leaders of the new organisation who shared certain common ideas, beliefs and values about society and the problem of electricity. A process broader than “framing” was at play – the discussions were not simply a question of how to attract people for the purposes of mobilising them against cut-offs; that is, they were not simply instrumentalist but were constitutive of the movement (Schurman and Munro,

2006). The discussion were part of a highly politicised “cognitive praxis” that is better grasped by the term “ideology” rather than “frame” (ibid). Indeed, when the SECC branched into other issues such as water, housing, education, anti-war, xenophobia and recently climate change, its approach suggests the existence of a long-term and deep ideological outlook that guides the organisation and its leading members. My experience has been that this outlook is constantly being contested, developed and modified at the level of the collective. But at a personal level, and dare I say at my age, I experience my thoughts and feelings as having “locked” into a particular ideological mould despite the doubts and modifications that perhaps are inevitable for anyone living in a world and country as full of contradictions as ours.

## **CHAPTER 9: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

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Protests are indeed the fly in the ointment of the “new” democratic South Africa. They smudge the idyllic picture of the rainbow nation by challenging post-apartheid society’s complacency and thus necessitating a degree of collective self-appraisal by all. But, towards what end and with what result? This study approached this question from the point of view of the protesters themselves inquiring how protest leaders understand the place and value of their protests. The study sought to assess the protests in the light of the debate about the extent to which they pose a challenge to neoliberalism (Bond, 2010a; Mngeni, 2010; Sinwell, 2010a).

Radical scholars of societies in transition from dictatorship to democracy have argued that high levels of civic activation are necessary in successfully introducing and consolidating a new democratic order (Cho, 2008). In this study it has been argued that there was a marked decline in the levels and/or quality of civic activation during the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society. Economic and political monopolies inherited from the old order remain intact rather than get dismantled in societies such as these (ibid.) The dissertation identifies the dynamic behind the post-apartheid protest movement in the uneven and combined development of the South African economy and the failure of the democratic transition to adequately challenge vested interest. Below is a summarised recapitulation of the main theoretical points made in earlier chapters of the dissertation.

### **9.1 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS**

Chapter 1 looked at the sociology of the protesters arguing that they are members of the working class despite the complex class structure of post-apartheid society, the changing class composition of capitalist society and attendant critiques of the concept “working class” (Ceruti, 2010a; Seekings and Natrass, 2005). Chapter 2 considered Karl Marx’s attribution of historical agency to the working class and his belief that this class would lead and consummate the radical social change necessary to rescue humanity from the ills of capitalism (Marx, 1970b). It was argued that despite the failures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century socialist experiment and the theoretical counter-arguments of post-structuralist and autonomist thinkers in the light of these failures

and the rise of “globalisation”, the broad outlines of the Marxist theoretical vision contain a lot of merit because of the continued – if crisis-ridden – dominance of capital and the capitalist state in the social metabolism, and the essentially class-based resistance to this in South Africa and elsewhere (Alexander, 2010; Ceruti, 2010b; Langa and von Holdt, 2010; Mészáros, 1995 ;).

Chapter 3 noted the coincidental increase in the number of strikes and community protests in recent years, and these were understood as expressions of working class struggle at the workplace and in working class communities respectively (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010; Vally, 2009). The increase was attributed to the deteriorating conditions of working class life wrought by the government’s neoliberal policies that have tended to entrench rather than eradicate racial, class and gender inequalities inherited from the apartheid order (Bond, 2000; Bond and Desai, 2006; McLennan and Munslow, 2009). Periodisation of the struggle in Chapter 1 suggested that the two forms of struggles – at work and at home – have sometimes coincided but have rarely been jointly organised. This apparent “diffuseness and semi-spontaneity” can be contrasted to the “political focus and organisational capacity”, and the commonality of purpose and vision that was developing in the 1980s during the struggle against apartheid (Saul and Gelb, 1986, p. 211).

In Chapter 2 discourse theory is introduced to explore the contestation of ideas that occurs in the course of struggle. Foucault (1980, p. 156) provides a basis for explaining the hegemonic use of discourse by pointing out the link between knowledge and power. His insights facilitate the application of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in the analysis of the protest leaders’ ideas as they take on the might of the local state. Their ideas can be regarded as forms of oppositional knowledge that seek to undermine the dominance of the power-holders; the ideas can be counter-informative, critical-interpretative, radical-envisioning or transformative in nature (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, pp. 9–10 ). In this battle of ideas oppositionists have a (tactical) choice of challenging the dominant hegemony directly or harnessing (appropriating) it, but in practice these distinctions are not dichotomous but constitute a continuum of hybrid forms (*ibid*).

## 9.2 FROM DE-MOBILISATION TO RE-MOBILISATION AND RENEWAL

The lull in working class struggle or civil society activation was longer and deeper than suggested by some authors (Ballard, *et al.* 2006a; Dawson, 2010). It involved both physical and ideological (discursive) decline of the movement of struggle such as the dismantling of organisations such as the UDF and retreat from more radical forms of democracy propounded by sections of the anti-apartheid movement (McKeever, 2001; Seekings, 2000). The role of the working class was discursively displaced by the adulatory history of great heroes and amazing organisations that liberated the nation (Sihlongonyane, 2010). Historical agency was attributed to elites. There was attenuation of the vision of socialist transformation that inspired many (Jacquin, 1999). Big capital was redefined as a “social partner” rather than an adversary (Butler, 2007; Gevisser, 2009; Naidoo, 2010). The working class movement was dismembered and the unity that proved so formidable against apartheid was politically scuttled. It is argued here that the literature on the post-apartheid “new social movements” tends to emphasise the newness of these struggles to an extent that obscures the continuities and inherited problems emanating from the (apartheid) era of demobilisation. These problems have not been adequately identified, addressed and overcome in order to give impetus to the re-mobilisation and renewal of struggle.

A major feature of the community protests is their isolation from one another. There appears to be little solidarity. It can be argued that solidarity is the heart and soul of the working class movement because workers need support from other workers if they are to win their demands given the power configuration in capitalist society (Grossman, 1985; Lebowitz, 1992). The findings suggest that the isolation of struggles tends to make it easier for the state to quell the protests and re-assert its hegemony over rebellious communities. Victories are attenuated, for example, despite Khutsong’s victory, this has only indirectly informed and strengthened similar struggles around demarcation (Duncan, 2010). The Harrismith movement inspired a series of similar eruptions in nearby Free State towns but it had to face state repression alone. If the protest movement continues divided, it will fall or not achieve much. The power-holders will learn to remove its counter-hegemonic sting and the protests might become “normalised”

happenings in the South African political landscape. This is likely to weaken the protests' challenge to the dominant neoliberal order and generally undermine the re-mobilisation and renewal of struggle.

In line with Gramsci's (1971) observations, the South African ruling class deploys force and persuasion against the protests. From the case studies it emerged that open challenge provokes a concerted propaganda campaign against protest leaders and the incipient oppositional movements. In addition to demonising the protests, the ruling elite find means to co-opt selected protest leaders and buy community support through the granting of concessions. These hegemonic moves are also accompanied by more direct forms of repression: teargas, rubber bullets, live ammunition, arrests, beatings, torture and homicide are just some of the methods used by the state police against the protesters (Sinwell, Kirshner, *et al.* 2009). It is my contention that the mix of force and persuasion in the state response depends on several factors but, in general, the struggle by the ruling class and party to assert its hegemony is key. For example, the response to the Harrismith protest in 2004, one of the earliest of the "service delivery protests", was severe with leaders singled out and made to face sedition, treason and other disproportionately hyperbolic charges. But it is noteworthy that as the community protests proliferate, the state's response has been more considered, less panic-stricken and even tolerant of the protests aiming at isolating and containing the protests rather than using naked brute force. The expulsion of a hated mayor or councillor, visits by the premier, minister of local government or even the state president himself, are some of the methods used to placate restive communities. But as Gramsci has pointed out, the softer approach does not entirely remove the big stick which is now and again wielded, but always subject to hegemonic considerations.

Another obstacle to the renewal of the working class movement of struggle is the new, divisive and dangerous emergence of xenophobia which some commentators have cast as a form of popular protest (Glaser, 2008). Some commentators have insisted that there is a line of demarcation between xenophobic violence and service delivery protests (Alexander, 2010). The evidence in this study supports the latter view but is concerned with the lack of a political

outlet and relief for the frustration building up in poor working class communities which, in the absence of progressive leadership and political project, sometimes can assume the form of xenophobia. Research into xenophobia suggests that it is often anger and frustration around service delivery issues and the deteriorating living standards that provides the backdrop to such attacks (Everrat, 2010). A chauvinist-nationalistic understanding of the “democracy-delivery dialectic” can also be partly blamed for the attacks.

Xenophobia is a real danger in a militant movement that has not fully clarified its politics, that is diverse and that appears to lack solid grounding in working class politics and solidarity. Neoliberal ideology promotes a form of competitive individualism that can feed into xenophobia. In Alexandra township, the epicenter of the 2008 attacks, the state delivered too few houses and allocated them on the basis of unclear criteria leading to the development of explosive tensions in this working class community (Sinwell, 2010b). The community organisations in Alexandra, because of working within the neoliberal hegemony and its budgetary constraints, ended up engaged in a zero-sum competition for housing (ibid). These considerations underline the importance of the post-apartheid protest movement **developing** a set of ideas that are counter-hegemonic in an inclusive and progressive way in the course of the re-mobilisation and renewal of struggle. The progressive role played by some social movement organisations, such as the SECC, APF and TAC, in the formation of the timely Coalition Against Xenophobia that organised the biggest mass demonstration against this scourge in the aftermath of the 2008 attacks, suggests that the resistance movement can contribute to the eradication rather than promotion of xenophobia (Ngwane and Vilakazi, 2010). This requires progressive social movements to consciously develop and commit themselves to anti-xenophobic forms of oppositional knowledge. Often this involves, inter alia, a critique of the historical basis of the birth of African national states in colonial borders drawn up by Africa’s colonisers (ibid); that is, developing counter-hegemonic perspectives.

### 9.3 HEGEMONY AND THE ROLE OF MOVEMENT INTELLECTUALS

Any counter-hegemonic project in South Africa has to contend with the reality of the ANC's prominent role in the struggle against apartheid and its use as a hegemonic device by the powers that be. The communities in protest had a difficult time sustaining their challenge to the ruling party suggesting that it possesses enormous political capital as a government of national liberation and leader in the first democratic regime in the country (Southall and Daniel, 2005). Most challenges, when we apply the typology by Woerhle, *et al.* (2008) of forms of oppositional knowledge, took the form of harnessing rather than directly challenging the dominant symbolic repertoire. Thus the legitimacy of the ruling party nor of the new democratic order was not questioned *per se* with the thrust of the oppositional argument being that the ANC government was failing to honour its promises, implement its own policies and, to put it abstractly, to manage the "democracy-delivery interface" (McLennan and Munslow, 2009, p. 275). The fact that opposition movements are often compelled to harness rather than directly challenge hegemony, or to use a "hybrid" form involving both harnessing and challenging, underlines a basic strategic dilemma, namely, the fact that "the strength of dominant discourses is an obstacle to movement organising. Direct challenging is seldom resonant across the entire cultural landscape" (Woerhle, *et al.* 2008, p. 191). Oppositional messaging reflects strategic dilemmas and "context-specific opportunities, collective identities, and organisational ideologies" (*ibid*, p. 185).

A counter-hegemonic project requires conscious crafting, it is not given. It requires, according to Gramsci (1971), conscious work by movement intellectuals. In this study the community leaders interviewed are theorised as the grassroots intellectuals of the protest movement (Barker and Cox, 2002; Webster, 1992). My autobiographical account suggests that movement intellectuals are sometimes able to turn spontaneous protests into durable social movements, and part of this process involves the development of a movement identity and discourse (Ayerman and Jamison, 1991). This process happens in relation to and in struggle with the dominant discourse. It is a continuous, contested and dynamic process wherein there are no guarantees of victory or even the ability to sustain opposition on a long-term basis. Moreover,

it is exactly this process that shapes, and in turn is shaped by the intellectual and organisational work of the movement intellectuals. The study provided background information on the diverse histories and circumstances of some of the grassroots intellectuals leading community protests. Most could read and write, but there was unevenness in their acquisition of formal educational qualifications and occupational status with, for example, the latter ranging from a street sweeper to high school teacher. This observation puts paid to the sometimes heated debate about the role of university-based versus informally-trained leaders in some of the literature (Bomke, 2010a; Friedman, 2010; Desai, 2008; Tissington, 2010). Movement intellectuals are produced in the course of and in relation to the struggle (Ayerman and Jamison, 1991), and their contribution has to be judged from this point of view rather than abstractly and in a manner that exaggerates the central role of intellectuals vis-à-vis the movements.

It is instructive that despite the exaggerated role of traditionally trained intellectuals in post-apartheid social movements, no powerful mass-based counter-hegemonic movement against neoliberalism has so far emerged. Nor are there any examples in history of counter-hegemonic ideas, theories and visions “spontaneously” arising out of movements without the participation of formally trained intellectuals. Despite an unprecedented rise in protests and strikes in South Africa, there is as yet no sign of the development of a Polanyi’s countermovement against neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007). Action does not always speak louder than words. Only a judicious combination seems to do the trick. The labour movement combines the two but perhaps not judiciously as is evidenced by its pre-occupation with policy alternatives in a manner that has not yet fully connected nor resonated with the community protest movement (Buhlungu, 2010). Post-apartheid protests and strikes have shaken the neoliberal hegemony but have not managed to develop an alternative that is vivid and supported widely enough by the working class to effectively weaken and dislodge the dominant discourse.

The lack of unity between the strikes and community protests is regarded as one of the main reasons for the relative weakness of the post-apartheid working class challenge to neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007). Findings from this study underline the lack of unity and suggest

that there is an objective basis for such unity to be forged but the subjective factor (leadership and organisation) appears to lag behind. For example, employed workers are affected by poor living conditions in working class areas and, it can be argued that strikes have implications for community members in areas where striking workers live or work. During the anti-apartheid struggle unity was achieved albeit unevenly and facing huge challenges. I have argued earlier that the legacy of demobilisation of the working class movement during the transition from apartheid to democracy might explain the failure of the protest leaders to develop a conscious and effective strategy to unite workplace and community struggles. Other commentators have blamed the failure on the limitations of the ANC-SACP-COSATU Alliance which is viewed as a brake on the development of strategies that rely on working class strength, independence and unity rather than looking to the ruling party's largesse for improving workers' lives (ibid).

Looking to the ANC government for solutions entails the protesters putting pressure on and appealing to the authorities for solutions to their problems. Not much has been won by the working class after more than a decade of protests and strikes, even though these take different forms, are of varying levels of intensity, and might be cumulative in nature or in their effect. Protest leaders as movement intellectuals have to figure out ways of breaking through the impasse, for example, because there is no ready store of houses to meet the demand for houses for all, and in the light of the budgetary constraints set by the neoliberal state, movement intellectuals need to come up with plans and visions of how the required houses could be produced or built. They have to traverse the distributional aspect and enter into the sphere of production. At the moment, even when houses are built, they are often of poor quality, are badly located far from employment opportunities, and so on. The involvement of employed workers would also be an asset to communities seeking to concern themselves with the production aspect of service delivery.

Movement intellectuals are the people who can develop alternatives that can strengthen and give direction to the struggles of working class communities. Without alternatives the struggle can begin to look futile, the protest movement can seem as if it is moving around in circles.

We need an alternative, we will see where we are going, we can achieve what we want. But at the moment it is dark. We can fight this poverty, if we can come together and come with an alternative. This is the way that can take us to socialism. As things stand nothing will come right.<sup>60</sup>

The darkness referred to represents the eclipse of a vision of solutions. During the difficult days of apartheid, it was imagination of a different world that gave hope, courage and direction to the millions and millions who were turning to collective action as a solution to their problems. Movement intellectuals are crucial in developing, elaborating and promoting an alternative vision. However, despite their efforts, it will probably take time and effort for the working class to come to terms with its situation in post-apartheid society, to find its bearings and regain its confidence as the class that produces the wealth and the houses that people need. It can be argued that only a vision of solutions can facilitate the unity of people across townships, villages and provinces, employed and unemployed, workplace and community struggles. The working class has to be restored to the political centre, as arguably happened during the climax in the struggle against apartheid, to allow a radically different way of solving problems can emerge. Its intellectuals and leaders have to focus the movement on rebuilding solidarity, compassion and working class alternatives to neoliberalism.

#### **9.4 YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF PROTESTS**

There is an overwhelming participation of disaffected youth in the service delivery protests (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2010). These youth have limited experience of leading struggles and carry less of the memory and tradition from past struggles. There thus exist discontinuities, gaps and unevenness in the knowledge of struggle transmitted from the old to the new era, even though some of the youth protest leaders exhibit impressive leadership skills and political acumen (ibid) and refer with veneration to the inherited tradition of struggle.

The participation of the youth provides the incipient movement with the potential of growing stronger going into the future. The baptism of fire of the present generation of youth will have

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<sup>60</sup> Solly Mkhize, community activist and leader, Intabazwe township, Harrismith; interview.

consequences for future struggles. Youth constitute the largest age group in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2007). While the youth's lack of experience is a challenge, the capacity of the youth to learn is an asset, as demonstrated by the young Balfour leaders who, in my opinion, exhibited rapid development of their political ideas in a short space of time. During the anti-apartheid days the growing power of the working class movement was able to provide the necessary support and guidance to the militant township youth on the basis of the ideal of working class leadership. Youth were viewed as "workers of tomorrow".

The power of the youth should not be underestimated. A defining moment during the anti-apartheid struggle was the 1976 student uprising (Hirson, 1979). Recently, the Mahgreb revolutions have also largely relied on youth militancy (Petras, 2011), as has the anti-globalisation movement, and the anti-austerity protests in some European Union countries recently. However, a Marxist approach cautions against the substitution of youth for the working class because it is the class rather than the transient and even unstable social stratum called youth that can lead and consummate the progressive restructuring of society (Grossman, 1985). Youth provide an important barometer to what is happening in the working class and it can be the spark that lights the conflagration of working class mass mobilisation, and serve as its shock troops. Youth participation in the struggle also provides the movement's future leaders.

Protests will probably grow rather than diminish in the future because market orthodoxy will continue to fail in overcoming the legacy of uneven and combined development left by apartheid. How this militancy is harnessed, developed and crafted into an effective force for progressive social change is an important question. The future of the working class and indeed of humanity is at stake given capitalism's destructive and unsustainable exploitation of human and natural resources (Cock, 2007; Kovel, 2007; Mészáros, 1995).

The restless and incessant search by the working class for collective organisation and action will still continue even if working class leadership is unable to rise up to the challenge and develop a viable counter-hegemonic project supported by the majority. The search may then take wrong turns such as xenophobia among workers, the spread of chauvinistic nationalism, spurious

violence between worker and worker, and the containment and normalisation of protests by the powers that be. A rise in state repression cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, a skillful and visionary working class leadership can guide the search towards the development of progressive alternatives by a movement strong enough to challenge and overturn capital's power. This would give content and make the slogan "Another world is possible" a reality.

### **9.5 SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVES AND THE PEDAGOGY OF COUNTER-HEGEMONY**

Socialisation, experience, organisation, leadership and propitious circumstances play a role in determining whether workers can be the best that they can be, or the worst that the system makes them to be. Gramsci (1988) argued for and sacrificed his life building a revolutionary working class party whose role was to educate, cajole and lead the working class into fulfilling its historical mission. Pedagogy was seen as essential in building counter-hegemony. Workers and society had to be systematically persuaded to see things from the point of view of revolutionary socialism. I have argued that earlier that the protest leaders interviewed qualify to be called the organic intellectuals to whom Gramsci allocated the task of carrying out this pedagogy of revolution. Youth leaders in Balfour indicated their hunger for knowledge that could help take forward the struggle. For Gramsci, education and organisation building constituted the preparatory stage – the war of position – in a strategy that would culminate in a direct assault on capitalist power (ibid).

Marxists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century carry the burden of the failures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century socialist experiment. Capitalist triumphalism thrived on these failures making it more difficult to develop a credible and persuasive argument against itself and for socialism. But the problems of capitalism for the working class and for humanity multiply as seen, for example, in the latest global economic meltdown, the resultant crises in European countries, the revolutionary upheavals in the Middle East, etc. Despite the heavy price the socialist movement is paying for the failures of Stalinist-inspired socialism, lessons can be drawn and the struggle for a new kind of socialism can begin. From this point of view, the protest movement in post-apartheid society requires and inspires the construction of alternatives to neoliberalism.

## 9.6 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Time and space did not allow me to develop in detail a framework that views the turmoil of protests and strikes in post-apartheid society as an expression of the working class struggle. I would have liked to develop through such an exercise a Marxist theoretical framework responsive to 21<sup>st</sup> century social complexities. Research is necessary to explore how the different waves of protest in communities are related to each other and to the strike movement. The dynamics of the labour movement and its complex relationship to the ruling party requires further research and theorisation in the light of recent developments in South Africa and the world. The so-called new social movements in South Africa require further scrutiny from the point of view of what they represent and could have represented in relation to the goals of the global anti-capitalist movement especially in the light of their decline. My theorisation of the development of oppositional forms of knowledge in the course of the struggle and how these can be included in crafting a Gramscian counter-hegemony is very tentative and sketchy in this dissertation. There is a need, for example, to analyse the mutual influence of the discourses deployed by both sides in the course of the class struggle. This exercise could lay a basis for strengthening the movement against neoliberalism by suggesting the strongest forms of oppositional knowledge and how these could be tailored to draw in the widest layers of the working class and other oppressed classes in society to form the countermovement discussed in this dissertation.

South Africa is a key and dominant player in Southern African geopolitics and a form of activist theorising is necessary to explore how this fact can be related to the struggle against neoliberalism in Africa. Barker and Cox (2002) have argued that activist theorising is necessary to go beyond contemplative analysis and move towards strengthening practical struggles based on empirical research. The epistemological issues involved in adopting an organiser perspective in theory-building requires careful study so that scholar-activists can conduct research that can provide answers to questions of what is to be done, how, by which methods, tactics, building which alliances, pushing which argument, how these have worked and not worked well in the past, without falling into the trap of solipsism and subjectivism. There is a need to explore the specific material and ideological obstacles that need to be overcome in, for example, traversing

the dichotomy between community and labour struggles, and between the local, the national and the international. There is a need to take forward the research into protest that turns into xenophobic attacks, and more generally into narrow nationalist agendas: how this happens and how it can be avoided. The general question is: how best can social science be liberated from being a handmaiden – wittingly or unwittingly – of the hegemonic projects of the world’s ruling classes and, instead, contribute to the struggle for economic and social justice for all?

### **9.7 CONCLUSION: TRANSCENDING CAPITALISM**

South Africa faces huge problems that ultimately can be traced to the rule of capital (Mészáros, 1995). Although atypical in that it has developed a large relatively advanced capitalist economy, like other African countries, it has to grapple with the problems of the post-colonial state, its disappointments and its skewed benefits for certain classes and not others. It also faces, with other emerging economies outside the continent, the challenge of democratisation in the context of globalisation. Failure is not an option as this could possibly lead to a tragedy of the magnitude experienced by Zimbabwe, its neighbor to the north (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). The indigenous rulers inherited a country which they promptly plunged into political, economic and social chaos in the most unnerving manner possible (ibid). The result has been much suffering for ordinary people with more than a million seeking refuge in South Africa; they are a constant reminder of what can happen if things go wrong. Despite the international community’s apparent approval and even admiration of South Africa, and Africa’s pride at its success, there is increasing evidence that, from the point of view of the country’s popular classes, life has become grim and even desperate (Buhlungu, 2007). We should therefore not be surprised to see the masses rising up in rebellion against this situation. It is a rebellion of the working class and the poor against the imposition of the vision of neoliberal capitalism and its market-friendly policies. This research has tried to connect the specific to the general, and to discern the likely direction of the forward movement from both a scholarly and an activist perspective. The protest movement in South Africa consists of many different struggles, demands and positions. It contains many possibilities and can take many different directions, some progressive, others reactionary. But, just as the Greek legendary hero Hercules discovered, what at first appears to be an impossible task can, with some strength and

ingenuity, be accomplished. Thus he was able to clean the Augean Stables by diverting two rivers to wash the impossible filth and muck. The same can be said of the accumulated muck of generations of exploitation and oppression attendant to various forms of class rule that needs to be washed off the face of the earth. To many, the post-apartheid protest and strike movements are streams feeding into the rivers that can accomplish the task. As a young protest leader in Balfour's Siyathemba township ominously laments:

We grow up in the township but we have nothing. We like politics but now is the time – we must change everything upside down.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sandile Sithole, youth leader and activist, Siyathemba township, Balfour. Interview.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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*Please note that your identity and the answers you give are strictly confidential. I will use the information for academic purposes only.*

#### 1. Personal details

- Name/Address/Occupation/Organisational affiliation (past & present)

#### 2. Participation and involvement in protest action

- (a) Tell me about the first time you were involved in protest action?
- (b) When was it?
- (c) What was the protest about?
- (d) Why and how were you involved?
- (e) How was the decision taken to protest? Who was involved in making the decision? What was the place of those people in the politics and history of the community or area concerned?
- (f) What were the grievances, issues and demands?
- (g) What methods were used in the protest?
- (h) How many people were involved?
- (i) How long did the protest take?
- (j) What was the response of the targets of the protest, including other authorities (e.g. local councilor)? Did they receive a memorandum? Did they meet the protesters?
- (k) How did the police respond to the protest? Did they allow it to happen? Did they try to stop the protest? Did they use force against the protesters? Was anyone hurt? Arrested?

- (l) What happened after the protest? In the short term? In the long term?
- (m) What were you trying to achieve?
- (n) What did you achieve? What did you fail to achieve?
- (o) Tell me about the second/third/fourth time you were involved in protest. Answer the questions (a) to (n) for each of the protests.

THE PROTEST: WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL CONDITIONS THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO SUCCESSFULLY ORGANISE THE PROTEST(S)?

### 3. Views on protest action

- (a) Why do you think people participate in protest action?
- (b) What are the other means available to the people to achieve their goals besides protest action?
- (c) Why are protests necessary, if at all, in a democratic South Africa?

### 4. Goals and aims of protest action

What do you tell the people you are fighting about? FRAMING

- (a) What are people trying to achieve with their protest action?
- (b) What are the short, medium and long-term goals of the protests?
- (c) What must change in society for the protests to win?

### 5. Methods of protesting

HOW DID YOU ORGANISE AND GET THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE?

WHICH PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS CAN YOU RELY ON FOR SUPPORT? WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO THEY PROVIDE?

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THE DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES AND POLITICAL VIEWS AMONG PEOPLE?

- (a) What are the methods and techniques used in protesting?
- (b) Which methods are most effective?
- (c) Which methods are not so effective? Why?
- (d) Why do people tend to use certain methods and not others?

#### 6. Protests and social change

WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN YOUR STRUGGLES?

- (a) What have the protests changed in society?
- (b) Where have the protests failed to change things?
- (c) What is the best way of getting things to change?

#### 7. International context

- (a) How is South Africa affected by developments in the rest of the world? [globalisation]
- (b) How is the world affected by what happens in South Africa?

#### 8. Comparison of anti-apartheid and today's protests

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST INSPIRING FROM THE APARTHEID STRUGGLE?

What are the similarities and differences between today's protest action and those against apartheid?

#### 9. Sources of ideas and influences

- (a) Who are the people or organisations that influence people who participate in protest action?
- (b) Can you refer me to some books or authors in this respect?

#### 10. The future

- (a) What kind of future do you want for this country? For the world?
- (b) How will the protests help in realising the future that you want?

## 11. Other points

Is there anything else you would like to say about protests which I have not covered in my questions?

*Thank you for your time and co-operation. If you wish I will send you a copy of my thesis, at least in electronic form, once it has gone through the university assessment processes. Thank you very much.*

---

end

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## **Supplementary/conceptual questions to guide probing**

### THE NATURE OF THE PROTESTS

1. Why are people coming out in protest?
2. What is the significance of the protests in South Africa?
3. Is it accurate to characterise the protests as “service delivery protests”?
4. Is the protest action solely about the delivery of services or does it signify a bigger dissatisfaction with the social order as such?

### PROTEST AND THE POLITICAL PROJECT

5. Do protesters link the struggle for satisfying their immediate needs, e.g. for water, electricity, housing, etc., with the struggle for broader social change, for a change in power relations?
6. Or are the people only interested in getting their “bread and butter” and their “bricks and mortar”?
7. Is there an imagined future that inspires the protesters when they wage their struggles?
8. What is the crisis that is pushing working class people into struggle?

9. What is the solution that might be engendered by the protest action?

#### PROTEST, METHODS AND ORGANISATION

10. What are the methods and techniques used? E.g. direct action, violent/non-violent, legal/illegal, etc.
11. What is the relationship between protest action and organisation?
12. To what extent do local conditions condition the nature of the protest?

#### PROTEST, POLICY CHANGE AND NEOLIBERALISM

13. To what extent do the protests contribute to policy change and development in South Africa?
14. Is a critique of neoliberal economic policy inherent/implicit in the protests?
15. If so, are the protesters aware of the significance of their protests in this respect?
16. To what extent and in what ways do the protesters see themselves as contributing to the global struggle against neoliberalism?
17. What changes are necessary in South African social conditions and power relations that can allow for the fulfillment of the protesters' demands?

#### PROTEST, THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT AND THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE

18. To what extent do they signify a renewal of working class politics and the rebuilding of a movement for radical change in the country?
19. What are the continuities and the breaks between the old anti-apartheid mass action and the new mass action in post-apartheid society?
20. During the anti-apartheid struggle the various problems and grievances of the people coalesced around the demand for ending apartheid and ushering in democratic majority rule. What are the problems today, what are the main demands and what is the unifying vision, if any?

#### PROTEST AND THE GLOBAL STRUGGLE

21. How are the protesters, if at all, influenced by the global movement?
22. To what extent do protesters emphasise the local nature of the problems they are trying to solve through protest action?

23. To what extent do protesters emphasise the global/continental/national nature of the problems they face?
24. Is “localism” a constraint on struggles that challenge processes that are national and international in character or origin?
25. Is “globalism” a diversion from the immediacy of the issues the protesters are trying to address?

#### PROTEST AND IDEOLOGY

26. What is the response of protesters when presented with different conceptualisations of protest action? E.g. Marxists presented with autonomist arguments, and vice versa.
27. What is the dominant language and script that protesters use in talking about their actions?
28. What are the problems that protesters are trying to solve when talking about their actions? (disclaimers, persuasion, framing, contestations)

## APPENDIX 2: List of respondents

Name	Organisation	Area
Martha Mbatha*	Landless Peoples Movement	Protea South, Soweto
Mavis Gwala	Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee	Orlando East, Soweto
Sipho Matlala	Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents	Intabazwe township, Harrismith
Solly Mkhize	Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents	Intabazwe township, Harrismith
Themba Motlounq	Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents	Intabazwe township, Harrismith
Jacob Mbatha	Merafong Demarcation Forum	Khutsong, Merafong City
Jabu Sithole	Merafong Demarcation Forum	Khutsong, Merafong City
Mandla Magwaza	Merafong Demarcation Forum	Khutsong, Merafong City
Sandile Sithole	Pan Africanist Congress	Siyathemba township, Balfour
Thami Sosibo	ANC Youth League	Siyathemba township, Balfour
**	Jubilee South Africa	Bushbuckridge

**	Freedom of Expression Network	Bushbuckridge
**	African National Congress	Standerton
**	African National Congress	Standerton
**	Motsoaledi Concerned Residents	Motsoaledi informal settlement, Soweto

\* Pseudonyms have been used.

\* \*The respondents not named were only interviewed once and thus were not incorporated into the findings; but their insights had an influence on the overall project.