

‘But We Were Thousands’

Dispossession, Resistance, Repossession and Repression in Mandela Park¹

Ashwin Desai & Richard Pithouse

what they (the ANC) have done to put the economy on a right footing, is, I think, almost miraculous

- Pamela Cox, Former Head of the South Africa Division at the World Bank²

Mandela has been the real sell-out, the biggest betrayer of his people. When it came to the crunch, he used his status to camouflage the actual agreement that the ANC was forging with the South African elite

- Trevor Ngwane, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee³

The Men with Guns

In September 1999 the sheriff came to Mandela Park with dogs and teargas and guns. On the first day they came to confiscate our goods. On the second day they came back to evict us from our homes. There were a lot of police, in Caspirs and in small vans. It was as if they were at war. They cordoned off one street at a time and started to evict people. The whole area came out, as well as neighbouring areas, to try and prevent the evictions. We stood up to them. No one told us to resist – it was spontaneous. People were beaten with batons, shot at with rubber bullets and bitten by police dogs. Teargas blew everywhere. A lot of people were injured and it is lucky that no one was killed. The police were only able to evict 13 families on that first day. And the community put many of the people who were evicted back in their houses. Later we got in touch with the Anti-Eviction Campaign in Tafelsig through the Anti-Privatisation Forum and then linked with people in Athlone, KTC, Valhalla Park, Gugulethu, Delft, Tambo Square, Mfuleni and elsewhere.⁴

¹ This paper has been reduced by over a third for this seminar. We have decided to remove most of the theory and analysis, and in particular our analysis regarding the strategic choices confronting movements like the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign (MPAEC), and to leave intact the bones of the basic story of the key events in the struggle of the MPAEC. Our telling of this story draws largely on interviews with Max Ntanyana and Fonky Goboza but we are also in constant contact with a number of other people within and allied to the campaign and have visited Mandela Park on a number of occasions and been eyewitnesses to the some of the events narrated here. We hope that in the future there will be resources and time and political space for us, or others, to add flesh to the bones of this story. But right now it seems that the most important thing is that this story is told. The full version of this paper is available online at <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?3,45>

² Alistair Sparks *Beyond the Miracle* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2002), 16.

³ Trevor Ngwane “Sparks in the Townships,” *New Left Review* 22 (2003), 41-43. For a good introduction to the electricity crisis in Soweto see Maj Fiil-Flynn with the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee “The Electricity Crisis in Soweto” *Occasional Papers* No. 4., Municipal Services Project (2000) <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~mspadmin/>

⁴ Fonky Goboza and Max Ntanyana, interviewed by Richard Pithouse, November 2002. Goboza and Ntanyana asked for the their comments to be recorded as ‘Goboza and Ntanyana’ rather than separately.

These are the words of Max Ntanyana and Fonky Goboza, activists in the Mandela Park anti-eviction campaign. Ntanyana currently⁵ lives under bail conditions designed to make political life almost impossible after spending his third term of awaiting trial imprisonment for campaigning against evictions and disconnections. Goboza is on the move, relentlessly, trying to avoid arrest. Mandela Park is on the edge of Khayelitsha - the massive township that sprawls along the bleak plains of the Cape Flats. If you walk down to sea you can, on a crisp day, see Robben Island.

Apartheid was undone bit by bit by endlessly multiple acts of resistance and lines of flight. By the early 1980s people were moving from the rural Transkei, where apartheid sought to keep them, and on to Cape Town in such numbers that the state lost the capacity to regulate the borders between its two opposed zones. Around the country people who were taking control of new spaces gave those spaces names. And the people who moved to the edge of Khayelitsha defiantly called their space Mandela Park in honour of their hope⁶.

Mandela Park is not the only community that finds itself under armed assault from the state ten years after the end of apartheid. Two weeks ago⁷ the Durban City Council sent scores of heavily armed men into Chatsworth in armoured cars to disconnect hundreds of people from water. Two days before the Bayview Flat Resident's Association had been able to beat off a less well-armed invasion with barricades and stones. They have been fighting constant battles against eviction from their council owned flats and disconnection from water and electricity since May 1996 when "a detachment of fifty security personnel rolled into Chatsworth in 4 x 4 bakkies and began disconnecting water and electricity, throwing furniture and other belongings onto the street, before sealing the doors of flats."⁸ Many communities around Durban and around the country have faced similar attacks. Indeed, David McDonald and John Pape conclude that up to ten million people have been disconnected from water and electricity respectively and two million evicted from their homes⁹ since the African National Congress [ANC] became the first African government to ever voluntarily¹⁰ seek the help of the World Bank to design and impose a structural adjustment programme¹¹ on its people¹². The results of this policy shift came quickly. By some estimates¹³ as many as one and half million jobs were lost and the state's own statistics agency reports that, in real terms, average black African household income declined 19% from 1995-2000, while white household income was up 15%. Across the racial divides, the poorest half of all South Africans earn just 9.7% of national income, down 11.4% from 1995.¹⁴

⁵ This was true when we wrote the first version of this paper in October 2003. It will still be true when we present it at the History and African Studies Seminar on 10 March 2004. Ntanyana will appear in court again on 12 March 2004.

⁶ Max Ntanyana, interviewed by Ashwin Desai, October 2003.

⁷ 17 September 2003.

⁸ Ashwin Desai *The Poors of Chatsworth* (Durban: Madiba Publishers, 1999), 38.

⁹ David McDonald and John Pape (Eds) *The Crisis of Service Delivery in South Africa* (Pretoria: HSRC, 2002)

¹⁰ However it should be remembered that in November 1993 the ANC "entered into a secret \$850-million loan agreement with the IMF... Attached to the loan was a statement of intent which, in retrospect, reads like a précis of GEAR". Hein Marais *South Africa: Limits to Change* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2001), 134.

¹¹ For many years the ANC denied that this policy, called the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, was a structural adjustment programme but World Bank Managing Director Mamphele Ramphele referred to GEAR as a structural adjustment programme at an IDASA conference in Cape Town on 11 August 2003.

¹² See Marias, *South Africa: Limits to Change* and Patrick Bond *Elite Transition* (London: Pluto, 2000)

¹³ Although this figure is now quite often cited the most commonly cited figure is 1 million.

¹⁴ Cited in Patrick Bond *The Limits to Water Commodification in South Africa*, (2003), 5. (forthcoming article)

Mandela Park is also not the only community in which resistance to outright dispossession and the exclusion from social services has moved from being expressed through the weapons of the weak (removing street names and numbers, misdirecting official vehicles, offering bodies as bribes etc.) and on to open and overtly political defiance¹⁵. Revolts have ebbed and flowed in poor communities all over the country since 1996¹⁶. People have been putting their bodies in harm's way¹⁷ and fighting militant struggles to stay in the places where apartheid put them, to retain access to basic services like water and electricity and resist exclusion from education. Not even the most cynical anticipated that the millennial hopes that fuelled the mass and micro and overt and covert struggles against apartheid would be crushed this quickly and this brutally.

Enter the World Bank (stage right, riding the neo-liberal juggernaut)

Changing the mindset of service providers, the elite, and the press is not simple, but it can be done. Much can be learned from the market penetration strategies of the private sector.

-The World Bank¹⁸

By the late 1980's the apartheid state was working closely with the World Bank. And The Bank, together with its enthusiastic allies amongst the local corporate elite, was able to persuade apartheid to begin to develop 'public-private partnerships' with a view to the state making the necessary arrangements for business to be able to outlay the capital for 'development' and for this investment to be recouped, with profit, from the poor.¹⁹ In this regard Mandela Park is unusual because it is one of the first places where housing for the poor was developed by private capital for private profit. This later became the ANC's standard housing policy under Minister Joe Slovo. In Mandela Park private banks, working with the state, bought land in 1986 and began to offer mortgages and employ private contractors to build houses. Ntanyana and Goboza remember that:

The deposits on the houses were very low, about R500, and people were moving in by 1988. But the houses were not complete. They had no ceilings or ventilation. They had cracks. They had rising damp. There was no plaster. There was only one door. And the lot size was too small. The banks built two houses on a single plot. These problems still exist in those houses today - 14 years later. The community said they were not prepared to pay for the houses until the banks resolved the problems. It is also very important to understand that because the banks own the land on which the houses are built there has been absolutely no development — no

¹⁵ And, of course, as David Harvey points out the global number and variety of "Insurgent movements against accumulation by dispossession...is simply stunning." David Harvey *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), p. 166.

¹⁶ See Ashwin Desai *We are the Poors – Community Struggle in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002)

¹⁷ This is not hyperbole. There have been a number of deaths at the hands of the police and private security agencies since Michael Makahabane was shot dead on 16 May 2000 on the campus for the then University of Durban-Westville. Makahabane was shot in the chest at point blank range with a shot gun in front of a number of witnesses. Despite legal action and mass protest the police officer responsible has never been charged.

¹⁸ Deepa Narayan with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher and Sarah Koch-Schulte *Voices of the Poor* (New York: Oxford University Press/The World Bank, 2000), p.279.

¹⁹ See Patrick Bond *Elite Transition*, 122-151.

schools, no clinics. Everything is privatised – the land, the house, the water, the electricity – everything.²⁰

Residents mobilized in their community and demanded that their houses be upgraded. When this failed to produce results, they instituted a boycott of bond repayments. The apartheid state, fearing a violent backlash that would feed into growing support for the United Democratic Front [UDF], was hesitant to attempt mass evictions with the result that the banks found it politically impossible to act on court judgments they had obtained against defaulters. But soon after the ANC took power it entered into relationships with banks and private developers and, in an astonishing ideological somersault, became unashamedly committed to neo-liberalism's foundational developmental principal - cost-recovery. The political legitimacy of the ANC enabled the banks to act on bad debts. There are times when it is necessary to return to Marx: "The more a dominant class is able to absorb the best people from the dominated classes, the more solid and dangerous is its rule."²¹

Trade union militancy from the Durban strikes in 1973 through to the last days of the negotiations in the early 1990's had played a key role in forcing South African capital to abandon apartheid. But after the ANC imposed its structural adjustment programme in 1996 there was a rapid erosion of the local manufacturing economy; particularly the textile and clothing industry. Tariff barriers were dismantled well ahead of the schedules requested by the World Trade Organisation and cheap goods produced under regimes of terror in East Asian sweatshops flooded the country. Most of the damage was done in the late 1990's. But according to the general secretary of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union, Ebrahim Patel, more than a thousand jobs were still being lost every month in the clothing, textile and leather industries in the first six months of 2003. It is in this sector that thousands of people on the Cape Flats work and seek jobs. These losses followed the loss of 17 000 jobs during 2001 and 2002.²² At the same time new research put the national unemployment figure at between 32% and 45%. The research found that a quarter of the currently unemployed lost their last job because of retrenchment or business closure; and that half the people seeking work have never worked before.²³ Furthermore while employment has declined rapidly the quality of jobs has also declined. Franco Barchesi shows that more and more people are working in 'atypical' or 'non-standard' (temporary, casual, contract, part-time) forms of employment that herald the ubiquity of a relatively unstable, and non-unionised workforce earning 'poverty wages'. He makes the telling point that unemployment in itself is only partially accountable for working class poverty: "the existence of huge areas of working class poverty in South African society ... indicate(s) an enduring, structural inability of waged employment to satisfy basic necessities for life and household reproduction".²⁴

Social income has also been subject to merciless pressure. Pensions decreased in real terms between 1991 and 2000²⁵ Inequality has been exacerbated by the lack of state support (like a social wage) with over 13,8 million people in the poorest 40% of South Africa's households

²⁰ Ntanyana and Goboza, interview 2002

²¹ Karl Marx *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Vol.3. (New York: Penguin), 736.

²² *Mail and Guardian*, August 8-14, 2003, 17.

²³ *Mail and Guardian*, 1 to 7 March 2002, 4.

²⁴ Franco Barchesi "Social Citizenship, the State and the Changing Constitution of Wage Labour in Post-Apartheid South Africa" Paper presented at the 2002 *Annual Congress of the South African Sociological Association*. (Belville: University of the Western Cape, 2002), 9.

²⁵ Tom Lodge *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), pp. 67-69.

not qualifying for any social security transfers.²⁶ At the same times basic services like transport have been privatised, water and electricity have been corporatised and the state has demanded 'user fees' for school, health care and other services.

Cost Recovery (and the armed assault on the poor)

To the point that their idea of freedom, a new and recent idea, is already fading from our minds and mores, and liberal globalisation is coming about in precisely the opposite form – a police state globalisation, a total control, a terror based on 'law and order' measures. Deregulation ends up in a maximum of constraints and restrictions, akin to those of a fundamentalist society.

- Jean Baudrillard²⁷

As David McDonald and Laila Smith have demonstrated so well the relentless concretisation of the precepts of the ANC's structural adjustment programme have resulted in

a fundamental shift away from the 'statist' service delivery models of the past where the state subsidized and delivered municipal services (in an overtly racially-biased manner), towards a 'neo-liberal' service delivery model where the private sector (and private sector principles) dominate. In the latter model, the state acts as a service 'ensurer' rather than a service 'provider' and municipal services are 'run more like a business', with financial cost recovery becoming the most effective measure of performance.²⁸

These developments have resulted in the corporatisation of basic services as a prelude to their eventual privatisation. This has meant opportunities for the enrichment of people whose political connections got them onto the various boards - Umgeni Water in Durban, The Johannesburg Water Company and so on - and who are paid on highly lucrative incentive schemes that reward them for increasing profit at, of course, the direct expense of the poor. Moreover the late Joe Modise, an ANC cabinet minister, was a Director of Conlog Holdings, the company that manufactures the prepaid water meters that are currently²⁹ being installed at gunpoint and against great resistance in Phiri, Soweto. And the Directors of Dynamic Cables, the company that supplies the cabling for prepaid electricity meters, include Keith Mokoape, former Deputy Head of ANC intelligence; Diliza Mji, former ANC treasurer general in KwaZulu-Natal; Ian Deetlefs and Ron Haywood who both held senior management positions in the apartheid state's arms industry and Richard Seabrooke who, according to *The Guardian* was, involved in smuggling to UNITA in violation of UN sanctions.³⁰ So it goes. When water and electricity are finally privatised local elites stand to become very rich as the ANC demands that multinationals partner with aspirant black capitalists. There are times

²⁶ Neil Coleman and Fiona Tregenna "Thinking BIG...the proposed Basic Income Grant for South Africa" *South African Labour Bulletin* 26.2 (2002), 25.

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), 32.

²⁸ David McDonald & Laila Smith "Privatizing Cape Town" *Occasional Papers No. 7.*, Municipal Services Project (2002), <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~mspadmin/>

²⁹ September 2003.

³⁰ This information was discovered, at our request, by the renowned investigative journalist Paul Kirk who, along with Sam Sole, has done much to expose the extent of the corruption in the ANC's multi-million dollar arms deal.

when it is necessary to go back to Fanon: “The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary.”³¹

The commodification of basic services has already resulted in a dramatic escalation of the costs of these services. But in communities where unemployment is endemic where is the money to pay for commodified services supposed to come from? In the most comprehensive study of affordability McDonald and Smith found a serious crisis:

If for example, 18% of the seven million people who are reported to have been given access to water since 1994 are unable to pay their water bills 'no matter how hard (they) try', then 1.26 million of these new recipients are unable to afford this water and an additional 1.2 million have to choose between paying for water and buying other essentials like food. Similar percentages apply to the 3.5 million South Africans who have been given access to electricity.³²

This in turn has increasingly caused ‘cost-recovery mechanisms’ such as disconnections of water and electricity to occupy the attention and energy of the local state rather than the delivery of new services. Between 1999 and 2000 some 75 400 water-cut-offs were imposed in the Greater Cape Town area³³. Furthermore neo-liberal logic rejects cross-subsidization and insists that each community must, itself, ‘recover’ the full costs of service provision. This means that people previously excluded from these services must carry the full cost of installing new connections. Hence the poor, the black poor, must pay much more for their services than the rich in the still largely white suburbs. Moreover coercive measures to extract payment – disconnections and repossessions of property often affected at gunpoint – are disproportionately taken against the weakest people in society – again, the black poor. People in Khayelitsha have had their property repossessed and their water disconnected for debts as low as R200 while no action has been taken against Newlands cricket ground for a debt two hundred times larger. And, although it is possible to avoid this by getting the rich and corporates to pay more for services and thus cross subsidize the poor this is not done because elites have the power to lobby effectively for the maintenance of privilege.³⁴ In this instance the enrichment of the developing black bourgeoisie is at the direct expense of the black poor. Indeed it is parasitic on the poor.

Hegemony (and terror)

What stank in the past is the present's perfume

- Lesego Rampolokeng³⁵

William Robinson argues that the emerging transnational order is characterized by “novel relations of inequality” resulting from “the rise of truly transnational capital and the integration of every country into a new global production and financial system” that functions in the interests of “a new transnational capitalist class” into which “a portion of the national elite has become integrated...[i]n every country in the world”. This process has been driven by “the rise of a transnational state, a loose but increasingly coherent network comprised of

³¹ Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1976), 122.

³² McDonald & Smith, “Privatizing Cape Town”, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁴ All of this is carefully explained in McDonald & John “The Crisis of Service Delivery in South Africa”

³⁵ Lesego Rampolokeng *The Bavino Sermons* (Durban: Gecko Poetry, 1999), 22.

supranational political and economic institutions, and of national state apparatuses that have been penetrated by transnational forces' that serve 'the interests of global over national accumulation process.'³⁶ Robinson adds that:

In most countries, the average number of people who have been integrated into the global marketplace and are becoming "global consumers" has increased rapidly in recent decades. But the absolute number of the impoverished – of the destitute and the near destitute – has also increased rapidly and the gap between the rich and the poor in global society has been widening steadily, and sharply, since the 1970s.³⁷

For Robinson the emerging transnational order is best characterized as global apartheid. He notes that "Ruling groups and their organic intellectuals tend to develop both universalist and particularist discourses to legitimate their power and privilege in conformity with their own cultural and historical realities."³⁸

With regard to universalist discourses we are currently witnessing a massive ideological project by the World Bank and others³⁹ to delink the classic racial stereotypes (laziness, dirtiness, dangerous men and willing women etc, etc) that legitimated colonial domination from race and to project them onto the global poor of all races in order to legitimate contemporary forms of domination that entrench inequalities that were previously created in explicitly racist terms.⁴⁰

The Bank's gaze is locked into the present. With neo-liberalism we are always at the beginning of year zero. And without history poverty is naturalised as is, by implication, wealth. Under colonialism "The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."⁴¹ Under neo-liberalism the cause is still the consequence: you are poor because you are The Poor; you are The Poor because you are poor. John Holloway makes the important point that all discourses of domination that seek to fix the ontology of the dominated are conveniently ahistorical: "The crystallisation of that-which-has-been-done into a 'thing' shatters the flow of doing into a million fragments. Thing-ness denies the primacy of doing (and hence of humanity). Thing-ness is crystallised amnesia."⁴² Amnesia, although in different forms, is equally useful for the old white elite and the rising black elite. The white elite relentlessly seeks to naturalise its privilege by disguising its history of conquest, expropriation and exploitation and presenting itself as the modernizing vanguard while the black elite seeks, with equal vigour, to entrench a systemic forgetting of the radical values of the struggles that bought it to power to be able to claim to

³⁶ Bill Robinson "Social Activism and Democracy in South Africa – A Globalization Perspective" Paper presented at the Idasa conference on *Social Activism and Socio-Economic Rights: Deepening Democracy in South Africa* (Gordon's Bay, Cape Town, August 2003), 2-3.

³⁷ Ibid., 3.

³⁸ Ibid., 7.

³⁹ For a good critique of the neo-liberal discourse of the United Nations Development Programme over the last ten years see Anthony Collins and Vaughan Dutton "Subjects of Development: The United Nations Development Programme as Technology of Neo-liberal Imperialism" *International Journal of Critical Psychology* (forthcoming) collinsa@nu.ac.za

⁴⁰ This argument about the World Bank's new discourse is developed in full in Richard Pithouse "Producing the Poor: The World Bank's new discourse of domination" *Banking Against Hegemony* edited by David Moore, (forthcoming)

⁴¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 31

⁴² John Holloway *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto, 2003), 34.

be the vanguard of a project called ‘transformation’. In both cases the majority, who are becoming steadily poorer, are told that everything depends on nurturing and perpetuating the privilege of a minority who are becoming steadily richer.

Given the ANC’s routine presentation of their project to reorder society along neo-liberal lines as part of a project of deracialisation⁴³ we should add that when such discourses seek to legitimate economic arrangements that entrench racialised inequality (an inequality that is a direct consequence of historical racist domination) their racial amnesia is virulently racist. David Goldberg notes that the tremendous radical energies of the various social movements against racism and colonialism were committed to “transforming the racial status quo, the prevailing set of stultifying and subjugating conditions of existence for those deemed not white.”⁴⁴ But he shows that these movements have been co-opted and made safe for extant power by being reduced to principles that are “primarily, principally, or completely to anti-racial commitment”⁴⁵. Anti-racism, he argues, requires historical memory.

The particularist discourses of domination have their roots in both the desire to legitimate the elite pact negotiated at Kempton Park (the seductive ‘miracle’ discourse which often includes the ‘rainbow nation’ myth and the fetishisation of Mandela and the constitution) and the class project of the national bourgeoisie (the more coercive discourses of loyalty and obedience to the leader and the party). The former set of discourses are more common in the dominating zones while the latter are more common in the subordinated zones. Fanon, writing forty years ago, explains the pathological aspect of the national bourgeoisie’s discourse:

Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines. Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of national wealth. The party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that people are hemmed in and immobilized. The party helps the government to hold the people down. It becomes more and more anti-democratic, an implement of coercion. The party is objectively...the accomplice of the...bourgeoisie.⁴⁶

Fanon goes on to explain how the police and army are used and how the party gets its power by the fact that it is an opportunity for “private advancement”⁴⁷, by the ideological trick of demobilising the people and presenting itself as the only legitimate agent of change (i.e. it

⁴³ A good example of this tendency is the presentation of the current round of university and technikon mergers and closures as ‘transformation’ when this project is clearly a neo-liberal cost cutting exercise similar to that imposed on other African countries by the World Bank and often described as an attack on African education. For a more detailed argument in this regard see Richard Pithouse “No Hope Without Struggle – Critical Choices” *Quarterly Review of Education and Training in South Africa* vol. 9., no 2 (2002), 32-35 and for a broad account of the World Bank led cut backs in African education see Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis and Ousseina Alidou *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities* (New Jersey: African World Press, 2000) We should also note that the new University of KwaZulu-Natal has announced that “out-standing debt (has) already been handed over to attorneys for collection”. *Independent on Saturday*, 14 February 2004. Attorneys hand debts over to debt collectors who seize the property of debtors and so another nominally public institution that primarily serves the rich is sending out men to take from the poor.

⁴⁴ David Theo Goldberg *The Death of Race* (forthcoming Basil Blackwell, 2004), 9. Presented at the Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture Series, Centre for Civil Society, 2003

⁴⁵ Goldberg, *The Death of Race*, 1.

⁴⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 138.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

“expels the people from history”⁴⁸ and by nationalist rhetoric that claims that the party incarnates the will of the people and that, therefore, to oppose it is to oppose the nation. So “these men who have sung the praises of their race...proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey, to go on obeying and to be obedient until the end of time.”⁴⁹ In contemporary South Africa nationalist rhetoric is not only mobilized to defend the interests of local elites via the ANC and linked political organisations. Thabo Mbeki is mobilizing Pan-African rhetoric, against widespread opposition from African intellectuals and social movements outside of South Africa, to win consent for his George Bush and World Bank approved New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) that aims to subject the entire continent to a self-imposed structural adjustment programme⁵⁰ on which South African capital can feed.⁵¹

So the ANC seeks to win consent for its armed extraction of wealth from the poor by the twin ideological strategies of the particular discourses of nationalism, with their demand for obedience to the leaders and the party, and the universal discourses of neo-liberalism with their demand for obedience to the market. Sometimes they are combined in novel ways like the government’s Masakhane campaign that claims, in the language of Ubuntu⁵² and in the context of entrenched and worsening unemployment and poverty, that the good person is the person who pays for services.⁵³

Universal and particular discourses of domination also intersect in a range of attempts to blame the poor for being poor and for suffering the effects of poverty. In South Africa, as in other countries, mass exclusions from access to clean water, resulted in the return of cholera.⁵⁴ The South Africa government, like the Indian government⁵⁵, dutifully followed The Bank’s ‘initiative’ and launched a campaign to persuade poor people to wash their hands more often. So people who had been forced, sometimes at gun-point, to seek water in polluted rivers and gutters and ditches, were sternly told by Nelson Mandela, in a television campaign, that they were getting sick because they were not washing their hands.⁵⁶ As Lewis Gordon reminds us “the racist’s credo (is) that, ultimately, the problem with other races is the races themselves.”⁵⁷ The market fundamentalist’s credo is that the problem with the poor is themselves. They get cholera because they are dirty. Academic consultants use the idea of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 135.

⁵⁰ See Patrick Bond *NEPAD: Fanon’s Warning* (New Jersey: African World Press), 2002.

⁵¹ South African embassies run a ‘World Bank Liason Service’ about which their blurb states: “The service, with the aim to increase South African private sector participation in World Bank projects, was started in 2000. It was born from a need to assist South African firms, NGO’s, universities, and organisations, to tender successfully for World Bank projects, focusing mainly on Africa.”

<http://www.saembassy.org/procureweb/mission.htm>

⁵² For an excellent account of the conservative ways in which the discourse of Ubuntu is deployed by elites see Christoph Marx “Ubu and Ubuntu: on the dialectics of apartheid and nation building” *Politikon* Vol. 29, No. 1 (2002), 49 – 70.

⁵³ See Richard Pithouse “Report from the frontlines of an undeclared war” *Politikon* 30.1 (2003) 65-74.

⁵⁴ See Tracey Mkhize “Cholera and the Water Business” *Debate* Vol. 5 and Patrick Bond’s *The World Bank in the Time of Cholera* <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs>

⁵⁵ See Sharma, S. and Shiva, V. *Of World Bank, Toilet Paper and Washing Soap* http://www.mindfully.org.WTO/World-Bank-Toilet_paper23sep02.htm

⁵⁶ See Mandisa Mbali *A Bit of Soap and Water, and Some Jik”: Historical and Feminist Critiques of an Exclusively Individualising Understanding of Cholera Prevention in Discourse around Neo-liberal Water Policy*. <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs>

⁵⁷ Lewis Gordon *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 29.

‘social capital’ to give a sophisticated gloss to the crassness of their collusion in this project of blaming the exploited and marginalized for their suffering.

Arguments about hegemony are useful for explaining why most academics and media in and outside of South Africa still enthuse about the World Bank’s enthusiasm for the ANC’s policies and why the lived experience of resistance and repression is almost completely absent from these spaces (other than as part of the general discourse of criminality).⁵⁸ Hegemony may even go some way to explaining how, in Mandela Park, the ANC took up the drive for cost recovery with such brutal enthusiasm, offered such quick support to the banks’ own drive to make good on bond repayments; and how the local state heaped further misery on the most vulnerable people in society by repossessing their clothes and household goods when they couldn’t pay their debts for basic services.

However the right wing nationalists gathering around Mbeki in the ANC, the market fundamentalists in the Bank, their academic consultants and the local corporate elite are not content with the situation where:

In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and ‘bewilders’ separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge.⁵⁹

They are working to achieve a situation where hegemony does all the work – where “everything is more elegant, less bloodthirsty...higher finance will soon bring the truth home...”.⁶⁰ But despite all the funding from foreign donor agencies for ‘development’ and ‘democratic consolidation’ this project isn’t concluded and hegemony doesn’t explain how such a staggeringly large number of people have been disconnected from water and electricity and evicted from their homes in post-apartheid South Africa. That fact is explained by something else: guns, dogs, teargas, smashed up front doors banging in the cold wind, prison – in a word, terror. Frank Wilderson makes an incisive observation in this regard:

Capital was kick-started by the rape of the African continent. This phenomenon is central to neither Gramsci or Marx. The theoretical importance of emphasising this in the early twenty-first century is two-fold: first, the ‘socio-political order of the New World’ was kick-started by approaching a particular body (a black body) with direct relations of force, not by approaching a white body with variable capital. Thus, one could say that slavery – the ‘accumulation’ of black bodies regardless of their utility as labourers through an idiom of despotic power – is closer to capital’s primal desire than is waged oppression – the ‘exploitation’ of unraced bodies (Marx,

⁵⁸ See the MPAEC pamphlet *Why Are We Under Attack From the Government and the Banks? Our interest is the people’s interest*, November 2003 <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs> for references of newspaper articles presenting the campaign as criminal.

⁵⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

Lenin, Gramsci) that labour through an idiom of rational/symbolic (the wage) power: A relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony.⁶¹

Mandela Park: the revolt begins

The people no longer feel their bellies at peace when the colonial country has recognized the value of its elites. The people want things really to change and right away. Thus it is that the struggle resumes with renewed violence.

- Frantz Fanon⁶²

At first meetings in Mandela Park consisted of small groups of affected homeowners who got together in an atmosphere characterized by despair and disbelief rather than militance. In fact, it was very difficult to summon up an attitude of defiance. After all it was the same ANC in which people had invested so much hope as they struggled against apartheid and it was just a few families that had been affected.

But there were a few trade union activists in Mandela Park who'd been fortified by years of having to assert life and hope against the cold logic of profit. They began to put these well-honed skills to use in their community. Solidarity also arrived from activists from the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC), whose members in the 'coloured' area of Tafelsig in Mitchells plain had been confronted by evictions the year before.

The WCAEC people brought very few resources with them but the fact that a vibrant anti-eviction mass movement existed with its own language and rationale was a great boost to the people in Mandela Park. No sooner had they formed their own anti-eviction chapter than even more people received notice that they were to be evicted from their homes. Supported by a number of city-based NGO workers, trade unionists and free-floating left activists, the Anti-Eviction Campaign started operating at two levels: exploring the prospects of a legal battle and beginning a programme of mass mobilisation. Soon the WCAEC, through a succession of well-attended meetings, became rooted within Mandela Park. A grim but powerful insurgency was born.

The ANC: banking on change

Globalisation does not mean the impotence of the State, but the rejection by the state of its social functions, in favour of repressive ones, and the ending of democratic freedoms.

- Boris Kagarlitsky⁶³

Around the world neo-liberalism recommends the creation or co-option of small, professional 'civil society' organisations in an attempt to give legitimacy to commodification under the guise of 'public-private partnerships'.⁶⁴ The ANC has taken this further by trying to create or co-opt simulated mass organizations to legitimise its policies. So, for example, when Thabo

⁶¹ Frank B. Wilderson, III "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Society" *Social Identities* Vol.9, No.2 (2003), 229-230.

⁶² Frantz Fanon *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 122.

⁶³ Boris Kagarlitsky "Facing the Crisis" *Links* No.19 (2001), 72.

⁶⁴ See Fiona Lumsden and Alex Loftus "Inanda's struggle for water through pipes and tunnels: Exploring state-civil society relations in a post apartheid informal settlement." *Centre for Civil Society Research Report No. 6* for an excellent account of this in Durban. <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs>

Mbeki's catastrophic AIDS denialism was opposed by a mass movement made up of more than ten thousand volunteers, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC),⁶⁵ the ANC set up an organization called the National Association for People with AIDS (NAPWA) that demonised TAC and supported the President's views on AIDS. This is never effective at the mass level but it does mean that ANC aligned media and academics always have a counter-posing voice easily at hand. In Mandela Park the ANC made use of the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO). SANCO was a popular and bureaucratically but nevertheless radically democratic union of community organizations that had played a key role in resistance to apartheid. The ANC had demobilized it after taking power but now they resurrected SANCO as a top down structure for, in Fanon's phrase, 'holding the people down'. Ntanyana and Goboza explain that:

As a result of the boycott there were negotiations with the banks facilitated by the ANC and SANCO. No solutions came up, even though it was taken up to 'higher levels' and people went to Jo'burg and everything. A local Joint Task Force for housing was created, with the ANC alliance on it. We were told all our demands would be met. But people were still not sure how much they should pay on their bonds. Heated debates developed in report-back meetings. Eventually proper report-backs stopped. SANCO would call meetings promising that the housing question would be discussed. But when people turned up at the meetings, the housing question would not be on the agenda. Instead all sorts of petty items would be discussed. People started to boycott these meetings.⁶⁶

The ANC's next move was to offer SANCO a 20% share-holding in Khayelethu Home Loans (Pty) Ltd, the company that provided finance for home loan debt in Khayelitsha. SANCO took the money. Letters of demand were now signed jointly by SANCO, the 'civil society' organization tasked with 'representing the people' and Khayelethu. Then an even more insidious organization arrived on the scene: SERVCON. As Ntanyana and Goboza explain:

SERVCON was formed in 1995 in terms of the 1994 'record of understanding' signed between the government and the banks. SERVCON is half owned by the government and half by the banks. It was meant to serve the interests of the people, and to deal with the 'historical problems' (as it is put) of incomplete houses, arrears, etc. In fact it has acted as the agent of the banks. SERVCON has offered four options: 'rightsizing', rental, buybacks, or evictions. 'Rightsizing' meant being moved to tiny houses far away from the community. At first we were only told these options verbally. The first time we saw them in writing was in June 2002. The community opposed them all.

But SERVCON said that people must find a method to pay or else be evicted. The problem is that poor people cannot afford to pay what the banks demand. This is especially so when they have built up arrears, for whatever reason. Interest rates have been very high over the past period and this has vastly inflated the cost of these houses. Originally these houses cost R25 000. But

⁶⁵ <http://www.tac.org.za>

⁶⁶ Goboza & Ntanyana, interview 2002

many people have paid thousands of Rand more than this for them over ten years and they still don't own them. It is unreasonable.⁶⁷

SERVCON, as one community activist put it, "sleeps under the same blanket as the banks and the government."⁶⁸

The Western Cape Government's attack on the poor of Khayelitsha at the beginning of 2002 was swift and brutal. In January 2002 evictions took place daily. Over 2 000 households faced eviction.

Right-sizing

For them the whole purpose of language is to mask intent.
-Arundhati Roy⁶⁹

Evictions are supposed to be followed by relocation to smaller houses in informal areas far outside the community. This process is described as 'rightsizing', the idea being that residents who find living in two-roomed houses beyond their means should be evicted and relocated to more affordable, and far more poorly serviced, one-roomed houses.

People who had been evicted from their homes by the Group Areas Act during apartheid, who had been forced out of 'coloured' townships as the government tried to police a 'coloured labour preference policy', who had been forced to find shelter in squatter settlements, now found the same thing happening to them again. But now it came under a new 'raceless' phraseology called right-sizing.

People evicted from Mandela Park and 'rightsized' refer to the one room 'houses' that they have been moved to as 'Dog Kennels'. This was the fate of Mr Mcondobi. Mr Mcondobi, a pensioner, was evicted and 'right-sized' in February 2002. He was in good health when he was moved to a one-room house with no inside plastering, a leaking roof, and no bath or shower. As winter set in, Mr Mcondobi contracted pneumonia and died. Max Ntanyana knows seven other old people from Mandela Park who died in 'right-sized' houses that winter and has heard of another fifteen from elsewhere in Khayelitsha.⁷⁰

Ntanyana and Goboza explain that local ANC officials rapidly moved from promises of help to the community to helping SERVCON identify easy targets for evictions.

After the first eviction the ANC ward councillors came in promising to solve the problems - but on condition that people must pay to prevent evictions. Small workshops were organised, with just a few people together with councillors and SANCO people etc. But after a short time we found that the ANC and SANCO officials were targeting the most vulnerable people - pensioners, the disabled, single mothers and so on - and intimidating them with threats of eviction if they didn't pay. The targeting of the vulnerable

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mandela Park Anti-eviction Campaign Meeting, Mandela Park, October 2003

⁶⁹ Arundhati Roy "Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin" *Power Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001), 42.

⁷⁰ Ntanyana, interview October 2003.

became a consistent pattern. This is why the ANC did so badly in the local government elections in our area.

But the backlash at the polls didn't protect us. Immediately after the elections evictions started on a much bigger scale. People didn't have the energy to fight back all the time and they were confused. We know of at least 190 families that were evicted in Mandela Park straight after the election. They were "right-sized" - relocated to smaller houses far away from Mandela Park, in Harare or Macassar. By 2001 the sheriffs and police were evicting people from more than 30 houses a day. In some cases people's houses were put up for sale by the banks even before they were evicted - because there was no new smaller house ready for them. And they still had to continue to pay the bond on the original house!"⁷¹

Resistance and Repression

new struggles always involve elements of continuity as well as discontinuity with the past. Bodies of thought formulated in different conditions, and marginalized in the recent past, can re-emerge to exert a major influence in a new movement.
- Alex Callinicos⁷²

At first the MPAEC sought to talk to the banks and the Provincial Minister of Housing. They pleaded that their houses be fixed and that the government buy back the land on which their houses were built from the banks. This was a reasonable expectation – that the state subsidise low-income group housing. All attempts at meetings with the ANC MEC (provincial minister) for Housing and the banks were rebuffed.

While the MPAEC showed a willingness to talk to the banks and politicians, it was resolute in refusing to get involved in the rationality of administrative procedures. This involved dividing the poor from the not so poor [preparing the former to be right-sized], negotiating a lowering of the debt [in return for suspending the boycott] and so on. In this way, the MPAEC was "making power visible and laying the foundations for an open confrontation with the authority and domination that are often hidden by the impersonal rationality of administrative procedures."⁷³ As Ntanyana and Goboza explain:

At first we were only semi-organised. Our real campaign against the banks started at the end of January 2001. We hold twice weekly meetings, on Wednesdays and Sundays, which are attended by hundreds of supporters of the campaign. Western Cape community safety MEC Leonard Ramatlakane stated in the *Cape Times* that we are "a handful of people". Our meetings are attended by young and old, as many and perhaps more women than men. We have invited Leonard Ramatlakane to attend our meetings, but he has failed to come and discuss with these people. We invite him again to come and see who we are.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Goboza & Ntanyana, interview 2002

⁷² Alex Callinicos, "Toni Negri in Perspective" *International Socialism Journal*, No 92 (2001), 22.

⁷³ Stephen Buechler *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102.

⁷⁴ Goboza & Ntanyana, interview 2002

In the first few years after 1994, ANC and even SANCO leaders were accorded respect and even deference. They carried the mystique of liberation fighters and spoke a language that promised a better life. But false promises and the repressive response to the community's mass mobilisation had the effect of what Ralph Miliband has called "desubordination", an erosion of respect and deference for both those who have power and their right to govern.⁷⁵

People were offended by the ANC's flat refusal to meet the MPAEC and outraged when activists in the MPAEC were harassed by the police, armed with guns and dogs, while the banks enforced evictions. Gradually the community realized that its overtures to the banks and government were not being taken seriously. This set in motion a series of more militant actions. They included marching onto the company disconnecting electricity, popularising a campaign for a R10-a-month flat rate for basic services that had began in Durban and ensuring that nobody was able to occupy houses from which people had been evicted. Ntanyana and Goboza explain:

During 2001 we began to slow down the rate of evictions and by June 2002 we had essentially halted them. In 2001 the sheriffs started cutting water in Mandela Park, and confiscating goods as payment for bills in arrears. There are similar problems with electricity. The anti-eviction campaign is now taking on these problems too. People build up 'arrears' because they cannot afford to pay. This is why we have made the demand for a R10-a-month flat rate service charge. Already this is what our members are paying each month. In April hundreds of us sat in at the municipal offices in Khayelitsha to protest cut-offs and to demand R10-a-month service charge.

In November, we marched to the electricity company and they agreed to reinstall electricity boxes they had taken out. From March 2002 we started returning people to their original homes.

In some cases these original houses have been unscrupulously 'sold' by the banks so that new people have a title deed. New owners - some of them even policemen and soldiers — have agreed to move to allow the original owners to return. We assisted them in finding other housing, for example in vacant houses (often protected by the bank's security personnel) where the original owner does not intend to return. We have not left a single new owner without alternative accommodation.

SERVCON and the banks are well aware that these houses are in dispute. It is very irresponsible of them to sell them off to new owners. Through this period we have been writing to the banks. We began writing to the ministry of housing after the ANC/NNP government came in the Western Cape in late 2001. Last May hundreds of us went to NBS and held a sit-in there. We complained that vulnerable people were being evicted and 'rightsized' to places in Harare and Macassar. We complained about the small plot sizes, and rising damp, the fact we had installed ceilings and roofs in the house at our own expense, had repaired faulty electrical wiring at our expense, and

⁷⁵ Ralph Miliband "A State of De-Subordination" *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.29, No.4 (1978), 47.

plastered and filled in cracks also at our own expense. We raised the question of the purchase of the land in Mandela Park by the government.⁷⁶

A few people proposed burning down two houses that the banks had repossessed. This was a catalyst for a series of public meetings to debate the issue. Out of this debate an entirely new tactic was born. Instead of burning down repossessed houses, a tactic that was obviously militant yet somehow a simultaneous admission of defeat, they decided on an altogether more positive strategy - to move people who had been evicted back into their homes. "Seize our homes, seize our lives" was the provocative chant that went up in Mandela Park; a chant that would become a widespread practice, inspiring people all over the country and earning local activists the rage of the state.

On 30 May 2002, 250 people from Mandela Park crossed into the opposed zone and occupied the ground floor of the National Building Society (NBS) offices in swanky St. George's Mall, Cape Town. Most of the occupiers, the majority of whom were pensioners, faced eviction the following week. Their situation was desperate as they had to pay back R500 a month. Their monthly pension stood at R540.

On 12th June 2002 the MPAEC organised an occupation of Khayaletu Home Loans company and refused to let the manager leave until the company's head office in Johannesburg agreed to attend a meeting which Khayaletu had previously promised, but failed to attend.

We met with Khayaletu Home Loans in July. More than 200 of us sat in the whole day. When the boss finally appeared we showed him a videotape of conditions in the houses, and of our struggles. We told him to scratch the arrears and to drop the prices of the houses. KHL agreed to scrap the arrears and promised to never again evict pensioners and the disabled. But NBS, Standard, First National are still arrogant and won't move on anything.⁷⁷

On 26th June some 300 MPAEC and Tafelsig AEC members converged on the Western Cape provincial parliament to get a date for a meeting with the ANC MEC for Housing Nomatyala Hlangana:

We have written numerous letters to the Western Cape MEC for housing, Nomatyala Hlangana She has never accepted our invitations to come and visit us. Eventually we heard that she was appearing on Radio Zibonele, on Wednesday 4 July, and we sent a delegation there to meet her. A few of us were on the air with her and she agreed to meet with us in Mandela Park - though later she withdrew from this.

Instead she set up a meeting with SANCO, COSATU, the SACP and ANC in Mandela Park. The leaders are saying that it is them who know everything and that the majority of the people can't think. We are saying that everyone can think.⁷⁸ We weren't invited to this meeting with Nomatyala and the

⁷⁶ Goboza & Ntanyana, interview 2002

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ It is useful to read the paper presented at this seminar by Raymond Suttner through the lens of this critique of the lived experience of the authoritarianism in the ANC alliance.

organisations that support the banks and the government so we went to her office in Wale Street with hundreds of people. Officials would not tell us if Nomatyala was there. While we were waiting for the Managing Director of SERVCON to arrive as we had been told, police surrounded the building, sprayed teargas inside, and arrested 44 of us. Some of those arrested were pensioners and children. We were charged with trespassing - in a ministry of the government we fought for and voted for! Among our bail conditions were that we never appear in Wale Street!⁷⁹

The banks applied for an interdict against MPAEC and four members of the organization including the chairperson Max Ntanyana. The interdict was unopposed because there was no money to go to court. The interdict restrains the respondents from, amongst other actions, preventing evictions, persuading or inducing others to do the same, and directly or indirectly inducing or encouraging any person to occupy property. This interdict eventually became the basis for lengthy periods of incarceration of MPAEC activists.

On 5 July 2002 the Sheriff of the court arrived to repossess the goods of a pensioner who owed R800 on her water account. All they could find in her house was a battered mattress and some old clothes. They took the clothes. The community organised to defend the pensioner. The police moved in firing rubber bullets and teargas. Twelve people were arrested including Max Ntanyana. Despite their injuries, they were held overnight in police cells and denied medical attention. The 12 appeared in court the next day, 11 were released on bail while a juvenile held overnight illegally was released without charge. But by now Max Ntanyana was a familiar face in the Khayelitsha Court. Sitting in the back of the courtroom was a police officer who had publicly stated that he regarded the MPAEC as an enemy of the state.⁸⁰ The discourse of the police and local media began to add the word ‘terrorist’ to their existing vocabulary of ‘criminal’ and ‘ultra-leftist’.⁸¹

Max Ntanyana was a shop steward in the COSATU-affiliated South African Municipal Workers Union. The union struck against the privatisation of municipal services. On 7 September 2002 twenty workers were arrested and taken to Somerset police station. Ntanyana was accused of continuing with his AEC activities in spite of the interdict, was charged with intimidation and contempt of court and, while in prison, fired from his job.⁸² The other workers were all released on R300 bail on 9 September but Ntanyana was imprisoned in Pollsmoor maximum-security prison for a further few weeks while bail was refused. In Pollsmoor Ntanyana met people who have been awaiting trial for years. Two

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Peter van Heusden, activist in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, personal communication with Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse, July 2002.

⁸¹ Aside from one article in the *Mail and Guardian* and one article in the *Cape Times* every other commercial media article (electronic and print including headline stories on primetime E-TV and SABC news bulletins) has, without exception, simply reported the views of the police, banks and government as fact without obtaining any views from the MPAEC. This is despite the fact that independent activists associated with Indy Media South Africa (<http://www.southafrica.indymedia.org>) have consistently put out good press releases. SAMU did the same while the Western Cape Government was under DA rule but withdrew its support for the MPAEC when the ANC took power. However there has been consistent coverage of this struggle on Indy Media South Africa and there is a segment on the Mandela Park struggle in Richard Rowley’s award winning new documentary film *The Fourth World War* <http://www.bignoisetactical.org>. See the MPAEC pamphlet *Why Are We Under Attack From the Government and the Banks? Our interest is the people's interest*, November 2003, for details of hostile media coverage received by the campaign.

⁸² Anna Weekes, SAMU press officer, personal communication with Ashwin Desai, 9 September 2002.

week's after Ntanyana's arrest, Goboza was arrested, imprisoned in the holding cells in Khayelitsha and eventually released on bail of R500. Ntanyana recalls that:

Pollsmoor is terrible. It was tough time. When you get a visitor you know that you are going to be robbed. You can only phone once a week. The warders won't look after you. The prisoners fight. People are sodomized. But we are finding that other prisoners have a lot of respect for what we are doing. We survive.

And we get overwhelming support from the community. When we appear in court it is full up. One time when they were refusing me bail they made me appear at lunchtime so that they could avoid the community. But they were there. They were hiding me so that I couldn't see the community. Then they said that my lawyer wasn't there so I must come back tomorrow. But I know that my lawyer was there. There are police working for the banks undercover. But other police are also affected by the disconnections and evictions so they were briefing me – telling me that I would not get bail. There was support from Argentina, Canada, Italy, America, Germany. People from Durban and Johannesburg came down physically. They came to the court and to visit us in prison. The support made me feel very strong. I was not worried anymore. I became more worried about the community and the campaign – especially the arrests and the crackdown.

When we got bail our conditions were that:

- We can't attend any public meetings, gatherings, marches, pickets of any nature
- We must sign two times a week at the police station (it costs R10 to travel there)
- We must not communicate with any evicted person
- We must not leave Khayelitsha without permission from the police⁸³

The ANC tried to rally in Khayelitsha.

On 26 October 2002 the AEC and ANC had rallies on the same day. We only had money for 4 buses but 6 000 people came to our rally in Khayelitsha. The ANC had 12 buses moving all around the Western Cape and nice loudhailers. Jacob Zuma was the main speaker. Nobody came. The rally was postponed. They said it was because Pirates were playing Sundowns but people came to our rally at the same time. People are not interested in party politics – they are interested in real politics. We are getting stronger all the time. After we were arrested it seemed as if they have a continuous programme to harass us. The provincial Safety & Security minister, Leonard Ramatlakane said that he would crack down on the AEC and our people are getting arrested all the time. He is on the central committee of the SACP but he is sacrificing his own people to advance the profit making of the banks. He came to the community with the MEC for housing and the new Cape Town mayor and hundreds of police, and casspirs. But we were thousands and we asked Ramatlakane to

⁸³ A copy of the bail conditions is in the authors' possession. Ntanyana hoped and still hopes to contest the constitutionality of these bail conditions but no NGO or legal aid organization has been prepared to take up the case.

apologise for calling us criminals, to explain why he is siding with the banks while calling himself a communist and to withdraw the charges. He couldn't say even a word and so he was chased away by the whole community. He calls himself a Communist and a leader but he can't come to the community without police.⁸⁴

The rhythms of resistance and repression beat faster and faster. On the last Thursday in July 2003 police and sheriffs moved into Mandela Park and evicted three households. This was after a similar operation in neighbouring Illitha Park exactly a week before where seven families were evicted in one street alone. In all cases, the evicted households were moved back into their houses by MPAEC activists on the same day.

After the August 7 evictions (which were again reversed by the MPAEC), scores of young men struck back, stoning police and targeting commercial vehicles driving down the main road through Mandela Park. This display of rage did not stop further attacks. On the following Sunday, police and sheriffs repossessed the goods of a woman who owed council for a water bill. They also disrupted the regular Sunday Mandela Park AEC meeting. The MPAEC press statement explained the pressure that the movement was under.

This is ongoing police repression. As of today, there are 6 comrades still in jail after being arrested on the Thursday the 12th of June (yes, that is 2 months ago!) for the simple 'crime' of re-occupying the houses that they had been evicted from. (Originally there were 10, but 4 have subsequently been released) The costs of hiring a lawyer to try and get these comrades released has left the Mandela Park AEC with a legal bill of R2 500, and as the case progresses, the bills are going to increase (the next court date is tomorrow!). The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign is trying to raise money to pay this bill. We are also trying to raise funds towards a bail fund and a legal defence fund. We anticipate that as next year's elections draw closer, pressure on the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign will intensify - in the strongly contested Western Cape province, the ANC has relied on the votes of Khayelitsha residents. They will want to eliminate opposition social movements, such as the MPAEC, in order to secure their voter base.⁸⁵

The ANC were now directly targeted in the poems that began to appear as resistance to evictions continued:

*Watch out Thabo [Mbeki]!
We will not build this nation in your image
We are not living in your nation, Thabo:
We are seizing our own power!⁸⁶*

The Safety and Security MEC, Leonard Ramatlakane, a leading member of the SACP, announced that he had instructed the provincial police commissioner to restore stability to Khayelitsha "and deal with the anti-eviction group, which is behaving as if it is representing

⁸⁴ Ntanyana and Goboza, interview, 2002

⁸⁵ *Mandela Park Anti-eviction Campaign Press Statement*, 7 August, 2003

⁸⁶ *Poem read at an Anti-Eviction Rally, Mandela Park, authors' notes*

the state. It is manipulating the real concerns and real problems of the community and should be brought to order.”⁸⁷

The WCAEC response was direct: “Why is there so much emphasis on criminalizing people who are living in poor circumstances? Lets (sic) open debate on the issue of housing and let’s not talk about not having money while we spend millions on weapons and a jet for the president”.⁸⁸ According to an MPAEC press statement “the catalyst for the ANC’s attack was the MPAEC’s practice of reinstating those evicted and rightsized even if the beneficiaries of this reinstatement strategy are people like 80-year-old Mrs. Ncama, card-carrying ANC member and care-giver to 5 children who was ejected from her house on the 25th July 2002”.⁸⁹

Marginalisation and repression of community movements seems set to continue. In August 2003 the ANC Deputy Secretary General, Sanki Mthembu-Mahanyele, in response to a question about the MPAEC, told a conference on Social Activism and Socio-Economic Rights that the government would distinguish between positive social formations and those with which they have a bit of a problem. “We are a young democracy ... We need a consensus. So we cannot behave in a manner like societies [that have been] independent for many years ...”⁹⁰

In the same week the ANC Gauteng General Secretary, David Makhura, was more direct when he referred to people in community movements like the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) which opposes disconnections and evictions in Johannesburg, as ‘ultra-revolutionaries’. “Basazakubethwa! (They will continue to be beaten!)” he thundered, “COSATU is a contested terrain and in this province the ultra-revolutionaries must be given a tough time ... The ultra-revolutionaries must have nowhere to hide.”⁹¹

This Moment (waiting for the sheriff’s knock)

Social activism will always be about hard struggles to wage, often impossible to win, at least in obvious ways – so often every battle appears lost but over time, consciousness shifts and suddenly society shifts and the day is won. Can we learn to recognise threads of victory in our inevitable string of defeats? Can we develop new orientations and the will to do activism differently...?
- Doug Reeler⁹²

Fear and defiance continue to mingle in Mandela Park. The state has led a sustained repressive charge against the MPAEC. Over the last year and a half some 400 residents have spent some time in jail. The poor are progressively squeezed between state repression and the commodification of the basic means of life. The installation of a pre-paid electricity system means that in Khayelitsha - where one survey revealed that half of the residents live on R167 or less a month, and a third on R39 or less a month - people are forced to self-disconnect.⁹³

⁸⁷ *Cape Times*, 8 November 2002, 1.

⁸⁸ *Cape Times*, 11 November 2002, 4.

⁸⁹ *Mandela Park Anti-eviction Campaign Press Statement*, 25th July 2002 The full statement is online at <http://www.southafrica.indymedia.org>

⁹⁰ *Mail and Guardian*, August 15-21, 2003, 3.

⁹¹ *Mail and Guardian*, August 15-21, 2003, 12.

⁹² Doug Reeler, *If you meet the White Rabbit on the road, steal his watch*, <http://www.cdra.org.za>

⁹³ Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, Research Report, 2003

The company controlling the pre-paid system, Phambili Nombani Electricity, has a board outside its offices in Mandela Park that reads: 'The Customer's Champion'. Grand conceptions of the privileges of citizenship under the 'best constitution in the world' mean very little when you are a customer without a job.

The law is a terrain on which the banks are far stronger than their 'customers'. Many people have almost no real opportunities to mount any sort of contestation on this terrain. Vakele Alfred Hemepe⁹⁴ of Lwandle Street, Khayelitsha is 55 years old. He came to Cape Town from Aberdeen in the Eastern Cape in 1958 after his father, a farm labourer, died and his mother could not afford to look after 13 children. In 1979 he found work with South African Breweries, starting out as a Hyster driver. By 1988 he was earning R 30 000 a year and decided to buy a home. He secured a Council house for R 58 000 with a loan from the Allied Building Society [now ABSA]. In April 1998 Hemepe was retrenched and found it difficult to keep up with payments. In early 2000 he was served with a summons by the bank. In the part of Khayelitsha where Hemepe lives, there hasn't been the degree of mobilisation and organisation that has enabled people to physically defend their homes from the banks' mercenaries. Organisations like SANCO and the local ANC branch are dominant and they refused to come to Hemepe's assistance on the grounds that they 'do not condone a culture of non-payment'.

He approached the WCAEC for support. They approached the Legal Aid Board on his behalf and then, after being turned away, the University of Cape Town Legal Aid Clinic. The clinic did not help. They gave the WCAEC a letter that read: "It would appear that in spite of a commitment on paper to increase the proportion of civil cases, the state-funded Legal Aid Board Justice Centres in Cape Town, Athlone and Mitchells Plain are taking on no civil cases at all..."⁹⁵

In a neighbourhood that hadn't developed a fighting culture⁹⁶ and without legal help he had no means to defend his home. His house was purchased by ABSA on 31 August 2000 for R10 000. Hemepe was evicted together with his wife, three children and three grandchildren.⁹⁷ He eventually managed to get his family back in the house by agreeing to pay R800-00 a month - eating up almost all of his casual wages at a company called Giant. But, although he has never missed one of these payments, the bank has renewed attempts to evict him. He lives in fear of the sheriff's knock.

His family has lodged a land claim consequent to an apartheid era forced removal in Aberdeen. Given the pace of land restitution and the policy of 'willing seller, willing buyer' it is unlikely that Hemepe will live to see the outcome of the claim.

⁹⁴ Affidavit in possession of Ashwin Desai

⁹⁵ Letter in Ashwin Desai's possession.

⁹⁶ Fanon's idea of a fighting culture emerges in his theorization of the lived experience of resistance in the Algerian revolution. As Nigel Gibson *Fanon and the Postcolonial Imagination* (New York: Polity 2003) shows Fanon's conception of a fighting culture is founded on "a protagonist not only entering history but becoming its author. Everyone could participate in the reconstruction and invention of...a social collective, where truth becomes subjectivity and subjectivity acquires a dimension of objectivity...Fanon saw it as the 'practice of freedom' taking place" (134).

⁹⁷ Affidavit in the High Court of South Africa, Case Number: 4552/03

Hleliwe Nosense Elsie Gaji⁹⁸ was born in Molteno in the Eastern Cape in 1940. In the 1970s she followed her husband to Cape Town and lived in the squatter camp of Crossroads. It was a place wracked with violence as police persecution, vigilantes, warlords and anti-apartheid resistance led to a cycle of attacks, revenge and death. In 1989 the Gaji's moved to a house in Mandela Park. They believed that, at last, they were taking the first step towards a better life. And things certainly looked up the following year when the ANC was unbanned and Mandela released. On the day of Mandela's release Hleliwe and her husband rushed to the centre of Cape Town and became part of the great throng listening to Mandela promise a better life under the banner of the Freedom Charter. The Gaji's house is still adorned with a framed portrait of Mandela. But Hleliwe's husband's pension just wasn't enough to enable them to keep up with the increasing payments on their home. In 2001 they were right-sized to a 'dog-kennel' in Macassar. "We went hungry. In Mandela Park our neighbours were family. They fed us. Here we are alone." Her husband sank into a deep depression. One day emissaries from the 'old community' arrived with great news – their house had been taken back from the bank and they could go back home. The Gaji's were marched, ran, sung and danced back into their old home. "At least my husband died in the house he lived for". The Macassar house was immediately occupied by squatters from across the road. Hleliwe lives in fear of the sheriff's knock. But at 64 she attends the weekly meetings of MPAEC and is ready to fight. This woman with no ideology or insertion into a political tradition has made her whole life within a cycle of dispossession, resistance, repossession and repression that has moved seamlessly from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa, from Botha to Mbeki.

Prospects for the movements

Decision and insurrection are neither rational nor irrational, neither systemic nor spontaneous; they participate in the teleology of the common, that is, in that teleology that at each instant is opened in a creative manner to the immeasurability of the to-come⁹⁹ ...the eminent form of rebellion is the exodus from obedience, that is to say, from participation in measure, i.e. as the opening to the immeasurable.¹⁰⁰
- Antonio Negri

The defence and seizure of houses, water and electricity entails the smashing, sometimes joyfully and sometimes grimly, of locks and meters. It is a rebellion against measure and an affirmation that humanity is an unconditional legitimation of the right to have the means to bare life. Under neo-liberalism that is heresy. This is good. This matters.

The rebellions around South African against the commodification of the means to bare life have come to be called, to the limited extent that any note is taken of them in the academy and the media, 'community struggles'. What little has been written about these struggles, including the work of the current authors, tends to romanticize them. It's difficult not to be moved by women who stare down men with guns to keep a neighbour in her house or teenage boys who risk prison to make sure that no old lady endures a winter without electricity. But it must be remembered that people are fighting militant struggles to keep themselves in apartheid's satanic ghettos. As this diary of key events in Mandela Park illustrates, life in neo-liberal South Africa remains, for the poor, a permanent state of emergency. The community movements respond to attempts to evict them from their homes or exclude them

⁹⁸ Interviewed by Ashwin Desai, Mandela Park, October 2003

⁹⁹ Antonio Negri *Time for Revolution* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 227-228.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

from water, electricity and education with actions designed to prevent and reverse dispossession. Their actions are largely defensive and reactive. There are generally periodic mobilizations around single issues that don't develop into an ongoing mass based confrontation with the neo-liberal juggernaut. The lack of resources and the ANC's ability to enforce repression and make strategic concessions all feed into the inability to sustain mobilization. Moreover, for many community movements the need to fight defensive battles in the courts exhausts resources so rapidly that the possibilities of linking with other struggles in the country, let alone Harare or Cochacomba, are very limited. Indeed activists in Mandela Park often struggle to work with activists elsewhere in Khayelitsha when there is no money for telephone calls and transport. There is a danger that the rebellion in Mandela Park could become an isolated 'militant particularism', unable to function in the face of sustained repression and the ANC's presentation of the comparatively well-funded and well-networked SANCO as the only body able to take up community issues 'legitimately'.

Attempts to mobilize around issues within communities - like family violence, strategies for generating collective livelihoods, the creation of spaces for artistic expression and so on - have generally been fragmented and limited. But there are some attempts to move towards a politics that reaches beyond a defence of bare life. The political culture of meetings has evolved in democratic directions. Twice weekly meetings currently attract around 600 people but are still a space that is, in Ato Sekyi-Otu's useful phrase, "radically political" in relation to itself and not just antagonistic to the forces that it opposes. For Sekyi-Otu "radically political" spaces are "essentially contestable and inescapably open, answerable (to the) claims of collective wills."¹⁰¹ At these meetings everyone can speak, everyone is obliged to listen and decisions are taken by a show of hands. Discussion tends to be extremely practical and to draw on the many varied strengths of the community. The culture, still promoted by the 'liberation movements', of simply applauding speakers on a platform and endlessly reciting empty slogans, has been decidedly broken. Moreover people openly speak of the political nature of this form of organisation (twice-weekly mass meetings, the designation of delegates to take on particular tasks rather than representatives to hold a position etc.). In the words of the MPAEC's Zuki Mlonyeni "we want to make decisions - not make leaders".¹⁰²

This is a prefigurative politics - i.e. the organising of a movement "in a manner that prefigured the broader cultural values and social relations that it was seeking in a transformed society."¹⁰³ But there is a danger in portraying this as a uni-linear unfolding. Debates over leadership continue, with some activists feeling that the leadership responsibilities in MPAEC needs to be more widely delegated, especially in the context of the constant repression that increasingly means time in prison. This debate has been limited by the fact that the de facto leadership - pulled out of their homes in the middle of the night to 'talk' to the police, often in prison, living on the run or under bail conditions that amount to something like an apartheid style banning order - are fearful of losing influence in the MPAEC and so support some degree of centralized control of the organisation. Repression has led to increasing paranoia about impimpis which has in turn firmed some tendencies toward more centralised control. There is a danger that, as Fanon warns, isolated rebellions confronting constant repression can degenerate into "a strategy of immediacy which is both radical and

¹⁰¹ Ato Sekyi-Otu *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 32.

¹⁰² Conversation with the authors, July 2003.

¹⁰³ Buechler, "Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism", 204.

totalitarian”¹⁰⁴ producing resistance that is militant but refracted through “a certain brutality of thought”.¹⁰⁵

The MPAEC was able to take but not to sustain a bold step in their attempt to move beyond reactive defensive struggles and to create a wider base and focus for their struggles. They seized a derelict school building and opened a community run school called People’s Power Secondary School (later renamed Masiphumelele School). Some 1 800 children registered to attend and 28 unemployed teachers began teaching. The school was

set up by Khayelitsha residents and members of the Anti-Eviction Campaign to cater for students excluded from other schools on grounds related to fees, failing exams or age. But after initially agreeing to allow the school the Western Cape Department of Education suddenly closed the school down. The acting chairperson of the school’s governing body, Chris Ndabazandile reported that most of the students were now sitting at home and that the school was closed despite meeting all the requirements for registration: “We were told that the reason the school is closing is that the African National Congress does not want it. Why ... are they playing these unconstitutional games with us?”¹⁰⁶

For his efforts Ndabazandile was, to his astonishment, arrested, incarcerated, subjected to the crudest racial abuse and, just as suddenly, released.

Senzani Na?

Khayelitsha is a living monument to the struggles against apartheid. The roads are named in honour of the pantheon of resistance gods – Albertina Sisulu; Steve Biko; Govan Mbeki and, in Mandela Park, Braam Fischer and Chris Hani. It is on Chris Hani road that about a hundred people, mainly women, gather to call for the release of Max Ntanyana singing a 1980’s anti-apartheid refrain, ‘Senzani Na?’ - ‘What have we done?’ It is October 2003. On the other side of the razor wire preparations for the celebration of ten years of democracy are in full swing. The people singing on Chris Hani road have done something. They have refused to be something. They are not docile extras in Mandela Park.

¹⁰⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 147. This danger is explored with particular insight by Ato Sekyi-Out (1996) and in Nigel Gibson ‘The Pitfalls of South Africa’s “Liberation”’ *New Political Science*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2001.

¹⁰⁶ *Mail and Guardian*, August 8-14, 2003, 14



One of the twice weekly Anti-eviction Campaign meetings in Mandela Park



Stoney Sithole points to the dangerously poor quality of her Mandela Park home - from which she faces eviction.



Important Message to all Khayaletu Home Loans clients

Khayaletu Home Loans (KHL), a subsidiary of South Africa Housing Trust (SAHT), in association with South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) would like to record their appreciation to all KHL clients who have been very co-operative by honoring their mortgage bond payments and fees that accrued by the Joint Co-operative Agreement (JCA) signed by KHL and SANCO. By reporting to their local branches and making arrangements for resumption of their bond payments, those cooperative clients have secured their ownership of the properties. Further, by paying their bond accounts, without breaks, they have saved their lives.

Since the signing of the JCA in September 1996, 37% clients made some payment on their loans over the past 12 months. Consequently the bond payments continue to rise.

Disposal of KHL

Government decided to liquidate its direct interest and involvement in retail financing by the disposing of KHL assets. This disposal means that KHL will eventually be owned by a private company after purchase.

During the process of the disposal of SAHT assets, it is important for you as our valued client to note the following:

- Agreements signed between SAHT, SANCO or other community based organizations remain in force.
- Your home loan contract still stands, even if another company takes over KHL. But you will be informed about the changes.
- Payment - payments will not be affected until further notice.
- All our clients are obligated to pay their bonds and failure to do so will result in legal action.

IF YOU HAVE NOT SIGNED YOUR SCHEDULE "S", WHY DO YOU NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY BY REPORTING TO YOUR NEAREST KHL OFFICE WHERE THE BRANCH PERSONNEL WILL GLADLY ASSIST YOU.

Signed by: Mlungisi Mphahlele

Signed by: Sita Khoswape

A pamphlet from SANCO and Khayaletu Home Loans

SERVCON HOUSING SOLUTIONS		Statement	
NDIEKU V L /THE OCCUPANT ERF 22447 MANDELA PARK KHAYELITSHA 7784 ERF 22447 KHAYE		CAPE TOWN Contact: VUKILE MATHE Telephone: 021 6631315/1374 PIP - EVICTIONS EVICTION INST - CANCELLED AGR NB2200000395	
Arrears Period: R 2000.00	Date: AUGUST 2002		
Bank Account Number: 82250881E	Reference Number:		
IMPORTANT INFORMATION			
IMMEDIATE ACTION			
Date	Reference	Debit	Credit
Balance B/Fwd			
01/12/2001	RENTAL	135.00	
01/01/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/02/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/03/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/04/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/05/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/06/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/07/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/08/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
01/09/2002	RENTAL	135.00	
PLEASE PAY THIS AMOUNT AT YOUR BANK		2465.00	
TAKE THIS STATEMENT WITH YOU WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR PAYMENT			
TOTAL ARREARS/ADVANCE	2330.00	MONTHS IN ARREARS/ADVANCE	17
MESSAGE		The receipt only becomes valid once the amount paid block has been completed and the accepting bank has officially typed and date stamped in the area set aside for the "Teller Date Stamp".	
PLEASE REPORT ANY ERRORS ON THE RENT STATEMENT TO YOUR NEAREST SERVCON BRANCH.		TELLER DATE STAMP AND SIGNATURE	
AMOUNT PAID: R			

NBS		DATE STAMP	TELLER USE ONLY	OFFICE USE ONLY
TRANSACTION FORM			010 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110	Signature printed Sign No. Min. Amount Deposited Acc No. Branch Date P/V Issued No.
IMPORTANT! FOR ONE TRANSACTION ONLY. PLEASE INDICATE: Cash Withdrawal <input type="checkbox"/> Cheque Withdrawal <input type="checkbox"/> Deposit <input type="checkbox"/>				
Name: _____ Address: _____ Also Tel: _____ WITHDRAWAL: Cash or Cheque R _____ Cash/Cheque amount in words: _____ In favour of: _____ DEPOSIT: Cash and/or Cheque(s) R _____ Cash (Name and value): _____ Cheques (Name of Cheque) Bank Branch: _____ Signature: _____				
Reference number: _____				

An eviction confirmation from Servcon - for arrears of R2 330.00