

Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa

by
Franco Barchiesi

Centre for Civil Society Research Report No. 20

Franco Barchiesi (b.1968, Senigallia, Italy), is assistant professor of African Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. From 1996 to 2002 he has lectured at the Dept of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. His last book is "Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'" (co-edited with Tom Bramble). He can be contacted at Dept. of Politics, Institutions and History, University of Bologna, Strada Maggiore, 45, 40128 - Bologna, Italy or f_barchiesi@yahoo.com

For breaking news on community and social movement struggles in South Africa stay in touch with Indymedia South Africa (<http://www.southafrica.indymedia.org>), Research & Education in Development (<http://www.red.org.za/>) and the news page at the Centre for Civil Society website (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/>)

The Centre for Civil Society publishes regular peer reviewed research reports in order to stimulate debate and reflection in civil society. Most of these research reports are work in progress and many are later published in books and journals. Much of the work published in these research reports has been undertaken by the Centre, with funding from the Centre's grant programme or as a contribution to the Centre's public lecture, academic seminar and activist workshops series. However we do also publish some work that has been undertaken with complete independence from the Centre.

We publish work from a range of ideological perspectives and the views presented in these research reports are not necessarily those of the Centre. All the Centre's research reports are available online at <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs>. Should you wish to receive hardcopies of these reports please email your postal address to Princess Nhlangulela at Nhlangulelap@ukzn.ac.za. Please also contact Princess if you are currently on the mailing list and have changed your address or are no longer interested in receiving these research reports. If you would like to have your work considered for publication in this series please contact Mandisa Mbali at Mbalim1@ukzn.ac.za

CCS Publications Collective: Hermien Kotzé, Mandisa Mbali, Sanya Osha, Raj Patel & Richard Pithouse

August 2004, Centre for Civil Society, Durban, South Africa

ISBN No: 1-86840-555-9

Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa

by

Franco Barchiesi

1. Introduction. Classifying the Multitude

The ANC landslide victory in the 2004 South African national elections confirmed and deepened a trend, already apparent in the 1994 and 1999 polls, of almost undisputed political hegemony which, coupled with the poor results of parties on its left, seemed to reflect a widespread popular mandate for socio-economic change. Once again, the support of the unionized working class for the ruling party seemed overwhelmingly enlisted. Furthermore, many commentators have discerned an increasing responsiveness by the ANC towards this constituency in the government's greater flexibility in discussing the modalities of implementation of macro-economic strategies and their social impacts. In particular various policy initiatives have been adopted with the stated purpose of infusing social contents and anti-poverty interventions in a macroeconomic policy framework that trade unions allied to the ANC have generally exposed as neoliberal and pro-business. Among these processes are the August, 2003 Growth and Development Summit to discuss policies of job creation and unemployment alleviation, the 2002 report of the Taylor Committee of Enquiry into Comprehensive Social Security which supported an expansion of social safety nets to most vulnerable social groups, and the first, timid acceptance by the government to roll-out anti-HIV treatment after years of denial and minimization of the problem.

However it has also been noticed (McKinley, 2004) that, despite these partial policy steps, the ANC's ability to mobilize unwavering consent from the poorest strata of the population has come under increasing stress. Popular participation in the elections has shown a trend to constant decline, which means that the ANC was voted into power by an actual minority of eligible voters. While various views (Friedman, 2004; Sachs, 2004) refuse to see in this development a sign of explicit disaffection towards the policies of the ANC government, a remarkable coincidence is nonetheless noticeable between areas of electoral abstentionism and apathy on one hand, and low-income, marginalized communities on the other. A cursory analysis of electoral registration and participation data reveals that a decline in voter turnout from 89 to 77 percent between the 1999 and

2004 elections mirrors a decrease in the percentage of eligible voters who registered (75% in 2004). The percentage of those with the right to vote who actually exercised this right dropped from 85% in 1994, to 64% in 1999, to 58% in 2004 (SABC/Markinor, 2004; Talbot, 2004), with the biggest decrease being visible among youth between 18 and 25 years, a section of the population that has grown up in a period of acute employment, uncertainty and a more distant appeal of the discourses and values of national liberation politics.

Meanwhile, alarmed opinion surveys reported sharp declines in peoples' positive evaluation of representative democracy or of its ability to contribute to improved living conditions (Mattes et al., 2004), with negative responses to both questions including more than half of the total and African respondents. The ANC's emphasis on "pro-poor", relatively interventionist economic policies, while maintaining the substantially orthodox framework defined in 1996 by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, is thus paralleled by questions on its ability to actively mobilize support from social constituencies that tend to fall outside the formal economy, unionized labour and continuous employment. Caution should be exercised in hinting at a possible causal nexus between these two aspects, or even in reading recent ANC policy shifts as essentially a response to a perceived problem of legitimacy and consent. These trends can, however, be taken, for the purpose of this paper, as concurrent in defining a possible terrain of social contestation which will likely challenge future prospects for the ANC to stabilize and strengthen its social hegemony. Over the past five years in particular, social movement organizations have tried to inhabit this terrain, in both rural and urban environments, claiming to represent and advance social demands and needs from excluded and marginalized sections of the population.

The ANC itself has been increasingly aware of the challenges raised by emerging social movements. The party's more marked recognition that these developments have to be taken seriously has been specifically related to identified increasing difficulties in organizing and mobilizing the poorest communities. The ANC's ability to contest loyalties and identities shaped by people's collective needs and material impoverishment has come under internal critical scrutiny. A document published in an official party magazine warns against the temptation to simply dismiss the movements as the product of personalised "rent-a-mob" mode of populist politicking (Comrade Tankiso, 2003). From this point of view, the problem is identified as the ANC's growing distance from communities' everyday experiences and demands, to privilege a narrow focus on institutionalization at the local level, which jeopardizes the hegemony of the party's discourse of social change. In the final analysis, however, the response to this challenge is still read in terms of

more effective and motivated organisational encadrement. The document eschews the question of rethinking macroeconomic policies and assessing their flaws.

The 2002 National Conference of the ANC noted in its resolution that:

the weak state of our branches has resulted in an absence of mass mobilisation, with the ANC not giving sufficient leadership in the mobilisation of our people to be active participants in the process of transformation (...). In fact we saw a further decline in the growth and quality of our branches. (...) At the time of the NGC [National General Conference] in 2000 we had 5,500 branches, most of which were not in good standing and with little political life. (...) Though we are moving towards the establishment of a branch wherever people live, this has not always translated into the organisation and mobilisation of all the different social strata and classes that make up the motive forces. At branch and regional levels, we have often not been able to create effective forums for joint strategising and action with the Alliance (...). We do however face a number of challenges in this area. The progressive forces – including the ANC and the Alliance – have vacillated between the extremes of demobilisation of the masses as recipients of government programmes and anti-statist approaches to mass mobilisation" (African National Congress, 2002).

At the same time, however, a prominent ANC strategist (Sachs, 2004) resolves the question of articulation between ANC and social mobilisation by reaffirming a rigid separation between a realm of popular demands, advocacy and associations acting in a “watchdog” role and the terrain of institutional representation and party organisation as the exclusive spheres where all this becomes properly “political”. In this view movements are recodified within a template of “civil society” that presupposes a fundamental decoupling between voicing social needs and desires and the terrain where needs and desires question power relations. This latter is thus confined to the ambit of institutionality, with its demands for pragmatism and moderation to accommodate domestic and global economic constraints.

These observations seem to corroborate the point that the growth and transformation of social movement politics in South Africa over the past few years has not only redefined the terrain of contestation over communities’ solidarity, identity and loyalty. In a more far-reaching way, social movements have grown into a potent and decisive force in shaping the political agenda and

strategies of the state, showing cracks, lines of fissure and potential basis of anti-systemic support in what, on the surface, seems an almost monolithic political mandate for the ruling party. The ANC regime is, conversely, compelled to adjust its economic and social policies in ways that can potentially enter uncomfortable relationships with the stringent criteria of fiscal discipline contained in its general programmatic statements. In this sense, and despite its limitations, the new generation of community movements in South Africa seems to have succeeded in opening political spaces where discourses of “the nation”, “transformation” and social change, previously almost the exclusive ideological preserve of the ANC’s nationalist repertoire, are now radically put into question, debunked or outright subverted with the rise of new meanings and desires. Moreover, such new political spaces are largely exceeding the confines of debates inside the ANC-led Alliance, despite the ideological and programmatic divergences over macro-economic policies between the party and its left allies, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

A graphic example of this shifting political climate was provided by the 31 August 2002 march on the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in the luxurious Johannesburg neighbourhood of Sandton. An estimated 30,000 demonstrators, gathered from a vast array of urban and rural community movements, converged from the nearby poor township of Alexandra to oppose what was regarded as a showcase for the ANC government that embellished with a token sensitivity to “pro-poor” economic growth its anti-popular, conservative macroeconomic policies.

The paper is based on the urgency to analyze these shifts in the relationships between grassroots social subjectivities, hegemonic discourses of “the nation” and the representative capacity of political institutionality and constitutionalised social subjects within a paradigm of economic liberalization. It is, in particular, important to decipher the meaning of these shifts in regard to what they suggest in terms of contesting alternatives on the political direction of the South African transition. My paper is not primarily concerned with tracking the development, ideologies and organisational forms of movements themselves. I will rather discuss changing scenarios of social movement politics against the background of crisis in other social identities on which the ANC had previously counted in its attempt to entrench a hegemonic discourse of social change among popular constituencies. In particular I will look at the crisis of waged employment and working class organizations as a crucial lens through which the rise of new community movements

could be understood, while exercising caution towards any temptation to infer an unproblematic causal relation between these two processes.

To better appreciate the relevance of an analysis that relates changes in social movement politics to the shifting location of wage labour in the post-apartheid South African society, it is nonetheless important to discuss those relevant features and peculiarities in new social movements' forms of identities, organization and action which pose them in stark contrast with both the style of organized working class mobilization and with the tradition of national liberation politics. Ashwin Desai's concept of the "politics of the poor" (Desai, 2002), underlines these differences in a way that emphasizes the capacity of the current generation of community activism to appropriate and creatively reinterpret the mode of social mobilization of the "old" social movements in opposition to apartheid. On one hand, practices of direct action and reappropriation, the importance of cultural repertoires, the immediacy of collective desires as a political, organizational and ideological tool remain decisive elements in social movements' practices. On the other hand, such practices are less and less available to be encased in grand representations of social transformation embodied in narratives of "the people" and "socialism", and are therefore less available to see their demands delegated to vanguard forms of political organisation. On the opposite, plurality and horizontality are contesting, within the very struggles conducted by social movements on the ground, the emphasis on the role of leadership and cadres as those endowed of translating the unruly politics of the crowd into a sense of strategic and political purpose. Elusiveness and unpredictability -- based on a "subversive" reaffirmation of the fullness of life and senses against the economic constraints of the market -- in the politics of the poor, which makes it problematic for the traditional categories of left politics, is well captured by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri:

"The poor is destitute, excluded, repressed, exploited – and yet living! It is the common denominator of life, the foundation of the multitude (...). The poor is in a certain respect and eternal postmodern figure: the figure of a transversal, omnipresent, different, mobile subject (...). Finally today, in the biopolitical regime of production and in the processes of postmodernization, the poor is a subjugated, exploited figure, but nonetheless a figure of production" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 156-157).

The concept of "multitude" that Hardt and Negri refer to is defined by Paolo Virno as the "form of social existence of the many as many" (Virno, 2004: 1) or as the irreducible plurality of social experience as an underlying precondition of political action. In this way, social subjectivity and

opposition emerge out of the very multiplicity of singular (i.e. individual or communities') experiences of oppression and exploitation. Their convergence towards unitary forms of political representation (as in the discourses of "class", "people" and "nation") is by no means a necessary outcome or the expression of a higher, truer form of collective consciousness. It is rather the contingent and often contested product of historical circumstances. The emergence of the modern state (which Hobbes opposed to a social multitude frightening in its unpredictability and unruliness) and capitalism (identified by Marx as bringing an abstract ordering and unifying principle to the variety of forms of living labour) provided a set of facilitating circumstances in this regard. Moreover, they allowed for the organization of historical antagonists like working class parties and unions in ways that were designed to contest, influence and seize power at the institutional core of such an ordering principle.

Both socialist and nationalist discourses have tended to convey an idea of the "people" (in class or national terms) geared towards this aim of shaping unity out of multiplicity. Conversely, dynamics of dematerialisation and financialisation of the economy, hollowing out of state prerogatives in the allocation of social resources, and retreats and defeats for the socialist project and working class organizations have dealt serious blows to this understanding of "unity" as necessary requirement and endpoint for processes and strategies of revolutionary change. In this view, the politics of the multitude re-evaluates as a foundation for political action the multiplicity of singular experiences of oppression and social contestation, of languages and meanings in which these are articulated at the level of communities and organizations. Rather than converging in the form of *unity*, or of adherence to a coherent system of meanings and forms of consciousness, these singularities seek *commonality* as shared understandings of common elements and root causes of material conditions, and strike at commonly identified targets while retaining their autonomy. The interaction between commonality and autonomy defines a political style where, in Virno's words, the One is no longer a "promise" but it rather becomes a "premise".

On these bases, the politics of the multitude rejects an ontology of the subject presupposed as a central, immanent actor of social change, as in the discourse of the organized working class or of the "general will" of the people. Second, the specific relation between singularity and universality upon which the politics of the multitude lies shapes modes of organization that are essentially non-representative. In other words, the articulation of the demands and desires that compose the multitude are expressed in the autonomy of experiences of its constitutive singularities and they are brought together in ways that do not require a higher, separate, institutional level of

political representation. Following Burawoy's (1985) methodological suggestion that every singularity contains in itself a universality, the way in which desires are expressed and struggles circulated within the multitude is based not so much on organizational structuration, but on transversality (Guattari, 1995) and recognition of generalised features and trends across a variety of experiential worlds. Finally, the process of social change ushered in by the politics of the multitude is non-teleological, in the sense that it does not assume preconstituted finality and direction for change as a source of validation and reproduction of practices of social conflict. Rather than building a cumulative path towards social transformation, the politics of the multitude "inhabits" events and situations (Badiou, 1985: 67-75; Colectivo Situaciones, 2001), shifts power relations by acting upon a multiplicity of sites of contestation, seizing opportunities to open up previously uncharted terrains of political possibility.

These features of the concept of "multitude" seem relevant to a discussion of the ways in which the current phase of South African social movement politics interrogates and questions historically entrenched narratives of social change in the ANC's national liberation discourse and in the unions' socialist rhetoric. However caution must be used in this exercise which, ironically, would otherwise carry the risk of translating the anti-ontological, anti-representative tension of the multitude into the foundation of a new ontology based on a refashioned grand narrative of change and historical subject. First, as we will see, the elements of the politics of the multitude here summarized continue to be at the centre of intense debates and contestation within South African community movements. Discourses of centralized organization along party lines and of the adoption of a socialist imagery coexist with practices and interactions that privilege horizontality and autonomy of singular organizations. State power is not merely discarded as a tactical or even strategic referent but continues to figure prominently both in debates around the possibility of competing in local government elections and in the legalistic framework in which many of the community movements' claims are shaped. Finally, a vision of ushering in a more authentic social change to rescue the aspirations -- inscribed in historic documents from the Freedom Charter to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) -- that have allegedly been "betrayed" by the ANC is also noticeable. All these factors repropose a general dilemma where processes of political subjectivation hinge on a constantly shifting boundary between recognition by state powers of the legitimacy of the movements' demands and the overt subversion of those very powers based on the ultimate incompatibility between their constitutive logic and the nature of demands (Zizek, 1999).

Moreover, the concept of “multitude”, useful as it might be as an analytic tool, is not immune from flaws and loopholes. Its rejection of a narrow view of political antagonisms - as embodied in organized structures and institutionalized forms of representation by virtue of a mode of political subjectivation based on “singular community worlds” and “fluctuating subjects that de-regulate all representations of places and parts” (Ranciere, 1995) - makes the attainment of political goals essentially coincidental with the very development of the movement. It also implies a danger of making the concept of multitude all-encompassing and self-explanatory, a short-hand, self-fulfilling idealisation of the revolutionary potential in all dynamics of social mobilization. Used in this way the concept would lose much of its explanatory power when it comes to define how the singularities that compose the multitude come to articulate their desires and demands in oppositional terms, how they identify their counterparts and through which processes of subjectivation they recognize the commonalities shared within a movement.

In other words, the multitude seems unable to provide an explanation for its own politicization and for the conditions that make political action possible (Laclau, 2003) in terms of opening up fields of contestation over meanings, policies, strategies. If the concept is useful in setting the case for a new ontological foundation of anti-capitalist politics, it nonetheless requires further elaboration and qualification when it comes to explain social movements’ material forms of operation. The ambiguities of the multitude with regard to these issues are essentially due to its immanent nature. As Jacques Ranciere (2002) notices, the question of politicization and articulation of social antagonism is deemed to irrelevance by the impression that the expansion and advance of the multitude as a “productive force” unleashed by the globalisation of capital makes liberation merely coterminous with the transcendence of the borders of the nation-state and workplace discipline, a by-product of global capitalist restructuring. As Laclau (2003: 30) argues:

If we have an internally divided society, the will of the community as a whole has to be *politically* constructed out of a primary – constitutive – diversity. (...) This means that any ‘multitude’ is constructed through political action – which presupposes antagonism and hegemony.

A possible response to these objections would be to think of the multitude not in terms of subject or process, but as an *open space of subjectivation* (Collettivo di DeriveApprodi, 2003) - the terrain where experiences of oppression and resistance, cultural repertoires, ideas of morality and discourses of change meet and define common meanings, values, symbolic forms and languages. A

terrain that could (but by no means necessarily will) allow the individual communities that partake of that terrain to articulate their immediate plights and desires into a generalised discourse of social and political antagonism. Within this broader realm, then, the concept of “class” can be reconsidered -- once it is deprived of any “ontological” determination of social agency by virtue of its position in the production process -- as a condition of legibility of oppression, a tool to structure and interpret resistance to the extent that antagonism is shaped by the mode of production. Aronowitz convincingly warns (2003: 141-170) that while an appreciation of the multiplicity of determinants of social contestation explains the formation of political identities and subjectivities, it cannot exhaust, or worse replace, the task of analyzing the structures of oppression and exploitation in a capitalist society and, I would add, the ways and the extent in which such structures are elaborated and represented within those identities and subjectivities.

2. The Crisis of Working Class Politics in the South African Transition

In many ways the South African transition promised a possible alternative to the historical trajectory of the state form, whose ‘decline’ in the face of global economic forces has long been commented upon by influential views and intellectual currents. The ANC’s rise to power can be seen as the final step in the continent’s trajectory of emancipation from colonialism and white minority rule. At the same time it was the first case where ‘national liberation’ was achieved in the era in which market forces and neoliberal ideology are globally dominant. Differences are apparent from past scenarios where anti-colonial experiments were linked to aspirations for non-capitalist roads to development. The ANC’s massive electoral victories in 1994, 1999 and 2004 seemed to reflect a mandate for a political programme that combined nationalist discourse with the promise of a ‘developmental’ role of the state in addressing inherited, vast social inequalities. The self-styled role of the ANC as the only truly non-racial, cross-class mass party able to build a unified citizenship out of the oppression and the antagonisms of the past, was the hallmark of legitimacy for the new state. The South African transition represented probably the most important myth-making event for those for whom the nation-state is still seen as able to provide the most effective barrier against the ravages of globalised capital.

Ten years after that momentous shift, the political mythology of the post-apartheid state sees many of its assumptions and preconditions abandoned or reconfigured in deeply different, often contradictory ways (Marais, 2001). Left elements both within the ruling party and in its allied organizations, COSATU and the SACP, have found themselves at great pain to reconcile the

material development of events that followed 1994 with the expectations that accompanied the first democratic elections. In fact, the original discourse of state-driven developmentalism has increasingly disguised and merchandised the wholesale adoption by the ANC government of liberal macroeconomic paradigms. At the same time, the discourse of social 'transformation' has changed its referents to prioritise economic competitiveness, insertion in global markets and investment driven by a largely unreconstructed, heavily financialised capital where traditional players have been partially integrated by new, limited layers of African corporate elite. Similarly, the nationalist slogans of political freedom and democratic sovereignty have been 'sublimated' into a new vision of Africa as transcending national boundaries in the making of a unified political-economic actor and a playground for an increasingly internationalised South African capital. The new mythology, however, conceals dramatic shifts in policy-making dynamics, recodified as largely technocratic processes of choice between narrowing policy alternatives. Finally, poverty has widened for large strata of the formerly oppressed majority (United Nations Development Programme, 2003: 70), while the narrowing gaps between blacks' and whites' average incomes reveals a deepening inequality across the African population (Terreblanche, 2003). The powerful working-class support for the ANC has faced the uncomfortable reality of a decline in stable waged employment, swelling joblessness, and the proliferation of 'atypical', de-unionised and highly vulnerable occupations (Hayter, Reinecke and Torres, 1999; Torres, 2002; Barchiesi, 2003).

These processes have been accompanied by domestic market liberalisation, the downsizing of the public sector, restructuring and privatization of massive state-owned companies and commercialization of public and municipal services. At the same time, the containment of public expenditure has led to a stagnation, if not a complete reversal, of the developmental role of the state towards largely residual forms of social welfare (Barchiesi, 2003), while the enforcement of market discipline in the access to social services has deprived large numbers of residents of healthcare, education, water, electricity and sanitation (McDonald and Pape, 2002). At the beginning of this century, one third of the rural population and one quarter of the urban one had no access to municipal water, sanitation and electricity utilities (Bond, 2001). As a result, a state of endemic rebellion and often violent revolt has developed in many urban and rural communities. Here the police and private security companies hired by local authorities have often constituted the only expanding public service, especially in their daily job of evicting residents who cannot afford to pay rents or bonds or disconnecting residents who cannot afford to pay service charges from utilities.

While the state has once again been experienced by vulnerable groups as an alien occupation force, occupations of houses and illegal reconnections of water and electricity by residents who were disconnected for ‘non-payment’ are weaving a new texture and narrative of resistance. Localised movements and organisations emerged in ways that reveal a growing distance from both ANC-aligned civic structures and trade union organisations historically strong but now increasingly under pressure. In August 2001 many of these movements staged a historic 20 000-strong march on the World Congress against Racism, in Durban. There, diversified and colourful anti-government slogans (Desai, 2002: 137) attacked the President’s minimizing and denialist position on the nature and extent of the HIV-AIDS epidemic (“Mbeki, AIDS is as Real as cANCer”) or underlined the continuous marginalisation of the rural poor from the ideological narrative of national liberation (“Landlessness=Racism”). A radically innovative and diversified imagery irrupted onto the public scene in a stark break with the turgid unifying nationalist rhetoric that expressed the ANC’s idea of the “national democratic revolution”. The march on the WSSD one year later replicated on a larger scale this repertoire while adding to it the symbolic impact of the reappropriation of the upmarket Sandton by the otherwise politically invisible crowds that walked from Alexandra.

The contestation over the nationalist-developmental project in post-Apartheid South Africa that is announced by these episodes is, at the same time, linked to important shifts in the structure of the South African society, particularly related to the change in the social position of waged employment. The adoption of neoliberal macroeconomic policies by the ANC imposed on the South African working class social costs that impinged upon the transition from the apartheid-era system of despotic labour control towards a fully-fledged and stabilized capitalist “free” labour market. The alliance between the ANC and organized labour was, conversely, an arena in which the black working class demanded from the transition not only the recognition of its organisational rights and bargaining power, but also a promotion of waged employment as a mechanism for full integration and social citizenship. The failure of this project in South Africa is not only marginalising organised labour as a critical social actor, but is a reflection of a deeper crisis for the new South African state. However, this crisis should not be read as mere “decline” of the South African nation-state in the face of global forces, or even as generalised reduction of state intervention, as both supporters and orthodox Marxist critics of globalisation tend to do. Rather than being reducible to a purely quantitative phenomenon, the crisis of the South African nation-state affects this very concept at a deeper level. In particular, what is decisively questioned in the current phase is the ability of the state to exercise sovereignty towards an expansionary, inclusive view of social citizenship. Instead, the combined effect of economic restructuring and social mobilization

from below reproduces in the South African case dynamics observable in other neo-liberalising societies where state sovereignty is being predominantly geared towards the reproduction, management and repression of social exclusion (Mezzadra and Ricciardi, 1997).

These shifts concluded the abandonment, through a gradual process that had started before the ANC's own legalisation in 1990, of deeply entrenched orientations on which the identity of this party had been built since its historic 1955 'Freedom Charter'. In line with a state-centred view of development direct government control over strategic economic assets and extensive nationalisations were advocated. Such a programme was more in line with an African nationalist view of 'nation building', rather than with socialist ambitions, which were however emphasised to some extent due to the influence exercised upon it by the SACP (McKinley, 1997). While maintaining an aversion towards class antagonisms, the move towards macro-economic orthodoxy reflected a change in the ANC's class referents, and the rising importance of a new African bourgeoisie and corporate elite in its non class-based view of the 'nation'. As Partha Chatterjee observes, in the transition to post-coloniality the image of the 'nation' has generally served purposes of defensive identification and unity among various subordinated groups, often on a non-class basis. In the post-colonial scenario, however, the 'nation' translated this image of unity into organised consent for policies of development and modernisation carried out by the new nation-states (Chatterjee, 1993: 202-205).

The equation of nationalism and political-economic modernisation in the post-colonial world provided a powerful mobilising tool, but it also delegated the continuation of the 'struggle' to new elites that generally owed their authority to their capacity to articulate national sovereignty and modernisation in continuity with the policies once sponsored by colonial powers. Strategies adopted by the ANC in power openly advocate the promotion of an African corporate sector both to 'deracialise' the structure of South African capitalism and to empower a black entrepreneurship able to open spaces of 'popular' capitalism through the growth of small-medium enterprise and broad-based shareholding. In particular, Thabo Mbeki's government, inaugurated in 1999, has been quite vociferous in supporting a notion of 'black economic empowerment' to designate the re-equilibrium of power relations in corporate proprietary assets. In this instance, 'race' is re-mobilised as a crucial legitimizing argument for a view of 'liberation' that, in stark contrast with previous discourses, comes to coincide with entrepreneurialism and individualised market-based empowerment (Jacobs, 2001). This allows the ANC to portray itself as continuously committed to fight historically entrenched social inequalities inherited from the past. At the same time it

conveniently obscures the continuity in the social forces that determine inequality, via a renewed loyalty to global market forces and the equalisation of market opportunities (to which 'empowerment' is largely reduced).

The change from the ANC's 'old' to the 'new' nationalist discourse is strikingly apparent in the declarations of its own protagonists. In a 1978 speech Mbeki, weaving Frantz Fanon's words into his own, stated:

Consider the circumstances in which we might position black capitalism as the antithesis of white capitalism... In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the west. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth. This black capitalism instead of being the antithesis is rather confirmation of parasitism with no redeeming features whatsoever, without any extenuating circumstances to excuse its existence (Mbeki, 1978).

If one takes this argument to task, it seems that the ANC's rise to power radically modified Mbeki's view of the extent to which "black capitalism" could be "redeemed". Therefore in 1999 the newly elected president Mbeki announced:

As part of the realisation of the aim to eradicate racism in our country, we must strive to create and strengthen a black capitalist class. Because we come from among the black oppressed, many among us feel embarrassed to state this goal as nakedly as we should... I would like to urge, very strongly, that we abandon our embarrassment about the possibility of the emergence of successful and therefore prosperous black owners of productive property and think and act in a manner consistent with a realistic response to the real world. As part of our continuing struggle to wipe out the legacy of racism, we must work to ensure that there emerges a black bourgeoisie, whose presence within our economy and society will be part of the process of the deracialisation of the economy and society. Accordingly, indeed, the government must come to the aid of those among the black people who might require such aid in order to become entrepreneurs (Mbeki, 1999).

This total argumentative overturn shows the extreme and peculiar flexibility of the ANC's nationalist discourse - in this very different from nationalist rhetoric fallen into disrepute elsewhere in the continent - and its remarkable capacity to adapt to changing global scenarios. In fact, in both cases, the ANC's definition of what the 'real world' makes viable (post-colonial developmentalism first, globalised neoliberalism then) is what ultimately defines 'the nation' and the policies needed to build it. This allows the party to maintain the progressive nature of its endeavours and enlist organized labour's support for neoliberal economic policies. The continuous and unchallenged capacity by the ANC to legitimize right-wing policies with a left-wing discourse confers it an unquestionable advantage over left critics. Hein Marais defines this as the 'gravity field' of the national liberation ideology:

The strategies of the ANC-in-power represent a fascinating mix of the 'old' and the 'new'... Striking are the ways in which it applies principles and practices associated with *traditional* national liberation movements in service of a *modernizing* agenda. [During the 1980s] the ANC had become adept at a key aspect of any hegemonic project: it managed to deploy an array of ideological precepts and symbols, and assert their pertinence to the lived realities of millions of South Africans (...). The idea of 'the people' was 'turned into a formalism whose singular consciousness was homogenized by the movement which spoke in its name'... Overall, the ideological field through which millions of citizens experienced reality was dramatically altered (Marais, 2001: 261-262, own emphasis).

Left voices inside the labour movement have been blaming the ANC's right-wing turn for its inability to 'deliver' on popular expectations. But this argument is, at the same time, revealing of the left's own inability to advance an alternative discourse to challenge the ANC's legitimizing myths and to relate symbolically to people's desires. Ideology then becomes a decisive and autonomous terrain of contestation, as John Saul puts it:

There is also the legitimacy, slow to dissolve, that accrues to the ANC as the historical agent of black liberation/African nationalism -- as well as the legitimacy that springs from the movement's continuing evocation of a project of racial redress. Moreover, despite its ambiguities in class terms, this latter project does have real resonance: after all, there continue to be cadres within party and state who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of conditions of their fellow South Africans

and availed themselves of the fresh opportunities opened up by deracialization and democratization to work for positive improvements in the lives of their fellow citizens (Saul, 2001).

The downscaling of redistributive state options implied in the ANC's policies, however, still contrasts with deep-seated expectations for social change and access to rights. These come from a plurality of social subjects - with a substantial working class presence - in the black population, which are structured in an articulated organisational and associational life. Politically, this social composition has so far expressed electoral support for the ANC as the force that emerged to lead the anti-apartheid struggle. Therefore, the capacity to sustain the deferral and containment of popular expectations at the level of 'realism' defined by the government's macroeconomic priorities has become a decisive legitimation issue for the ANC. Its task can be understood as an attempt to balance the ideological advocacy for increasing equality and social upliftment for the majority and the substantial delegation of these tasks to global market forces, with all the uncertainties this implies. At the same time, however, the latent contradiction between the nature of the ANC's political support and its governance strategy is shaped by, and influences in a very problematic way, the social subjectivities that carry radical expectations for social change. These contradictions reflect the problems inherent to 'national liberation' ideologies as expressions of what Frederick Cooper (1996) defines as 'decolonization from above'. The concept defines the reproduction of the institutional power of new elites, which incorporate and devalue conflictual dynamics of subjectivity formation under unproblematic, totalising images of 'the people' and 'the nation'.

The nature of the grassroots support for the ANC government, however, gives a particular urgency to the problem of responding to popular expectations for transformation, far from confining this issue at the level of mere ideological debates. The nature of the problem can be summarised as the management of grassroots subjectivities in a situation where diversified popular needs and demands contrast with dynamics of globalization that constrain the range of options available to the democratic state to represent and organise such needs and demands. The linkage between social subjectivities, popular ideas of change and state attempts to balance these with the requirements of capitalist development are well captured in Foucault's notion of "governmentality". This concept refers to the ability of power to "structure" the citizen's field of possible actions. The construction of subjectivities on the part of the state is expressed in macroeconomic policy language in terms of objective "constraints", "limits" to redistribution and social spending, and the "viability" of grassroots demands. This is required, in Procacci's (1993) view, in a capitalist-liberal society to

solve the otherwise intractable contradiction between a notion of the individual as the centre of “egoistic” economic activity and that of the “citizen” as the subject of rights and obligations derived from the political community. “Civil society”, therefore, far from being an unproblematic counterweight to the action of the state, defines a technique of government where a discourse of “rights” - and their limitations - is established to balance the economic sovereignty of the individual with obligations towards areas of “poverty” that could otherwise become antagonistic to the capitalist system. The very notion of ‘poverty’ lies at the centre of the ‘social question’ in bourgeois states as premised on the monitoring and observation of the living conditions of the ‘excluded’, and on the design of apparatuses of regulation of their everyday life (welfare state, health and population policies, etc.). While this reduction of the social question to the technologies of control over life - captured under the term ‘biopolitics’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000) - insulates the issue from any fundamental critique of the capitalist social structure, it also confers a specific meaning to the question of ‘social rights’ and their extension. These become a field of conflictual relations between state-sponsored views of the ‘feasibility’ of popular demands and the rise of new radical demands or subjectivities.

In the South African case, the ANC faces the problem of defining new symbolic appellations to enforce social cohesion, particularly among its left constituencies, in the aftermath of its abandonment of its previous state interventionist orientation for a pro-market approach towards the post-apartheid ‘social question’. In the 25 years that preceded the collapse of apartheid the most relevant dynamics in the development of left grassroots organisations was undoubtedly provided by the growth of militant trade unions of the black working class. The impact of these social forces on other sectors of the opposition to the racist state has been far-reaching in terms of demands, programmes and emancipatory visions. According to many observers, the role played by organised labour in the South African transition was peculiar in the broader context of African processes of decolonisation and democratisation (Mamdani, 1996; Adler and Webster, 2000). As a result, with more than 3 million members, industrial relations legislation that supports collective bargaining and organisational rights and a unionisation rate that compares favourably with that of many European countries, organised labour is recognised as a crucial political actor in post-apartheid South Africa. The main union federations - among which COSATU is the largest with approximately 1.7 million members - take part together with representatives of capital and the state in formal tripartite negotiating institutions, like the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), which has a statutory mandate to discuss all proposed social legislation before it is submitted to Parliament.

However, the institutionalisation of labour's opposition to apartheid under the changed conditions of political democracy has coincided with a gradual decline in the unions' ability to contest the decisive, and under many aspects detrimental, changes in economic policies that have taken place under the ANC government (Buhlungu, 1997). The GEAR strategy, for example, was adopted by the Department of Finance as a "non-negotiable" document, even if its basic tenets constituted a substantial departure from what COSATU had expected from the macroeconomic programmes with which the Alliance had contested the first democratic elections. These were mainly expressed in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), started under the initiative of COSATU and adopted by the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance as the 1994 electoral platform of the ANC (Adelzadeh, 1996; Goetz, 2000). The RDP was largely a mix of Keynesian demand-management recommendations, a broad list of state interventions in meeting basic needs and a market-orientated approach towards export-led growth and higher investor confidence. GEAR stressed its own continuity with the general principles of the RDP, but its adoption of a "trickle down" approach to social equity and employment creation meant that business confidence and international competitiveness gained centre stage while the expansion of public spending was subordinated to stringent budget deficit containment, a priority on anti-inflationary mechanisms and a support to labour market flexibility to tackle rampant unemployment (Michie and Padayachee, 1997; Habib and Padayachee, 2000).

GEAR came to symbolise the loss of union power in shaping strategic choices and orientations of the new democracy - a loss that is despite the unprecedented level of institutional presence and recognition enjoyed by organized labour. But GEAR is by no means an isolated example. Similar processes of marginalization have been suffered by labour in policy debates over trade liberalisation (which has heavily affected industrial sectors that in the past were sheltered by apartheid state protectionism), the restructuring of the public sector and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (where unions had to face massive layoffs and legal impediments to industrial action). Finally, COSATU has recursively, but to no avail, complained about fiscal and monetary policies that have favoured the interests of financial capital through high interest rates and capital movements' liberalisation, to the detriment of job-creating investment. A frank assessment by COSATU of the difficulties encountered in these areas of engagement closed on a very problematic note:

Economic policy has arguably been the area of greatest contestation during the first term. It

would be fair to say that the economic policy debate currently stands at an impasse both in terms of process and in content. Although COSATU has made more interventions on economic questions than in any other area, it is also the area in which its submissions, with significant exceptions, have resulted in the fewest policy or legislative changes. Policies which have been pursued during the first term have undermined productive economic activity and made the economy vulnerable to speculators. The federation has argued for a fundamental review of the restrictive monetary policy pursued by the SA Reserve Bank, on the basis that it is incompatible with the country's developmental challenges (...). The workings of the Alliance itself have been uneven and problematic over the past period, and the Alliance has not been given the space to drive governance in any meaningful way. The co-ordinating structure set up by the extended officials meeting could potentially improve this situation. For this to happen requires sufficient political will, commitment to a new role for the Alliance, and shifts both in the style of governance and policy direction. The extent to which the Alliance begins functioning effectively will be one of the major determinants of COSATU's success in engaging with governance during the second term (COSATU, 2000a).

Many reasons have been mentioned for the marginalisation of trade unions inside the ruling Alliance. Some views emphasise labour's lack of preparation, sophistication and skills required by a changed scenario where socio-economic 'reconstruction' has replaced 'resistance' against an illegitimate regime as a strategic priority (Von Holdt, 2000). While the relevance of the issue cannot be easily discounted, this explanation is however extremely reductive due to its functionality to a binary opposition between 'resistance' and 'reconstruction' that is largely ideological and normative. In fact, this view tends to advocate as the main role for South African labour under the new democracy that of co-operating in the rebuilding of an internationally competitive capitalist economy in a liberalised environment. Working class advances and gains are therefore subordinated in this framework to the necessity to achieve 'class compromises' (Adler and Webster, 2000) between labour and capital that ensure the compatibility of class conflict with the maintenance of the present socio-economic system. Arguing that labour's inability to shape the policies of the new democracy is a matter of lack of technical sophistication rather than, say, abdication from a more radical and militant course of action is a rather unwarranted speculation. Moreover, a view of labour's marginalisation as deriving from a lack of pragmatism and co-operation with capital and the state fundamentally obscures other, probably much more relevant - and less researched - dynamics underpinning the decline of union power.

The next section of this paper will, in particular, look at how the processes here under examination have coincided with a dramatic loss of representative capacity of grassroots constituencies on the part of organised labour. This change signals an important crisis in the relevance of formal waged employment in the social subjectivity and forms of identification of subordinate classes in South Africa. It carries important implications for left organising and the emergence of new social movements.

3. The Collapse of the Wage-Social Citizenship Nexus

Changes in the macroeconomic strategy of the ANC government have reflected and seconded important developments in the composition of the South African working class which contribute to a loss of representativity by organised labour. Apart from a persistently high rate of unemployment, the past ten years have seen a steady increase in the use of ‘flexible’, ‘atypical’ and casual labour, and the expansion of a relatively unstable, unprotected and unionised workforce (Kenny and Webster, 1999). Short-term contract labour was a defining feature of the African proletariat in South Africa, particularly under the oppressive migrant labour system and ‘influx control’ legislation of the apartheid regime. However, the growth of non-permanent employment in democratic South Africa responds to specific and more recent economic pressures, and it contradicts labour’s demands for job security and state-driven employment creation. As I have argued elsewhere (Barchiesi, 2003; see also NEDLAC, 2000), full time occupations currently employ little more than 40 percent of the economically active population, a figure that decreases to approximately one-third of the African population. This situation is combined with a decline in the range of benefits that are accessible for formally employed workers. Unemployment insurance covers approximately only 10% of the employed population, while contingent and seasonal workers are completely excluded. The spiralling costs of medical insurance, also linked to the HIV-AIDS epidemic, the collapse of public health care and the absence of state provision of social security grants for the population aged between 8 and 60 (for women) and 65 (for men) faces workers’ wages with added pressures. Moreover, the wages of a shrinking proportion of the population in formal employment are the main form of safety net for increasing numbers of unemployed relatives, while retirement benefits are eroded in the form of payments in cash to cushion periods of unemployment or to be used as collateral for housing mortgages. According to recent union-sponsored research, approximately 8 out of 10 workers take home less than 40% of their wages, while the rest is spent in repaying debts at usury rates to “microlenders”. This occurs in the context

of poor access to formal credit and the need to supplement wages that are increasingly inadequate to cope with basic necessities (Hlangani, 2004). The erosion of the set of social benefits attached to formal employment is revealing vast areas of working class poverty that include full-time workers and are not only confined to contingent employment and spiralling unemployment that hovers at around 35% of the economically active population. As a consequence, images of social inclusion and solidarity historically attached to formal waged employment are rapidly turning into a reality of exclusion, fragmentation and survivalism.

While permanent employment is rapidly disappearing from the experiential world of an increasing portion of the South African working class, for many others waged labour becomes associated with deepening insecurity and instability. For the trade unions, these are dramatic changes. The numerical impact of deindustrialization, de-unionization and the difficult task of organizing an increasingly volatile workforce have seen COSATU lose approximately 200,000 members between 2000 and 2003, to its current 1.7 million figure, with major drops in membership for its strongest private sector affiliates, like the metalworkers' union (Buhlungu, 2004; Barchiesi and Kenny, 2002). Although job insecurity is not a new feature in the subjectivity of South African workers, the struggle against apartheid had found in the workplace a decisive site of organization and solidarity. As a result, the idea that democracy and political freedom are to be complemented by dignified conditions at work as the basis for increasing social rights and citizenship was deeply entrenched in working class expectations. These are now conversely faced with a new sense of fragility due no longer to an identifiable oppressive regime against which to mobilize, but to what the democratic government voted by the unions' grassroots present as 'inevitable' policies to 'adjust' to new global realities and impersonal market forces.

A substantial amount of literature has analysed the ways in which the loss of centrality of waged employment in the subjective experiences and forms of identification of the working class leads to the disintegration of forms of solidarity and views of emancipation, while promoting an individualised approach to social problems (Bauman, 1999; Beck, 1999; Sennett, 1999). The impact of these processes in the South African case is particularly devastating when related to the importance assumed by the world of work as the main repository of collective power in the struggle against state racism. When black working class organisations were resurrected in the country during the 1970s, they showed features that were highly peculiar with regard to both other African countries and earlier stages of South African working class history (Friedman, 1987). Previous waves of organisation affected partially proletarianised workers, mainly in the rural and mining

areas. Conversely, the 1970s mark the irruption in opposition politics of a black semi-skilled, urbanised proletariat located in manufacturing industry and with prospects of waged employment as the main source of social integration for themselves and their families. While emerging union organisations remained largely confined to shopfloor issues and structures throughout the 1970s, the following decade saw an increasing and strategic involvement in popular struggles in the context of black township insurgency. This shift took often the form of overt grassroots rebellion against union leaders that were blamed for their ‘productivist’ orientation to the workplace and their privileging the terrain of wage bargaining and union recognition (Baskin, 1982; Ruiters, 1985). The struggle against apartheid came instead to be identified by many younger workers as the rejection of the compatibilities imposed at the point of production and with the demand for access to social services and a higher quality of life. Regardless of its partial reforms and recognition of collective bargaining rights, the racist regime was generally unable to keep worker organizations confined to the level of workplace industrial relations.

The politicization of the unions expressed the deep-seated illegitimacy of the regime and of its coercive forms of labour control. These dynamics reflect under specific circumstances in the South African case, what Yann Moulier-Boutang (1998) has observed in many colonial realities. In his view the imposition of unfree labour on the working class tends to produce forms of escape from, and refusal of, wage labour, which in the South African case were translated into exporting worker militancy from the factory to the community. As Cooper (1996) argued, the history of struggles by the African working classes was to a large extent that of attempts to avoid being reduced to a working class, or limiting immediate claims and demands to the ambit of the wage relation within the boundaries of labour market discipline while facing despotic forms of domination and the absence of civil and political rights. Similarly, the story of South Africa’s black working class struggles under apartheid can be regarded, therefore, as a process of building up power inside the wage relation to express then a generalised *refusal* of the wage relation as a terrain where expectations of emancipation could be advanced in isolation from radical social change. The struggle of the black proletariat over worker rights and powers expressed deep-seated desires of liberation *from* wage labour that co-existed with the demand for social and political recognition deriving from being part of the industrialisation process.

Trade unions’ involvement in popular struggles during the 1980s reflected this duality in the subjective experience of wage labour in particularly dramatic ways. Township struggles in this decade were developed around issues of social services, quality of life, political citizenship and

democratisation of local government. A plurality of subjects (workers, students, women, churches, professionals, middle classes) were involved with diverse, often contradictory and confused political agendas that coalesced around national liberation themes that were rapidly hegemonised by ANC-aligned organisations. Such struggles demanded an assumption of political choices and responsibilities on the part of a union movement that, up to that point, had privileged workplace-based issues, maintaining a suspicious attitude towards nationalist politics. Workers' self-organisation (as in the case of the 'shop stewards councils' in the industrial concentration of the East Rand) circulated a rising awareness of non-workplace based problems and practices of struggles, as in the case of rents and tariffs boycotts. It is to be underlined, however, that in this context, while the workplace remained a crucial (albeit problematic in view of the diversification of workers' life strategies and lifestyles) site of organisation, wage labour was no longer the exclusive, or even the main, source of demands that were now directed to housing, social services, social security, a 'living wage', in short decommodified social citizenship rights. While wage demands remained the most important factor for workers' decision to join unions, associated forms of consciousness and radicalism were largely shaped by community issues, household income perceptions, struggles in the sphere of reproduction and the lack of social services, rather than by ideas of wage-productivity deals (Torres, 2000).

The ANC's advent to power heralded a new era of 'free labour', where the wage relation was supposed to be regulated by contracts and subject to the 'objective' laws of the market. The establishment of a 'free labour' regime in post-apartheid South Africa was translated into an attempt to constitutionalise waged labour by legally recognising basic rights and institutional positions for trade unions (Barchiesi, 1999). The strategy defined by the 1995 Labour Relations Act (LRA) ostensibly tried to promote an internationally competitive production environment based on conflict-free relations between capital and labour and a framework of voluntarist collective bargaining. Unions' collaboration was elicited in exchange for the entrenchment of organisational rights. The establishment, for the first time in the history of the country, of a fully-fledged capitalist labour market and the end of unfree labour came therefore to coincide with a double movement of increasing regulation and the imposition of a new ethos of compromise and moderation on labour unions at the institutional level, and of increasing market-driven deregulation of labour market conditions. Within this perspective it can be argued that the turn in the ANC's macroeconomic thinking was not a mere passive adaptation to global neoliberalism (Bond, 1999), but was decisively shaped by the forms taken by the development and organisation of working class struggles and by the need on the part of the new government to control a radical, insurgent proletarian subjectivity.

The macroeconomic policies that contributed to the political marginalisation of organised labour under the new democracy are, to some extent, the result of labour's success in exploiting the contradictions of the past authoritarian regime. In this sense, as Eidelberg (2000) argues, the institutionalisation of labour's power and rights in the context of the ANC's alignment with global capitalism has made the agenda of the left much more limited and constrained than it was when labour was exercising a mainly resistant role against an authoritarian regime. Moreover, the political marginalisation of labour reflects a social marginalisation of work as a source of stability, identity and emancipatory visions for an expanding section of the working class. On the other hand, the everyday lives of working class communities are continuously affected by the detrimental impact of neoliberal economic policies on social reproduction. Faced with these uncomfortable realities, popular responses to neoliberalism are forced to experiment with innovative methods, to which the final section of this paper will turn.

4. New Social Movements and the “Politics of the Poor”

Thabo Mbeki's first term in power has temporally coincided with a resumption of social movement politics and activism which, articulating a common rejection of the ANC's conservative turn in macroeconomic policy, displayed at the same time important differences from the tradition of mainstream left organizations (especially COSATU and SACP). Community movements have emerged both in urban localities to respond to the government's restructuring of local government and municipal services, and in rural areas to express the plight of landless people that have been marginalized both by the inequitable distribution of land ownership inherited from the past and by the government market-driven approach to land reform. Mobilisation and activism have touched a broad spectrum of social issues ranging from the inadequacies of government's response to the HIV-AIDS epidemic and, in particular, the failure to provide access to anti-retroviral treatment; the demand for reparations and cancellation of debts inherited from apartheid; and the environmental degradation linked to unrestrained multinational corporations' power, often facilitated by complacent local authorities.

My discussion will be focused on urban social movements mobilizing around issues related to privatization, since it is in this area that the link is most apparent between the decline of previous forms of social solidarity and views of social change embodied by labour organizations and changes in practices and discourse of social rights and power. However, the diversity and complexity of

community activism in neoliberal South Africa must not be reduced to its urban dynamics. Indeed, it seems that bringing to the fore the demands of constituencies historically marginalized within nationalist discourse, like the landless, is one of the main challenges for the ANC's construct of "the nation". Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse, activists and close observers of social movement politics in South Africa, provide a synthetic picture of these movements and their ability to open areas of political contestation that starkly contrasts with the landscape of apathy and political-ideological homogeneity that emerges in the realm of electoral politics:

It is because of the Treatment Action Campaign that the AIDS has been placed so high on the national agenda. It is because of Jubilee South Africa that the issue of reparations continues to be a struggle. It is because of organisations like the Anti-Privatisation Forum that electricity and water disconnections are resisted. It is because of the Anti-Eviction Campaign that evictions have been resolutely opposed under DA and ANC rule in the Western Cape. It is environmental organisations that have raised the ante on the destruction of the Wild Coast and the oil companies that give us cancer and asthma in South Durban. It is the Landless People's Movement that has challenged the ANC's failure to redistribute land. It is in organisations like these that our nation has come alive and it is here that the real fight to defend and deepen our democracy is being fought. (Desai and Pithouse, 2004).

As part of the GEAR macroeconomic framework, direct financial transfers from central to municipal government have been severely curtailed. Given the importance of this source of revenues for the development and maintenance of basic infrastructures (water, electricity, sanitation, etc.) municipalities were generally faced with the requirement of becoming increasingly self-sufficient (Bond, Dor and Ruiters, 1999). The government maintains, following the 1998 National Framework Agreement with the trade unions, that the public sector is the 'preferred method' for the delivery of services and the enforcement of equitable conditions. However, it also advocates and facilitates the involvement of private capital in the actual supply of the service, through public-private partnership contracting schemes known as Municipal Services Partnerships, which leave the public actor in the role of regulator of tariffs and standards. As a matter of fact, however, the extremely precarious financial situation of many municipalities, coupled to the enormous backlogs in delivery, has it made possible for privatized utilities and private companies (including powerful multinationals) to obtain contracts that provide them with ample discretion and power in deciding the communities' conditions of access to the services, which become *de facto*

privatised. Moreover, in their bid to become reliable for potential investors and generate capital funding, municipalities have embarked on ‘cost recovery’ schemes aimed at enforcing regular payments from residents. In many cases this has led to escalating costs. This is also due to the accumulation of arrears from the past boycotts of payments against apartheid local councils, which have placed the poorest sections of the population in a substantial inability to pay.

The response by municipal councils to non-payment has often been repressive, in the form of disconnections of services and evictions of defaulters (20,000 disconnections a month were calculated in Soweto alone in early 2001), which has ignited heightened levels of conflict (Fiil-Flynn, 2001). Conflicts over access to municipal social services are reflecting not only the impact of neoliberal policies on communities’ everyday lives but also the precariousness of the sources of income in areas of high unemployment or precarious employment. Therefore the mobilisation against privatisation and for a decommodified access, delinked from the market, to services mirrors the crisis faced by the waged working class.

Examples of these movements can be identified in most major urban areas of the country (Desai, 2002; Desai and Pithouse 2003; Greenstein, 2004; Legassick, 2003; MacInnes, 2003; Eveleth and Mngxitama, 2003; Naidoo and Veriava, 2004), and a detailed discussion of their organisational features and developments is largely beyond the scope and aims of this paper. To summarise the most entrenched experiences, in Durban resistance against evictions in the township of Chatsworth has led to a wave of organisation which saw civic groups established in other townships, and the formation of a co-ordinating body, the Concerned Citizens’ Forum (CCF) in July 2001. More recently civic groups in Durban have been networking through the eThekweni Social Forum (ESF). In the Gauteng region, similar experiences are gathered in an Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), originated in 2000 by student struggles against tertiary education privatisation and by municipal workers and communities’ opposition to the privatisation of municipal utilities. Here the presence of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC), led by a former ANC councillor, Trevor Ngwane, expelled from the party due to his opposition to privatisation became significant. In this case, informal skill networks (under the name ‘Operation Khanyisa’, meaning ‘switch-on’) have been developed in the activity of reconnecting clandestinely the electricity installations disconnected by municipal technicians. In the townships around Cape Town local “anti-eviction campaigns”, connected in a Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC), have been opposing forced relocation of residents in arrears with rents for council housing or bonds to banks.

At an ideological level the movements' construction of localised community identities either reject or are indifferent towards the motifs of the 'national liberation' discourse. Partha Chatterjee (2004: 75) brilliantly captures the general terms of the problem in ways that are relevant to the South African case:

Community (...) is conferred legitimacy within the domain of the modern state only in the form of the nation. Other solidarities that could potentially come into conflict with the political community of the nation are subject to a great deal of suspicion.

The ANC's response to these movements, however prone to resort in the immediate to tactics of criminalization and repression (McKinley and Veriava, 2004), has with some hindsight identified a deeper strategic threat to its own discourse of "the nation" as a device to reabsorb and contain "infra-national" forms of solidarity and social antagonism. Particularly noticeable is the perceived threat that community movements, by shifting the terrain of contestation from the unfavourable conditions of the factory and the wage relations, towards broad community mobilisation, could provide alternative avenues for the expression of resentment and dissent to disillusioned and disempowered working class constituencies:

The APF (...) lends an important link between basic services cut struggles with shop floor battles. The struggles waged in the township (...) are linked to those at the shop floor. All these challenges both at community and shop floor are presented as consequences of privatization and GEAR, and more particularly as an assault on the working class, hence the combined efforts to fight back. Unfortunately the internal contest within the [ANC-led] alliance has opened up strategic opportunities for centrifugal forces baying for its split to exploit these chances, with the hope that this will offer a short cut to socialism by the working class having retreated in itself. This temptation is incited by the exclusive conceptualization which wants to beleaguer the value in the mobilization of all classes for the project of a successful NDR [National Democratic Revolution] that recognize the working class as the consistent and revolutionary class. (Comrade Tankiso, 2003).

While increasingly antagonistic towards the ANC (albeit they have generally failed when they tried to challenge it in local government elections through independent candidacies), the immediate target of community movements is generally constituted by the government and the local

authorities. These experiences remain anchored to a predominantly local dimension. They do not seek centralised forms of co-ordination and eschew the tradition of ‘vanguardist’ organising and full-time cadreship of the SACP and trade unions’ tradition. When co-ordination emerges, it usually takes the form of loose ‘umbrella bodies’ where the constituent groups retain varying, but generally quite large, degrees of autonomy. In general, these movements do not mobilise in alliance with mainstream unions, especially in COSATU, which suspicion and even overt hostility towards them. In the words of metalworkers’ union official Dinga Sikwebu:

The unions feel threatened by [social movements] at two levels. First, most of these movements arise in opposition to either the local state, which is now largely ANC councillors, or to the ANC-led Alliance, of which COSATU is a part. (...) Second, I agree that some of these workers may not organise in unions. (...) If you take union resolutions, they always say that we organise these workers into the union, but maybe they don’t want to come in the union, they just want their rights protected and better livelihoods. But if you go that way and organise them as independent community-based organisations, that may start interfering with SANCO [the ANC-aligned South African National Civic Association], or with ANC branches. There are therefore these two things operating which block COSATU from taking up the issue of relations with social movements (Appolis and Sikwebu, 2003).

In general, COSATU’s persistent approach that the alliance with the ANC “remains the only weapon in the hands of our people to deepen transformation and take our ‘National Democratic Revolution’ to new heights” (COSATU, 2003) makes the leadership of the federation suspicious towards movements that are considered as “anti-government” in principle. This despite some COSATU officials recognise the possibility of limited convergence between ANC-aligned unions and community movements around specific issues that the labour movement can utilise to strengthen its negotiating position within the Alliance (Naidoo and Veriava, 2004: 25).

Episodes of co-operation have rather emerged between local groups and radical breakaway unions. The most important exception to this pattern was the support by the South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), one of COSATU’s largest unions, to struggles against the “iGoli 2002” plan of corporatisation of Johannesburg’s municipal utilities. This can be explained by the double vulnerability, as municipal employees and residents, of SAMWU members when confronted to the privatisation of local services. However, SAMWU itself has organisationally

withdrawn from formal alliances with community movements, especially following direct pressures from COSATU and the union's inability to reverse programmes of municipal privatisation (Naidoo and Veriava, 2004: 35). But the distance existing between unions and community movements also reflects the absence, or at least the relative relevance, among these latter of a working class language of opposition. In the Durban township of Chatsworth, for example, the main source of collective identification and self-definition was based on shared conditions of poverty and social suffering for what have become known simply as 'the poors' (Desai, 2002). In the nearby area of Mpumalanga, activists in the struggle to introduce a merely symbolic payment for water (the 'Ten Rand Campaign') came to relate to each other with the term 'Makhelwane' (neighbour), which replaced the more conventional 'comrade'. In this sense, while the question of which organisational synthesis these movements will take in the future is quite open, their current state challenges a unitary concept of 'left' that in its mainstream expressions has been thrown into disarray by the ANC's right-wing turn.

The barriers of suspicion that have been established on the two sides of the labour-social movements divide have also to do with a rising awareness among social movement activists of the impact of the decline of wage labour both as a vehicle for social stability and insertion and as a harbinger of strong collective solidarity. Waged work as a linchpin of a universe of values, system of sense and ethical world views -- which is quite central in the discourse of COSATU as an organisation that represents a shrinking number of formally employed workers -- no longer fits popular perceptions of the wage form in contexts where unemployment is often permanent and, when it is interrupted, it is replaced by extremely unstable, exploitative, vulnerable occupations that in no way contribute to advance access to social rights and guarantees. In the words of an activist in Durban:

Why should I be fighting for jobs? I don't want to fight for jobs. I don't want to go and work in one of those factories. I don't want to work in a Taiwanese sweatshop. I don't want to work in the export processing zone. I'm not raising the banner of 'jobs for all'. Fuck that, those jobs are paying R480 a month. Your upkeep in a council flat is R900. I must be part of that shit? (quoted in Naidoo and Veriava, 2004: 44).

Even if a relationship of reciprocal distrust exists between social movements and ANC-aligned union organisations, significant – albeit isolated – moments of labour-community alliances and struggles have taken place. This is, for example, the case of a protracted strike in 2001 by a local,

non-COSATU union at the Engen oil refinery in Wentworth (Durban). Albeit the strike was ignited by a straightforward union issue (the use of casual workers through labour broking contracts in unsafe working conditions to cut costs at peak times), the workers were able to usher in remarkable innovations compared with mainstream unions' mobilisation. Engen was, in fact, targeted with moral outrage for contributing to the decline of the community's income, which jeopardises households' survival, and for using production methods responsible for the heavy pollution in the area. This internalisation of reproductive and environmental issues proved decisive to mobilise the support of the whole community in a protracted and eventually successful strike. Moreover, it constituted a visible change compared with the much more productivist orientations of established trade union demands. As Ashwin Desai notices:

The executive of [the union] did not simply dictate the pace and nature of the struggle but devolved their organization into a loose and very broad grouping of activists and community and religious leaders. The unemployed (some would say "gangsters") were represented at the discussions and their inclusion played a crucial role in cutting off Engen's ability to recruit scabs. All the time the workers tried to ensure Engen was totally isolated from reaching potential allies in the community, by ... "getting there first" in the information battle and creating space for various interest groups to become part of the strike committee. For much of the time the union and community structures appeared as one (Desai, 2002: 120).

In other instances, the involvement of COSATU local structures and leaders in formal alliances or principled cooperation with community movements has ignited dynamics that emphasised the contradictory position of the federation, caught between local branches and affiliates that most urgently feel the need to define radical political alternatives to the processes of erosion and fragmentation of its own grassroots, and an institutional position at the national level which commands moderation and non-confrontational attitudes vis-à-vis state and capital in the name of the stability of the "nation" and the growth of the "economy", narratives in which unions are recruited in an increasingly subaltern position.

The events of June 2003, when COSATU decided to evict the APF from the premises it occupied inside the federation's national headquarters' building, was seen by many observers and activists as a signal that the leadership of the union federation had opted for a solution that privileged the stability of the Alliance and the compatibilities of governance (Naidoo and Veriava,

2004: 35). In the meanwhile the ANC was, moreover, starting its long electoral campaign with a process that, in an attempt to rekindle its disillusioned left-wing support, culminated in a Growth and Development Summit where, while macroeconomic strategies were not subject to any fundamental rethinking, the ruling party showed a renewed sensitivity to piecemeal interventionist approaches (public work programmes, partial use of privatisation revenues for poverty alleviation).

At the same time, COSATU's support for these solutions seemed increasingly inadequate to cushion and contain dissent, especially outspoken within those unions that had maintained points of contact with community movements. This was in particular the case of the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (CEPPWAWU), one of the COSATU affiliates hardest hit by the impact of retrenchments and casualisation, and where the secretary of the influential Wits Region, John Appolis, was also the chairman of the APF. In May 2003 the entire leadership of the region was suspended by the union's head office for calling a referendum among members on COSATU's alliance with the ANC and on the stand to be taken for the 2004 elections. According to dismissed officials, the referendum was specifically intended as a demonstrative act to voice grassroots dissatisfaction with COSATU's positions that combined a nominal condemnation for the ANC's privatization policies with a formal political alliance with the ANC in government. Another point of contention revolved around Wits region's attempt to organize unemployed and retrenched chemical workers in a structure that the leadership of the union considered as an APF front inside CEPPWAWU. The dismissal of the leadership of the Wits region of CEPPWAWU has since led to the formation of a breakaway union outside COSATU (Naidoo and Veriava, 2004: 20-22; Dickinson, 2004).

Despite problems in relations between movements and traditional left organisations, elements of mainstream left parlance sometimes resurface behind attempts to build 'connections' and 'co-ordination' among social movements. For example, the APF identifies the state as the central focus of contestation to reverse the ANC government's privatisation policies, and to that extent it advocates a nationalisation agenda to complement its demand for free basic services. These elements of analysis raise questions concerning the organisational directions that such co-ordinations might take in future. From this point of view, the APF seems to reveal the most centralising approach. Initially born as a vehicle to 'build connections' across different and autonomous struggles bridging the workplace-community divide (Anti-Privatisation Forum, 2000), at the end of 2001 the APF adopted a formal, party-like structure (which includes full-time officials) where 'representatives' of communities are sent, together with delegates from formal political left organisations, to a 'council' that meets monthly, while a weekly more restricted 'co-ordinating

committee' 'provides strategic direction' (Anti-Privatisation Forum, 2001). In March 2002 an APF workshop concluded that to transcend the limitations of 'specific issues' represented by its organisations, the APF needed a 'national co-ordinating structure' to organise its campaigns (Anti-Privatisation, 2002). These developments probably testify to the role played by mainstream left activists in the APF, which was born as a coalition between unionists opposed to the privatisation of Johannesburg's municipal infrastructures, student movements, activists from earlier organised Marxist fringes to the left of the ANC (Naidoo and Veriava, 2004), and only at a later stage defined itself as a *trait d' union* for township struggles. In any case, this also emphasises issues of diversity in organisational methods between movements and it opens questions concerning the extent of the rupture that some of them determine with regard to established left traditions. For example, in his speech at the 2002 World Economic Forum in Porto Alegre the most popular leader of the APF, Trevor Ngwane, advocated for the need to build a new working class party outside the Alliance.

More directly linked in their origins to township struggles that have often remained at the sidelines of working class politics (and organising also working class 'coloured' and Indian constituencies that historically are relatively less identified with the ANC's nationalist discourse), the AEC and the CCF (and now the ESF) have, compared to the APF, acted more as 'umbrella bodies', rather than proto-parties (Pithouse, 2001; Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, 2001). At the same time, different orientations towards centralised political organisation and diverging options in relations with state institutions are linked to on-going, and still unresolved, discussions concerning the movements' approach to electoral politics. While a strong hostility persists towards the idea of running lists or candidates in national elections, an increasing acceptance can be discerned, particularly on the APF's part, of the idea of engaging on the electoral terrain at a local level, either with lists or independent candidates (Naidoo and Veriava, 2004: 44-45). However it would be reductive to focus an evaluation of these debates entirely on the question of the relevance of state power and the strategic need to exercise influence upon it, without considering the complex set of problems, quite present in social movement literature, surrounding the role of legalism and rights-based discourses within radical community mobilisation. In other words, institutional guarantees and rights can provide valuable assets both in terms of protection from intensified (and often vicious, as in the case of Cape Town social movements) state repression, and to sustain solidarity and a sense of morality in a context where all this is no longer provided by structured, centralised, cohesive organisations in whose legitimising myths advancing rights through state institution tends to be coterminous with that of seizing power in state institutions. Of course, a legalistic strategy to advance a discourse of rights, as in the case of the demand for 'free water',

‘free electricity’, access to housing and medical treatment, is open to ambiguities, as Wendy Brown (2002) adequately summarises:

rights secure our standing as individuals even if they obscure the treacherous ways that standing is achieved and regulated; they must be specific and concrete to reveal and redress (...) subordination, yet potentially entrench our subordination through that specificity (...); they emancipate us to pursue other political ends while subordinating those political ends to liberal discourse.

Moreover in the South African case, it has been convincingly argued (Pointer, 2004) that the emergence of well connected defacto leaders behind a rhetoric of ‘no leaders’ and claims about the unanimity of ‘the community’ can, especially in the context of legalism and the formalization of political claims, reinforce a trend towards control of power and resources by professionalised activists and notable political personalities. These dynamics reveal and entrench unequal power relations and disempowerment, which is particularly apparent on a gender dimension. They also problematize the very notion of “community” that becomes itself a contested terrain for different hegemonic practices and exercise of power vying to define the movement through the structuration of its priorities, goals, strategies.

However, a rights-based discourse cannot be easily dismissed in view of its inability to modify power relations at a structural level, without falling into a view of the “political” identified with an institutional sphere that is, short of a revolutionary seizure of power, fundamentally immutable in its ability to grant, apportion and reproduce those rights. Such a binary polarity between conservation and revolution neglects how the political nature of a rights-based discourse can be articulated at a subtler level. While a discourse of rights is made possible by a system of power and government that codifies those rights and gives institutional and policy visibility to the subjects that claim them, the same system is not capable, however, of managing the dynamics of subjectivation that take place on these bases and which can, quite literally, get out of control. As Chatterjee (2004: 59-60) reminds us, with regard to the attempt of a Calcutta “illegal” squatter association to articulate its own discourse of rights:

Refugees, landless people, day laborers, homestead, below the poverty line – are all demographic categories of governmentality. That is the ground on which they define their claims (...). Thus, alongside its reference to the government’s obligation to look

after poor and underprivileged population groups, the association was also appealing to the moral rhetoric of a community striving to build a decent social life under extremely harsh conditions (...). The categories of governmentality were being invested with the imaginative possibilities of community, including its capacity to (...) produce a new, even if somewhat hesitant, rhetoric of political claims. These claims are irreducibly political. They could only be made on a political terrain, where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure.

The march on the United Nations' World Conference Against Racism in Durban in August 2001 was the first moment of convergence of these localised social movements within the fold of a national mobilisation directly aimed at confronting the ANC government. The APF, CCF and other similar organisations gathered under the name Durban Social Forum (DSF), an explicit reference to the Genoa Social Forum that few months earlier had staged the most important anti-capitalist demonstrations in Western Europe since 1968. In this way, the new wave of social movement mobilisation in South Africa was starting to develop explicit relations with the global movement against corporate globalisation that had been spreading after the 1999 Seattle riots. One signal in this direction was the opening of a South African version of Indymedia, the independent global network of media activists, which played a decisive connecting role in the Durban demonstrations and, especially, in those against the WSSD one year later. Many methodological elements were shared by global movements and their South African counterparts, mainly a rejection of bureaucratic structures and traditional top-down forms of left organising, the recognition of being composed by autonomous social subjects, the preference for horizontal, ad-hoc forms of co-ordination, and the way the critique of power was interwoven with a discourse of rights:

There is an agreement that while left values are still important to us, the left project often took on forms that became obstacles to realizing those values. This was true at least to the extent that left organizations are based on a mere philosophy of domination that confines social subjects to the role of either passive victims or card-carrying members of the revolutionary party. The left has been unable to recognise the teeming life in between. Life! This is not just a theoretical issue (...). If I was a traditional leftist, I would have to spend all my time first engineering the content of the life of people in these communities so that it accorded with the insights of socialism. That would be the struggle! But this is not the way things are. There is a rich, complex, imperfect and sensuous collectivity existing in the communities (...) and their needs (...). There are

dangers of course. Talk of human rights and citizenship often result in validation of the social order (...). Parochialism too has to be warded off and efforts made to be sensitive to the struggles of other subaltern groups. But there is no doubt for me that whatever the dangers, there would be little civic resistance at all today in South Africa if it was not for expectations of dignity, human rights and a dignified life (Desai, 2002: 137).

On the other hand, the reaction of established left organisations to the growth of new social movements on a national scale did not help to bridge gaps. While some local branches of the SACP have initially entertained a dialogue or even joint actions, as in Johannesburg, with these movements, the reaction of the SACP's leaderships has generally been hostile when not overtly repressive. The ANC Minister of Public Enterprises, Jeff Radebe, who is also a member of the Central Committee of the SACP, for example, has defined the SECC as a 'criminal organisation', threatening a police crackdown on anyone involved in its activities such as tariff boycotts. Despite some of its affiliates' support for groups like the APF, COSATU is generally dismissive of these movements in ways that basically confirm the positions expressed on the occasion of the 1999 Seattle demonstrations. In that case COSATU recognised progressive elements in the protests against international economic institutions, but it also defined such movements as a 'motley crew' with no common agenda or centralised coordination, which exposes them to the danger of being coopted or becoming a mere 'side show' (COSATU, 2000b).

In the final analysis, many features of the new social movements seem to stand in the way of better relationships with ANC-aligned trade unions. The movements, in fact, have appropriated and updated methods of direct action coming from the tradition of civic associations' opposition to apartheid. 'Illegal' reconnections and boycotts of rents belong fully to this repertoire. However, these are now put at the service of resistance against the ANC-driven commodification of public goods where dynamics of class oppression are experienced in specific and highly differentiated local, household and biographic conditions, difficult to accommodate in the unanimist mythology of official national or class discourses. Supporters of these movements come from a multitude of 'unemployed, single motherhood, community defender, abandoned, neighbour, factory worker, popular criminal and rap artist' (Desai, 2002), that provide a landscape that does not fit homogenous appellations, especially when the national liberation ideology is undergoing a credibility crisis. Rather than delegating their notion of citizenship to institutionalised dispensations and codifications, these subjects tend to experience the notion as a permanently fluid field of contestation. Many in the official left can dismiss these dynamics as 'single-issue', 'particularistic'

and ‘confused’. It is however unquestionable that the rise of new social movements in democratic South Africa interrogates the established left in one decisive respect: the ability to redefine the field of what is ‘possible’ and ‘feasible’.

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the recent rise of a new generation of social movement politics in South Africa in its organizational and ideological/discursive relationships with long standing experiences of working class organizing, in the context of shifting strategies and procedures of governmentality of the ANC regime. The dynamics here analyzed reveal a continuous relevance of class-based discourses, practices and understandings of conflict for the multitude of community movements that are contesting the neo-liberalisation of the South African transition. What has been decisively questioned in these developments, however, are the two prevailing modes of representation of the discourse of class in the history of South African resistance politics. In fact, both the absorption of the waged working class in the broader template of the “national democratic revolution” and its centrality as intentional agent of change in socialist discourse were questioned by the plurality and complexity of collective subjectivities, experiences and biographies that are constitutive of South Africa’s “politics of the poor”. The coexistence of traditional left organizations, strategies and ideologies within this broader and constantly “exceeding” fray is what in the final analysis defies an “ontological” understanding of South African social movements as premised on a homogenous agent of social transformation and requires a renewed attention to the open spaces of politicization where a multitude of processes of subjectivation discover commonalities, elaborate strategies, confront power, become political.

Another crucial point touched by this paper is that the rise of new social movements cannot be understood without taking into account the transformations and crises of previous forms of social solidarity, organization and struggles, primarily embodied in the tradition of organized labour. Of course it would be difficult to establish a causal link between the collapse of waged employment and the development of community activism and I did not want to do this. However, the fact that wage labour, the organizations based upon it, the visions of social transformation it enabled, the claims for rights and citizenship it opened, are all in fundamental decline is one of the main problems facing the stability of the post-apartheid socio-political order. Important determinants in this decline are the unions’ subordinate institutionalisation within organs of the state deeply committed to a liberalizing macroeconomic agenda, and their deepening social

marginalisation due to a growing inability to represent changes in the world of work. In particular, the meaning of wage labour has changed dramatically in the “new South Africa”, in a way that it is no longer enabling the old trade unions’ visions of social inclusion, rights and citizenship but it has become a recipe for poverty, vulnerability and despair. In general, South African unions have not been able to respond to this profound disarticulation of the work-citizenship nexus, either in terms of organizational strategies, or on the terrain of analysis and ideology.

While not simply linked in a causal way to these transformations, social movements have opened a field of political possibilities whose languages and identities are deeply shaped by the collapse of wage labour as a vehicle for social emancipation. At the same time, such a collapse is not necessarily seen as a limit, a defeat from which to recover. On the contrary, it represents, paradoxically, a continuity with a historic tendency of the African working class to push its demands and desires beyond the terrain of the wage relation, to claim access to resources and social services that are truly decommodified, independent from the monetary wage and on labour market positions. A discourse of radical decommodification of life is what ultimately opened up new spaces of political possibilities and simultaneously makes the reincorporation of social movements within the canvass of “civil society” woven by the ANC’s “pro-poor” rhetoric highly problematic.

The ANC itself is walking on the very thin thread of designing “pro-poor” interventions while at the same time avoiding the theme of decommodification, even at the cost of the harshest repression on its proponents. This exercise was apparent in the words of Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, speaking on the 2004 Budget. Here Manuel lauded the “expansionary” and “developmental” nature of the budget just few lines before rejecting the idea of increasing paltry state-funded old-age and disabled people’s grants of R700 (US\$ 100) a month by more than R40 (US\$ 6), on account that “more generous increases could be a disincentive for people to look for jobs as being disabled could suddenly appear relatively lucrative” (Sefara, 2004). In opposition to this constant reaffirmation of market discipline the theme of decommodification survives in the practices of community movements. Moreover it is continually updated and expanded to embrace practices of direct action that, contrary to traditional left politics, are ruthless in their taking on the myth of the “nation” in which the ANC discourse of post-apartheid transformation lies.

References

- Adelzadeh, A. (1996), 'Growth and Development: Labour and Business Perspectives on Economic Development', in *Against the Current. Labour and Economic Policy in South Africa*, edited by J. Baskin (Johannesburg: Ravan Press).
- Adler, G. and E. Webster (2000), 'Introduction: Consolidating Democracy in a Liberalizing World – Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa', in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, edited by G. Adler and E. Webster (Basingstoke: MacMillan).
- African National Congress (2002), *Secretary General Report to the 50th National Conference*, Stellenbosch, University of Stellenbosch, 16-20 December.
- Anti-Privatisation Forum (2000), *Democracy is not for Sale: The JHB Anti-Privatisation Forum*
<http://www.apf.org.za/htm/0008democracy.htm>.
- Anti-Privatisation Forum (2001), *About the Anti-Privatisation Forum*, <<http://www.apf.org.za/htm/about.htm>>.
- Anti-Privatisation Forum (2002), *Exploring NEW Grounds of Struggle*, <<http://www.apf.org.za/htm/020305.htm>>.
- Appolis, J. and D. Sikwebu (2003), "Pressing Challenges Facing the Labour Movement: An Interview with John Appolis and Dinga Sikwebu", in *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, edited by F. Barchiesi and T. Bramble (London: Ashgate)
- Aronowitz, S. (2003), *How Class Works. Power and Social Movement* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press).
- Badiou, A. (1985), *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Paris: Seuil).
- Barchiesi, F. (1999), "Economic Adjustment, Political Institutionalisation and Social Marginalisation: COSATU and the First Democratic Government (1994-1999)", *Transformation*, 38: 20-48.
- Barchiesi, F. (2003), "Social Citizenship, the Decline of Wage Labour and Changing Worker Strategies", in *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, edited by F. Barchiesi and T. Bramble (London: Ashgate), pp. 113-131.
- Barchiesi, F. and B. Kenny (2002), 'From Workshop to Wasteland: Deindustrialisation and Fragmentation of the Black Working Class on the East Rand (South Africa), 1990–99', *International Review of Social History*, 47, 3.
- Baskin, J. (1982), "Growth of a New Worker Organ – The Germiston Shop Stewards' Council", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 7, 8: 42-53.
- Bauman, Z. (1999), *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Beck, U. (1999), *Schoene neue Arbeitswelt. Vision: Weltburgergesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag).
- Bond, P. (1999), *Elite Transition. From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press).
- Bond, P. (2001), *Cities of Gold, Townships of Coal. Essays on South Africa's New Urban Crisis* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press).
- Bond, P., G. Dor and G. Ruiters (1999), *Transformation in Infrastructure Policy from Apartheid to Democracy*, Municipal Services Project Background Paper No 1, Kingston: Queens' University.
- Brown, W. (2002), "Suffering the Paradoxes of Rights", in *Left Legalism/Left Critique*, edited by W. Brown and J. Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp.420-434
- Buhlungu, S. (1997), 'Flogging a Dying Horse? COSATU and the Alliance', *South African Labour Bulletin* 21, 1: 71-78.
- Buhlungu, S. (2004), "The State of Trade Unionism in Post-apartheid South Africa", in *State of the Nation, 2003-04*, edited by J. Daniel, A. Habib and R. Southall (Pretoria: HSRC Publishers), pp. 184-203.
- Burawoy, M. (1985), *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso).

- Chatterjee, P. (1993), *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Chatterjee, P. (2004), *The Politics of the Governed* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Colectivo Situaciones (2001), *19 y 20. Apuntes para el nuevo protagonismo social* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Mano a Mano).
- Collettivo di DeriveApprodi (2003), “Editoriale”, *DeriveApprodi*, 23.
- Comrade Tankiso (2003), “Beyond Dreadlocks and Demagogy”, *Umrabulo*, 18.
- Cooper, F. (1996), *Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- COSATU (2000a), ‘Accelerating Transformation. COSATU's Engagement with Policy and Legislative Processes during South Africa's First Term of Democratic Governance’, *The Shopsteward*, 9, 3.
- COSATU (2000b), *Advancing Social Transformation in the Era of Globalisation*, political discussion document for the 7th National Congress.
- COSATU (2003), *Consolidating Working Class Power for Quality Jobs – Towards 2015*, Discussion document to the 8th National Congress.
- Desai, A. (2002), *'We are the Poors'. Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press).
- Desai, A. and R. Pithouse (2003), *But we Were Thousands: Dispossession, Resistance, Repossession and Repression in Mandela Park*, Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Centre for Civil Society.
- Desai, A. and R. Pithouse (2004), “(Un)civil Society and the Vote”, *The Mercury* (Durban), 8 March.
- Dickinson, D. (2004), “When Brothers Fall Out...”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 28, 2: 53-58.
- Eidelberg, P. (2000), ‘The Tripartite Alliance on the Eve of a New Millenium: COSATU, the ANC and the SACP’, *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, edited by G. Adler and E. Webster (Basingstoke: MacMillan).
- Eveleth, A. and A. Mngxitama (2003), “The Struggles of South Africa’s Landless”, *Development Update*, 2: 149-162.
- Fiiil-Flynn, M. (2001), *The Electricity Crisis in Soweto*, Municipal Services Project Occasional Paper No 4, Kingston: Queens’ University.
- Foucault, M. (1982), ‘The Subject and Power’ in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H.L Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Foucault, M. (2001, 1994), ‘Michel Foucault et la question du liberalisme’, extract from the lecture held on 24 January 1979 in the unpublished course ‘Naissance de la biopolitique’ (College de France), compiled by M. Senellart. Italian translation: ‘La questione del liberalismo’ in *Biopolitica e liberalismo. Detti e scritti su potere ed etica 1975-1984*, edited by O. Marzocca, Milan: Medusa.
- Friedman, S. (1987), *Building Tomorrow Today. African Workers in Trade Unions 1970-1984*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press).
- Friedman, S. (2004), “Slaying the Myth of Voter Apathy”, *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 16 April.
- Goetz, G. (2000), ‘Shoot Anything that Flies, Claim Anything that Falls: Labour and the Changing Definition of the Reconstruction and Development Programme’, in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, edited by G. Adler and E. Webster (Basingstoke: MacMillan).

- Greenstein, R. (2004), *Social Movements, Civil Society and Socio-economic Rights in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, School of Social Sciences.
- Guattari, F. (1995), *Chaosmosis: An Ethicoaesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press).
- Habib, A. and V. Padayachee (2000), "Economic Policy and Power Relations in South Africa's Transition to Democracy", *World Development*, 28, 2: 245-262.
- Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000), *Empire*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- Hayter, T., G. Reinecke, and R. Torres (1999), *Studies on the Social Dimension of Globalisation. South Africa* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation).
- Hlangani, M. (2004), "Plea to Help Break Credit Bureaus' Grip on the Poor", *The Star* (Johannesburg), 27 May.
- Jacobs, S. (2001), '*History is not on Our Side*'. *Black Economic Empowerment, the ANC and Globalization*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association (Houston, TX, 17-21 November).
- Kenny, B. and E. Webster (1999), "Eroding the Core: Flexibility and the Re-segmentation of the South African Labour Market", *Critical Sociology*, 24, 3: 216-243.
- Laclau, E. (2003), "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?", in *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, edited by P.Passavant and J.Dean (London: Routledge), pp.21-30.
- Legassick, M. (2003), *Direct Action. Housing Battles in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: Socialist Alternative).
- MacInnes, P. (2003), *Rights, Recognition and Community Mobilisation to Gain Access to Basic Municipal Services in Soweto*, mimeo.
- Mamdani, M. (1996), *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Marais, H. (2001, 1998), *South Africa: Limits to Change. The Political Economy of Transformation* (London: Zed Books; Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press).
- Mattes, R. et al. (2004), *Democratic Governance in South Africa: The People's View*, Afrobarometer Paper No. 24 (Cape Town, IDASA).
- Mbeki, T. (1978), 'Domestic and Foreign Policies of a New South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 11: 6-16.
- Mbeki, T. (1999), *Speech at the Annual National Conference of the Black Management Forum*, Kempton Park, 20 November.
- McDonald, D. and J. Pape (eds.) (2002), *Cost Recovery and the Crisis of Service Delivery in South Africa*, London: Zed Books.
- McKinley, D. (1997), *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle. A Critical Political Biography* (London: Pluto Press).
- McKinley, D. (2004), "New Power to the People...", *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 14 May.
- McKinley, D. and A.Veriava (2004), *From Swaart Gevaar to Rooi Gevaar: The 'Story' of State Repression in the South African Transition*, Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Centre for Civil Society.
- Mezzadra, S. and M. Ricciardi (1997), "Democrazia senza lavoro? Sul rapporto tra costituzione, cittadinanza e amministrazione nella crisi dello stato sociale", in *Stato nazionale, lavoro e moneta nel sistema mondiale integrato*, edited by E. Parise (Naples: Liguori): 59-86.
- Moulier-Boutang, Y. (1998), *De l' esclavage au salariat. Economie historique du salariat bride'* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France).

- Michie, J. and V. Padayachee (eds.) (1997), *The Political Economy of South Africa's Transition* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace & Co.).
- Naidoo, P. and A. Veriava (2004), *Re-membering Movements: The Trade Union Movement and New Social Movements in Neo-liberal South Africa*, Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Centre for Civil Society.
- NEDLAC (National Economic Development and Labour Council) (2000), *Infrastructure Delivery Report* (Johannesburg: NEDLAC).
- Pithouse, R. (2001), 'The Aunties' Revolt', *Sunday Tribune*, 4 February.
- Pointer, R. (2004), *Questioning the Representation of South Africa's 'New Social Movements': A Case Study of the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign (MPAEC)*, mimeo. Forthcoming Italian translation to be published in "Afriche e Orientali" (Bologna).
- Procacci, G. (1993), *Gouverner la misere* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).
- Ranciere, J. (1995, 2003), *La mésentente* (Paris: Galilée). Engl. transl. *Disagreements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).
- Ranciere, J. (2002), "Peuple ou multitudes? Entretien avec Eric Alliez", *Multitudes*, 9.
- Ruiters, G. (1995), *South African Liberation Politics: A Case Study of Collective Action and Leadership in Katorus, 1980-1989*, unpublished MA dissertation, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- SABC/Markinor (2004), "Possible Turnout, Voter Registration and Apathy", 25 March.
- Sachs, M. (2004), "The Poor Believe in the Poll", *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 21 May.
- Saul, J. (2001), 'Cry for the Beloved Country. The Post-Apartheid Denouement', *Monthly Review*, 52, 8.
- Sefara, M. (2004), "Bigger Grants would Discourage Job-Seeking", *Cape Times*, 20 February.
- Sennett, R. (1998), *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton).
- Talbot, C. (2004), "ANC Wins South African Election in Low Voter Turnout", *World Socialist Web Site*, <www.wsws.org>, 17 April.
- Terreblanche, S. (2003), *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2000* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press).
- Torres, L. (2000), *Amandla. Ngawethu? The Trade Union Movement in South Africa and Political Change* (Oslo: FAFO).
- Torres, L. (ed.) (2002), *The Mesebetsi Labour Force Survey*, (Johannesburg: FAFO).
- United Nations Development Programme (2003), *South African Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Virno, P. (2004), *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e)).
- Von Holdt, K. (2000), 'From the Politics of Resistance to the Politics of Reconstruction? The Union and 'Ungovernability' in the Workplace', in *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, edited by G. Adler and E. Webster (Basingstoke: MacMillan).
- Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (2001), *What is the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign?*, <<http://www.antieviction.org.za/html/02whatisAEC.htm>>.
- Zizek, S. (1999), *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso).