Anti-globalisation movements, identity and leadership:
Trevor Ngwane and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee

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Manuel Castells (1997: 9) provides us with a valuable threefold typology of identities. He distinguishes between those that are legitimising (‘introduced by the dominant institutions to extend and rationalize their domination’); those associated with resistance to this domination (or, as he explains, with ‘survival on the basis of principles different from . . . those permeating the institutions of society’); and those he classifies as project (which develop when ‘social actors . . . build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure’). He adds: ‘Naturally, identities that start as resistance may induce projects, and may also, along the course of history, become dominant in the institutions of society, thus becoming legitimizing identities to rationalize their domination.’ But, how do resistance identities induce projects (thereby, one assumes, encouraging the development of project identities)? On this, the three volumes of Castells’s magnum opus are silent - apart, that is, from some vague formulations like: ‘Societies are, and will always be, shaped by social actors, mobilized around interests, ideas and values, in an open, conflictive process’ (2000: 63). For anyone seeking knowledge about how to move beyond a rejection of some aspect of neo-liberal globalisation (sweat shops, genetically modified food, water privatisation, or whatever), towards the kind of mobilisation, conflict and project identity that can transform social structure, this silence is a considerable weakness.

The basic premise of this paper is that the creation of a new, project identity - and the mobilisation of social actors to transform society – involves leadership. Whilst a resistance identity may arise spontaneously (in principle at least), the development of a project identity is, by definition, a conscious process. It must, to quote Castells, be ‘built’. ‘Building’ involves organisation and decision making, which, in turn, require individual initiative; and it is this individual initiative hooked to a collective practice that I am referring to as ‘leadership’. When we turn to those writers who have had a significant impact on the way we think about new movements against globalisation, lack of attention to the role of leadership is striking. Naomi Klein (2000) does not mention the issue, nor do Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000). Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello and Brenden Smith (2000: 30, 86-89) limit themselves to a denunciation of ‘leadership domination’ and advocacy of ‘networks’ as a form of organisation (which, though, ‘have no formal mechanism for resolving internal conflict’). Robin Cohen and Shirin Rai provide many references to ‘leadership’, but no theorisation of the problem. Similarly, whilst Sid Tarrow’s Power in Movement (1998), perhaps the most theoretically sophisticated of recent volumes on social movements, does touch on the issue (mainly by reference to Lenin), again there is no systematic treatment.
In attempting to open a tiny crack so that some southern sun might shed a little light on the matter, I turn, firstly, to a book edited by Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette (2001) that explicitly addresses Leadership and Social Movements. Thereafter, the focus shifts to the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and its most prominent leader, Trevor Ngwane. SECC is the largest and most successful affiliate of the Johannesburg-based Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), which, in terms of capacity to mobilise large numbers of people, has been the most effective of South Africa’s new social movements. Ngwane, SECC’s chair, is the secretary and organiser of the APF, and also a convener of the African Social Forum. Empirical data is drawn from secondary literature, press reports and press statements, observations of meetings and demonstrations, brief interviews with participants in SECC events, a limited-scope survey conducted at a SECC annual general meeting, and, especially, a two-hour interview with Ngwane. However, this is very much ‘work-in-progress’. There are significant gaps in the research and, inevitably, these will lead to some distortion in the analysis. In particular, because other leaders and members of SECC and APF have not been interviewed, there is a danger of exaggerating Ngwane’s role within these organisations.

Some thoughts on social movements and leadership

In their introduction to the Leadership and Social Movements collection, Barker, Johnson and Lavellette (2001: 5) argue: ‘For collective images and ideas, projects, forms of action and organisation to emerge, someone must propose them. . . . Without such proposals, and any assent they receive, movements do not exist, collective identity is not formed, collective action does not occur.’ Johnson (2001:101), in a chapter on Martin Luther King and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, makes the further point: ‘Leadership was vital . . . because no automatic relationship exists between economic change and political identity and action.’ Acknowledging that, nonetheless, the problem of leadership in social movements has attracted little attention, Barker, Johnson and Lavellette (2000: 1-2) propose five reasons for this important lacuna. First, there has been a ‘desire to avoid “great man” understandings of history”; secondly, a concern not to revive ‘agitator theories’ of anti-establishment action; thirdly, academic analyses have been influenced by a new generation of movement leaders, who, in general, have been attracted to spontaneist rejections of old-style social-democratic and Stalinist organisations and ‘lunatic “Leninisms”’; fourthly, leadership has often been conceived as ‘domination over a group’; and, lastly, the general thrust of social movement theorising has been focused elsewhere.

Our authors (Barker, Johnson & Lavellete 2001: 7-8) associate the fourth of these reasons – the emphasis on domination - with, in particular, Max Weber’s distinction between traditional, charismatic and legal-rational forms of Herrschaft, which, so they argue, leaves no space for a ‘democratic’ form of leadership. The foundation of their alternative approach comes from two sources, both of them marxist. The first of these is Antonio Gramsci’s recognition that, whilst there is no such thing as pure sponteneity – even in the smallest movement somebody initiates actions (though this may not be recorded in history) – any effective democratic leadership must respond to new upsurges of thinking and action that develop ‘spontaneously’, i.e. outside its control (Gramsci 1971: 50-51, 196-8). The second is provided by post-revolutionary Russian writers, such
a V. N. Volosinov (1986), who developed the idea of ‘dialogics’. At its simplest, this is the idea that communication – in whatever form – involves the ‘listener’ as much as the ‘speaker’, and is shaped by perceptions that each has of the other, and hence the context in which it occurs (Barker, Johnson & Lavellete 2001: 8-9). Implicitly drawing these two strands together, Johnson (2001: 105-6) proposes that a democratic leader requires ‘followership skills’, concluding that King’s success was a consequence, in large measure, of his possession of such skills.

However, movement leadership embodies purposive activity as well as a dialectical relationship and dialogical awareness. As Barker, Johnson and Lavellete (2001: 10) explain: ‘Leadership is argumentative, urgently persuasive’ (original emphasis). Such ‘persuasion’ is not only a feature of the relationship between leaders and a broader movement, it must also occur within the decision-making structures of a movement (so that mechanisms for resolving internal conflicts are necessary if a movement is to survive beyond its first domestic dispute). ‘Persuasion’ – both internal and external – is central to democratic leadership, distinguishing it from the antagonism towards argument that typifies ‘authoritative’ approaches associated with religious and military leaders, with parents and, perhaps, even with teachers (Barker, Johnson and Lavellette 2001: 18, developing a distinction made by Bakhtin 1981). This simple contrast between persuasive and authoritative leadership is, though, complicated by Johnson’s (2001: 104, 114) notion of ‘generalship’ – ‘the art of winning the battle’ (on which count King is held to have had some limitations). For Johnson, generalship, as well as communication, is a ‘necessary and democratic response to . . . unevenness in the consciousness of the emancipatory subject, and the organised opposition of the adversary.’ Whilst this is acceptable, one might add that aspects of generalship – notably the snap judgements that have to be made in the midst of a battle – involve momentary suspension of ‘persuasion’ in favour of ‘authority’. (Interestingly, Johnson concludes with the observation that ‘contemporary hostility to the notion of generalship usually reflects the failure of cultural politics to engage in those kinds of collective action, whether against the state or the employer, in which one learns that generalship matters.)

Barker and Laurence Cox (2002: particularly 2-5) have provided an extended discussion of the differences between, on the one hand, academic (or traditional) theorising and intellectuals, and, on the other, movement (or organic) theorising and intellectuals. A key aspect of this distinction is that movement theorising must always concern itself, at some level, with ‘what is to be done?’ (Barker, Johnson & Lavellette 2001: 5). However, answering this question, in a manner that has the power to influence a movement, involves not only the quality of the message but also the ability to deliver it to an audience. In practice, this raises the question of organisation (getting people to meetings, producing newspapers, gaining access to popular media, etc.). Eyerman and Jamieson (1991, cited in Barker, Johnson and Lavellete 2001: 5-6), distinguish three tasks of leadership. These are defined as ‘cosmological’, the enunciation of a vision for a new society and an appropriate theory of transformation (which sets limits to a movement’s development); ‘technical’, that is the art of protest, of selecting appropriate forms of actions; and ‘organisational’, the craft of mobilising actions, maintaining morale, raising funds, and so forth. Whilst, at least in larger organisations, there maybe a degree of specialisation, perhaps distinguishing the tasks of intellectuals from those of
organisers, as Johnson (2001: 109, citing Robnett 1996) emphasises, ‘leadership goes all the way down a movement’.

The argument, thus far, is that to analyse movements against neo-liberal globalisation and, more broadly, to comprehend the shift from resistance to project identities, we need to investigate leadership. Further, that leadership need not be controlling, that it can be democratic, and that, in practice, successful social movements depend upon effective democratic leadership. To assist an investigation of democratic leadership, it is suggested that certain key concepts – including dialogical, followership, persuasion, generalship, movement intellectual and organiser – might be of some value. Before returning to these issues, we offer a brief account of SECC and of Ngwane’s relationship to this movement.

SECC – a brief account

SECC, born in May 2000 (Ngwane 2002a), had two parents: a small group of socialist activists, and widespread antipathy to electricity disconnections. ¹ Starting with the first of these – not because it is more important, but because it is older – let me begin by introducing Trevor Ngwane (who becomes the main actor in our broader account). Born in the Durban township of Lamontville in 1960, he grew up in northern KwaZulu-Natal, where his mother was a nurse at a mission hospital (it was run by one Dr Barker, who created an ‘island of non-racialism . . . and as a result I never considered white people to be “them” . . . though I understand the need for black pride’) (Ngwane 2002b). After schooling – which included time at Marionhill (from where he was expelled in 1976) – he worked for a while as a teacher and a clerk, before attending Fort Hare (from where he was expelled in 1982) (Ngwane 2002b & 2003). He says that by the time he left Fort Hare he was a marxist, ‘not a good one’, but identifying with the ‘marxist perspective’ within sociology (which he studied alongside industrial psychology) (Ngwane 2003 & 2002b). From there, via a University of South Africa correspondence degree and work with the Human Sciences Research Council and the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached), he entered the University of the Witwatersand, where he completed an honours degree in sociology (Kgosana 2002, Ngwane 2002b). He was hired as a junior lecturer, but, forced to resign from this post - Wits ‘thought I was too radical’ (Kgosana 2002) - he took a job at the Wits Workers’ School.

By now ‘it was 1991 or 2’, and having had a brief spell in the recently unbanned Communist Party (SACP), he joined the Socialist Group (SG) (‘a handful of socialists with a Trotskyist background’) (Ngwane 2003). For about two years he worked as an education officer with the Transport and General Workers’ Union (TGWU), until, in 1993, he was expelled for writing a critique of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (which ‘was advocating the impossible – pleasing the working class and the bosses’) (Kgosana 2002). While working again at the Workers’ School, he was active in the African National Congress (ANC), initially as a political education organiser, and then, from 1995, as a councillor for Pimville in Soweto (in which capacity he was employed full-time after the first six months) (Ngwane 2003). In 1999, having publicly criticised the Johannesburg City Council’s ‘Igoli 2002’, which included proposals for

¹ In addition, Ngwane (2003) noted: ‘When we started we were inspired by the “children of Seattle”, the new social movements, the anti-globalisation movement as it was called.’
privatisation of essential services, Ngwane was suspended from membership of the ANC. At the end of the following year he stood as an independent in the municipal election, winning a very respectable 30 percent of the Pimville vote (Ngwane 2002b). By this time, Ngwane was working as a policy analyst employed by the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), a radical NGO, and SECC had been formed. He recalled (2003):

The meetings that led up to SECC were CANSA meetings – the Campaign Against Neoliberalism in South Africa. . . . We had a workshop, a Johannesburg workshop, on CANSA, looking at how to spread ideas against neo-liberalism. We resolved to set up CANSA (Soweto). . . . We [a ‘we’ that would have included some of Ngwane’s SG comrades] met for three months, but we just couldn’t find a way forward. . . . Then one day we decided ‘look, let’s find an issue.’ (At that time it was not just Pimvillians, [but] people from Tladi, Zola . . . and [South African Council of Churches] types) . . . So, we discussed, and electricity was an issue. So, we found money for a workshop, through CANSA, from AIDC . . . and we decided we were going to form an organisation, so we called another workshop, which was addressed by Patrick Bond [and] Dennis Brutus [well known activist professors] . . . and afterwards we had our own discussion, and we had to find a name, so we decided to call it the Soweto [Electricity Crisis Committee].

The issue – electricity – was, then, the second parent of SECC. As Maj Fiil-Flynn (2001: 1) argued in a research report published by the Municipal Services Project (MSP), (an international collaboration involving, among others, the Wits-based Bond): ‘One of the priorities of the [ANC] . . . was to make electricity accessible and affordable to all South Africans. . . . the government has been successful in this regard, having connected more than 2.5 million additional homes to the electricity grid’. The problem was that many people could not afford the electricity that was provided, and, according to the MSP researchers, three-fifths of the 200 Soweto households surveyed had experienced an electricity cut-off in the previous twelve months (Fiil-Flyn 2001: 2). When the MSP asked people about the effects of these cut-offs, the complaints included: food gets spoiled, we cannot cook properly, our personal hygiene is negatively affected, we spend more money on alternative fuels, and the children cannot study properly (Fiil-Flyn 2001: 20). There were two underlying problems. The first was a high level of poverty, with research by Wits sociologists showing an unemployment rate of 40 percent in Soweto (Daniels: 2001). The second was that, in line with government’s neo-liberal economic policies - and specifically its intention to privatise Eskom, the electricity supply corporation - consumers were expected to pay for electricity at an unsubsidised rate (Fiil-Flyn & Greenberg 2002: 302). Eskom’s administration of payments led, however, to further aggravations. According to SECC (2001a), by June 2001 residents were identifying the following problems (additional comments drawn mainly from Daniels 2001 and Mail & Guardian 2001):

- Massive and indiscriminate cut-offs [including disconnecting whole blocks - penalising those who had paid their bills, as well as those
who had not - and cutting power to police stations, clinics and supermarkets;  

• Cut-offs without proper notice;  
• Cockeyed bills [including incompetent double billing];  
• No proper reading of meters, estimates used;  
• Unserved and faulty meters;  
• Huge bills which only a few can afford;  
• Huge arrears, which are so huge they are unpayable [including many in excess of R30,000 and at least one totalling more than R100,000];  
• No concessions for pensioners and disabled;  
• Bribery, extortion and corruption by ESKOM [some employees were sacked for this];  
• Unfair rates, a tariff structure which favours the rich [the cost of electricity in Soweto was 28c per unit, while in the wealthy suburb of Sandton it was 16c, and big business was charged only 7c];  
• Unilateral decision-making by ESKOM without meaningful participation by residents; and  
• Privatisation of ESKOM [a matter that also worried Eskom employees].

In addition to stopping all cut-offs and scrapping all arrears, SECC’s main demand was for one free kilowatt hour per day per person (which Ngwane calculated as involving a subsidy of less than R9 per month) (Fiil-Flynn & Greenberg 2002: 327-8). During early 2001 the organisation was holding meetings attracting hundreds of residents, and on 21 March, Human Rights Day, there was a thousand-strong, APF-backed demonstration that ended at Soweto’s Jabulani Stadium (Goatley 2001, Ngwane 2003). In early April, an Eskom manager told the Mail & Guardian that the aim was to disconnect at least 75 percent of Soweto residents, and he confirmed that cut-offs had increased to 20,000 per month (Daniels 2001). On 5 April, SECC launched Operation Khanyisa (khanyisa being the Zulu for ‘to light’); this involving reconnections of electricity (justified by reference to the ANC’s defiance campaigns) (Daniels 2001, SECC 2001). In November, The Star (Jeter 2001b) quoted Virginia Setshedi, SECC’s vice-chair as saying, ‘We’re getting about 50 calls each day . . . We don’t ask why or when the people were cut off, we just switch them back on,’ and it claimed that Khanyisa had reconnected a total of about 3,000 homes. According to Mike Dorsey and Thulani Guliwe (2002: 411): ‘activists went door-to-door like Robin Hood, illegally reconnecting people for free. The SECC achieved folk-hero status.’ On 9 June, SECC held another thousand-strong march, this time ending at the council offices in Jabulani, and later that month a mass rally decided to launch a campaign for a boycott of all electricity payments (SECC 2001a, SAPA 2001). In mid-October with a growing mood of resistance – reflected in at least one Soweto councillor having his electricity supply disconnected by SECC supporters, and plans to spread the lessons of the campaign to activists across South Africa - Eskom decided on a tactical retreat, announcing that cut-offs would be suspended. In a press release dated 18 October, and at a thousand-strong celebration rally, SECC claimed a victory, but vowed to continue the fight for scrapping arrears and for free electricity (SECC 2001b, Setshedi 2001).
On 6 April 2002, during a SECC demonstration outside the suburban house of Amos Masondo, Mayor of Johannesburg, a guard panicked, started shooting and injured two of the demonstrators. There was a melee, and 87 arrests. Using his cellphone inside a Jeppe police cell, Ngwane told a reporter (Mail & Guardian 2002): ‘Initially they were only going to charge me as I was prepared to take the blame for the damage to property, but instead they arrested us all. We have elderly grannies and youths here in the cell.’ Fifty of the protesters were detained for eleven days, most of them spent in the notorious ‘Sun City’ prison in Soweto (Bond 2002: 13-14, Ngwane 2003). The police had the trial of the Kensington 87 (named after Masondo’s suburb) postponed twice, though when it eventually did take place, on 5 March 2003, the magistrate dismissed the case, complaining about lack of credible evidence and inconsistencies (McKinley 2003: 94).

On 31 August 2002, SECC participated in a 25,000 strong demonstration from Alexandra township to the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) being held in Sandton. Anti-government slogans were prominent, and the significance of the march, the largest social movement mobilisation since 1994, was underlined by the ANC Alliance holding a very much smaller demonstration along the same route only an hour or so later. The APF’s media officer, Dale McKinley, saw this as a turning point (Mail & Guardian 2003a).

By March 2003, SECC had extended its campaign for free electricity by removing newly-installed pre-paid meters and reconnecting power, so that consumers would still not be charged for electricity (Ndaba 2003). On 1 May, Eskom announced that, in Soweto and nine other townships in the Johannesburg area, all arrears accumulated since the suspension of cut-offs would be cancelled. This climb-down, said to cost R1.4 million of Eskom’s R2.4 billion nationwide debt, had been ‘negotiated’ by the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), an ANC ally, in a transparent attempt to bolster its flagging following in the townships (Mail & Guardian 2003a, Banda 2003). However, there can be little doubt that the announcement was a significant victory for the SECC and APF. Free electricity has not yet been won, ‘pre-paid’ is more expensive than ‘metered’ current and structural problems of delivering power to poorer communities remain (McDonald 2003), but SECC’s activities have mobilised thousands of people, securing significant gains (especially for the poor), and its achievements have won it extensive respect and credibility across Soweto.

At the time of writing (20 June 2003), the organisation was moving in a new direction, working to enlarge the base of its support by building on its successes and widening the focus of its activities. According to Ngwane (Neslen 2003): ‘We decided to broaden our struggle to include a demand that all basic services in South Africa should be free – water, housing, electricity, healthcare, education and transport.’ In November 2002, SECC had organised protests against high food prices (SECC 2003). On 15 March 2003, as part of the biggest international protest the world has yet seen, SECC supported the Anti-War Coalition’s city-centre march against a US invasion of Iraq. On 7 June, it backed an APF protest outside the Growth and Development Summit, aiming to draw attention to the suffering associated with unemployment, and linking this with the government’s neo-liberal economic policies (APF 2003a). Then, on 16 June, alongside the APF, it mobilised more than a thousand people, most of then youth, to march in commemoration of the 1976 uprising and in support of free education (APF 2003b).
In beginning to understand SECC’s success, it is worth sketching in three additional considerations. First, from attending SECC meetings and demonstrations, my impression is that its tactics are often innovative, providing inspiration for its supporters. There are the activities associated with major campaigns, such as Khanyisa, but other examples might be given. On protests, leaders like Ngwane and Setsheki use dramatic performance - involving dance, song, audience participation, and tensions with the police - to motivate their supporters. At the 9 June 2001 demonstration, an Eskom official was instructed to receive a memorandum on behalf of Masondo; the only way he could do this safely was in an armoured police vehicle, but, when this arrived on the scene, the truck was immediately surrounded. To maintain order, the police allowed SECC to use the vehicle as a platform, as a stage, giving Ngwane, now in control of the situation, the opportunity to entertain his audience with satirical attacks on the government, and by means of a witty lampoon of the poor official, described as a monkey confined within a police cage. At the WSSD rally, Minister Essop Pahad, President Thabo Mbeki’s personal representative, was permitted on to the podium, only to be ignominiously booted off by the crowd. The 16 June 2003 commemoration ended with a moving and well rehearsed re-enactment of the 1976 killing of Hector Petersen and others.

Secondly, SECC benefits from its symbiotic relationship with the APF, formed early in 2000 out of campaigns against Igoli 2002 and proposed outsourcing at Wits University (Mail & Guardian 2003b). Whilst SECC provides the APF with its largest affiliate and best-known leader, the APF, in turn, supplies SECC with significant resources. First, through APF affiliates, SECC has valuable allies in most townships across the urban conglomeration centred on Johannesburg (and, latterly, some far beyond). Secondly, the APF confers access to experienced trade unionists, such as John Appolis, the APF chair, and to intellectuals, such as McKinley (Ngwane 2003). Thirdly, it furnishes a means to engage in broader coalitions, such as the Social Movement Indaba, which organised the WSSD protest. Fourthly, it has assisted SECC in securing external funding and has provided office accommodation. Because of strong similarities between its own objectives, demands and approach to politics, and those of the APF, SECC decided, at a conference held on 2-3 March 2002, to officially rename itself SECC/APF. At the same gathering, it was agreed that the organisation should commit itself to ‘socialism’ as a long-term goal (Molefe 2002). Importantly, both organisations recognise that, as yet, they have only won the allegiance of a small section of the working class (as Claire Ceruti, a leader of the APF-supporting Keep Left grouping, put it, the APF and SECC are a ‘mini mass movement’) (Ceruti 2002). Consequently, to win major advances it must win over people who presently identify with the ANC. In attempting to achieve this, they support other struggles, including the two-day general strike and 40,000-strong demonstration organised by the Congress of South African Trade Unions at the beginning of October 2002 (Webster 2002).

Thirdly, Ngwane and the APF have developed valuable international connections. His message to Washington, DC protests against the World Bank, and to World Social Forum (WSF) gatherings in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is a simple one: ‘Through international solidarity we were able to get rid of the apartheid regime. But now our freedom is coming to nought, because of the neoliberal policies of these institutions, which undermine our freedom. We need solidarity to oppose these policies’ (Hafferjee 2001). Bond (2003) detected that, at the 2003 WSF, his passionate speeches shifted the agenda towards
Africa-wide organisation and his ‘declaration that the World Bank must be defunded and decommissioned.’ In November 2001, the Washington Post ran a front page story sympathetic to SECC and Khanyisa (Jeter 2001a), and financial support has come from a number of international donors, including the British charity War on Want. In August 2002, the Canadian activist and writer, Naomi Klein, perhaps the single most visible opponent of neo-liberal globalisation, joined a Kensington 87 protest outside Jeppe magistrates’ court. A few days later, on 24 August, she and other celebrities, who had arrived for meetings liked to the WSSD, were on a ‘Freedom of Expression’ march that was brutally attacked by police, using stun grenades (McKinley 2003: 94-6). A week on, international guests participating in the Alexandra to Sandton demonstration helped draw worldwide attention to the inequalities of South Africa’s post-apartheid society.

What emerges from this scan of SECC’s brief history is that the organisation has been relatively successful, both in achieving some of its demands and in mobilising mass opposition to government economic policy. What is less apparent, and is difficult to quantify, is the extent to which this has engendered support for a new pro-working class, socialist identity. However, having watched audience responses to SECC leaders enunciating a socialist argument, and, as at the recent 16 June event, involving demonstrators in singing ‘I’m a socialist’, I have little doubt that this has occurred, at least to some degree. In terms of leadership, the decision to mobilise around electricity cut-offs, clearly a popular issue, was important, as were strategic and tactical choices about how to mobilise. Moreover, there is some evidence of leadership playing a part in moving people from a resistance identity to a project identity. To gain further insights, I turn, first, to a consideration of SECC’s recent policy-making annual general meeting (AGM), held on 1 and 2 March 2003, and then to data obtained from an interview with Ngwane.

A conference and a limited-scope survey

Notes from the AGM include the following observations. Well maintained community hall. First day about 110 present, second about 80. Event started with a play – about school, teachers, money, and so on – performed very professionally by youths from Orange Farm (township south of Soweto). Ngwane arrives, greeted with respect and hand shaking, but not the awe and deference associated with nationalist leaders. People making notes, so they can report back to branches. Good quality lunches prepared by a member (who runs a small catering outfit); they rope me in as a driver to deliver the food, because no other cars available. Discussion mostly in Zulu and Sotho (which is translated for me), though all documents in English. Proceedings disciplined and well organised, but more lively and with better speeches than academic and union meetings (much more so than the former). Delegates obviously feel they ‘own’ the organisation. Speeches from floor include one that argues ‘Jesus died for the truth, so church people should not be frightened;’ another that favours participation in school governing bodies; yet another calling for use of a loud hailer to address people when they gather for sports.

A written constitution distinguishes the mission – ‘free basic services for all’ – from the vision: ‘Our dream is socialism, a society where the working class owns and controls the wealth and the means of producing this wealth’ (i.e. a marxist, not a social-democratic definition). A section on decision making states: ‘decisions must be made
collectively after informed discussion and debate. Majority rules, and the position of the minority is noted, not suppressed.’ Provision is made for local ‘structures’, the usual office bearers, functional sub-committees and ‘desks’, and a weekly extended executive committee, which includes representatives from the structures as well as office bearers and nine sub-committee and desk leaders. The secretary’s report acknowledges that ‘court appearances disturbed our progress’; provides information about four comrades who were suspended because they charged for reconnections; notes there are now 20 structures (i.e. branches or affiliated organisations); and mentions that SECC employs an administrator and an organiser. The treasurers report, which is clearly and carefully presented, includes balance sheets and a 2003 budget allowing expenditure of about R330,000 (which, given 2002 expenditure and fundraising, seems reasonable).

There is a session on the national political situation introduced by Bongani Lubisi, the organiser. He argues, among much else, that capitalism doesn’t only exist in Soweto, and that our movement needs to link with other countries. He also urges the importance of being united, making it more difficult for the National Intelligence Agency to put a million rand under somebody’s door along with a note that reads ‘kill Trevor’. Ngwane’s own contributions emphasise a number of issues. The 2002 decision to articulate a socialist vision was necessary, he says, because otherwise it would be easier for Mbeki’s ideologues to convince people that we need to attract foreign investment, and that, to achieve this, it is necessary to pay for electricity. He proposes that every branch should adopt one workplace, one school and one church, and use these as a focus for activity. A case is made for a mass workers’ party that can fight for socialism. However, he also explains that the organisation’s membership cards are not designed to exclude people or to encourage a ‘top down’ approach (and the constitution allows people to join regardless of political affiliation or creed). Rather, he says, they should be used as a means to involve more people and encourage activism.

To gain a better sense of the organisation, a simple survey was proposed. After a brief explanation to the meeting, it was agreed that everyone present should participate, and almost everybody did (n=77). Table 1 provides a breakdown by branch. Each branch was allowed up to ten delegates, the exact number depending on an assessment of its level of activity and participation. ‘Meadowlands’ actually covers three branches. Ngwane (2003) thought that the level of representation at the AGM roughly reflected the strengths of the various branches. When I suggested to him that the meeting was effectively a gathering of the organisation’s cadre, he replied that many key individuals would have been missing because of funerals and other pressing commitments. A majority of those attending were women (n= 41). All survey questions were in English only, but, in the case of the one open-ended question, there was a request for respondents to answer in whichever language they preferred. The majority responded in English (n=39), there were significant numbers in Zulu (n=17) and Sotho (n=8), and only a handful in other languages (n=5). This open-ended question asked respondents to state why they had attended the AGM? Many gave answers like ‘to know more about SECC’ (n=19) and ‘to improve knowledge in general’ (n=17), and only a smaller number wrote something like ‘to further the fight for socialism’ (n=13). One interpretation of this balance might be that SECC is still a young movement. However, even numbers said they had been a member for (a) less than 12 months (n=32), (b) 12-24 months (n=31) and (c) more than 24 months (n=33).
Table 1. Attendance at SECC/APF AGM, by branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If 'yes', which branch do you belong to?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diepkloof</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pimville</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadowlands</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>48.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orlando East</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiawelo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naturena</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naledi</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dube</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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A question on age showed that SECC/APF is a relatively old organisation (Figure 1). All averages were in the mid to late forties (and six people were over 70). This was in keeping with what had been witnessed on demonstrations. Ngwane (2003) later commented:

We do tend to be an older movement . . . especially in terms of regular attendance of meetings . . . Older people pay for the bills. . . . [T]he youth, including employed people, they tend to leave – especially men – questions of electricity to the folk at home . . . . It’s almost as if, if you’re working, you’ve done enough to provide the funds . . . But also the youth of Soweto is not so much politically active; they mostly go to church.

Figure 1. Attendance at SECC/APF AGM, by age (percentage)
A very telling finding was that only a tenth of those present were employed (n=8) (Figure 2). As Ngwane (2003) acknowledged, SECC/APF is a movement of the unemployed (‘we want to change this’). It is hardly surprising, then, that not a single respondent said they were a union member (though, according to Ngwane, there are some trade unionists in the organisation). By contrast, more than 70 percent of respondents stated they belonged to a church. Whilst there was a wide spread of affiliations, the largest numbers said they were Roman Catholics (n=12) or members of the Zion Christian Church (n=9). Also, about a third of those present claimed membership of a political party (n=25). None were members of the ANC; there was just one member of each of the Pan Africanist Congress, the Azanian Peoples’ Organisation, the Sofasonke Party, and the Workers Party; and there were two members of the SG (presumably one was Ngwane himself). 19 said they belonged to SECC/APF. Since this is not a political party, the finding seemed rather surprising. However, according to Ngwane (2003):

Although they fight for electricity, what [people] actually want is an answer for everything, and they understand that an answer for everything means power. So, basically they are looking for a political party, or, as we put it, the power which can solve all the other problems. In fact, that’s why we had this big debate about membership cards. . . . Some people might consciously want the SECC to be a political party, but others might project it into a political party. Now we don’t like that. We want more clarity . . . so we can discuss about the need for a mass workers’ party; otherwise people think we have arrived.

Figure 2. Attendance at SECC/APF AGM, by whether employed (percentage)

Are you employed?

<table>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>10.4%</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
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So, the impression one gets of SECC is that it is a rather open organisation; sufficiently open that it allows a researcher – albeit a sympathetic one – to attend and gather information at its AGM. This, doubtless, reflects a good measure of confidence, but also, I think, an honest and democratic approach to politics. Honest accounting is a prerequisite for informed debate, fostering, one might suggest, the kind of atmosphere that allows for uninhibited argument and persuasive leadership. Similarly, democratic debate promotes participation and activism, and these aspects of effective mobilisation
might be considered mutually reinforcing. Whilst the survey suggests that SECC/APF has significant weaknesses – notably its age and employment profile – its achievements and healthy internal life should provide a strong basis for moving forward. Before assessing the significance of this for our discussion of identity, the question of leadership will be probed further by means of an interview with Ngwane.

**Time with Trevor**

The following quotes are taken from an interview with Ngwane that took place at the APF office on 18 June 2003. They are presented without comment, because they have an inherent quality and an internal coherence that would be disturbed by frequent interruptions. In the conclusion, some attempt will be made to analyse the significance of Ngwane’s views within the context of the broader issues being raised.

**Influences, inspirations and heroes**

My dad, when he was still alive. He and my mother divorced, so I didn’t spend a lot of time with him, but I did spend a year. He was a political guy; he was drinking; and he kind of gave up on politics or something. He was the kind of person who always praised you. . . . So, I was always feeling, ah, confident.

I had some very good friends – people who listen to you. I had a girlfriend for many years. We went stead quite early . . . so I think that gave me a sense of stability, confidence – I didn’t have to worry about what other teenagers think [laughs]

At Fort Hare, what I learned was ‘solidarity’, because we used to have, once or twice a year, a strike, a boycott. . . . I kind of learned critical thinking. We had some good lecturers – one or two . . . One guy used to give me books during the holidays, he became my friend. His name was Mike Sharm, a youngster from Pietermaritzburg, teaching Development Studies. He used to play guitar. And he made me read things like Hume, Freud, Marx of course, Herbert Marcuse.

At [Wits] university I had a good friend of mine, Robert van Wyk, a coloured guy. I was teaching there, but he was teaching me a different politics, different books. . . . Then there was Roy Martens, who is a member of the Socialist Group – he was the guy who recruited me to the party – he’s a mathematics professor at Wits, but he’s in England now; and his wife Mary. Both used to teach at our school, Wits Workers’ School. So the wife was kind of a friend, more gentle, allowing me to say what is in my head, which I think is important. Whereas the husband - we used to call him the ‘hit man’ – good politics, all the time. . . . [Joining the SG] was a turning point.
Then of course [there is someone] you might know, Jonathan Grossman, in UCT [University of Cape Town] – he’s a good guy, very good. He taught me, how can I say, that, in fact, I was in politics not just because of what I think, but [because] of the way I feel. . . . People are in the struggle because they have dreams for their kids; they have dreams for themselves. Because they feel pain. His politics is . . . don’t talk to what they [workers] present to you, but talk to their hearts. Our slogan in this group is ‘respect for the working class.’ So, this means even a drunken worker should be respected, even an IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] worker, even a murderer. Because of their location, there is something we as socialists can talk to. That doesn’t mean we’ll always succeed.

Of course, my wife is always supportive. We have our stormy moments [laughs]. And then – on an emotional level, my wife, my kids. My kids because they are just good kids. People think if your kids are fine you must be OK [laughs] - maybe its luck. I’ve got four kids – my daughter’s at university, my son his just preparing to [go].

Working with the ANC, when the ANC was unbanned . . . I was kind of hand-picked by Raymond Suttner for their special political education team . . . . That was another small turning point, because most of my life I’ve been teaching, so here I was teaching politics formally - and with my hero Raymond Suttner. OK, we had many political differences. But I was kind of youthful and positive – he used to call me the ‘wild man’, I kept on interrupting him. . . . [He] inspired me for a while. I still like him, but I think he lost it – being a Stalinist, his refusal to stand up to Mbeki.

I’ll say I’m hero worshiper because I like Bob Marley, I like Samora Machel, I like Lenin quite a lot (I read his biographies). [In Durban] I got a book on Sizwe Dube – you know the Lamontville leader (I grew up in Lamontville a bit). . . . Cabral I used to read. OK, looking back at my old notes, I’d have lists of people I admire, mostly men, though I do like Rosa Luxemburg, people like that. . . . I’m also fascinated by ideas – I wish I had more time for ideas.

**Educating and organising**

The union [TGWU] was good for me, because I was also doing education there. And I kind of learned to work with [and] appreciate the real working class. You know they expelled me, so they taught me you need to be tough, and strong. I don’t think I’m a hard guy, but I know it helps – endurance, tenacity. Unions also teach you cunning. So you don’t always fight the fight when your enemy expects you. [John Apolis walks past.] There is John, he can tell you all about that [laughs]. [PA:‘he knows the cunning?’] Even with us [laughs a lot].
And discipline – unions are not a question of emotions. It’s just, like, bureaucracy, inertia and procedures and repetition. In a way this has been good for me, because the social movements are the opposite of that. Which is good, but they can also get carried away, become too flighty, lack an orientation to build structures, which I think are fundamental, other wise things don’t last. You can have a wave, so you ride on the crest of a wave, but then you are flat on your back and there is no water.

Part of our education work in the ANC was helping to set up structures. . . . We learned to distinguish between organising and educating. We had those debates about when education substitutes for organisation. . . . Maybe you don’t need a workshop on the history of the ANC; you just need a workshop on the problems in that area, and how to solve them, and then, last point, how can the ANC help us solve them.

Proper education methods – I got quite a dose of that also from my NGO work, with AIDC. . . . I worked for seven, eight years for Sached, teaching sociology ['I think I had to stop a year or two into Wits']. We always discussed teaching methods.

**Being expelled**

[PA: ‘What’s been the effect of your expulsions?’] When I got kicked out, it’s almost like ‘whenever a door closes, another one opens.’ It’s always marked some kind of progression. Also, when I get kicked out, often I’m given a choice. . . . [The union was straight] ‘We’ll moer [hammer] you, or you - .’ So you decide. It also made me understand my own ideas – what I believe in. It has made me stronger. Because I realised, when I got expelled at Wits, that some people were thinking there’s a bit of humiliation or you feel small, you’re not wanted. But for me it was not a problem. I just felt I could walk tall. That gives you confidence.

**Organising, politics and SECC**

[In the survey, I had asked respondents to say whether they agreed or disagreed with four statements, each of which was a position enunciated by the SECC leadership, either verbally or in documents. These were really leading questions, thus unscientific. However, the responses suggested a level of support for the statements that varied between about 90 percent and 100 percent (this last being for SECC’s definition of socialism).] Some positions we drew up ourselves and, in a way, sell to the comrades. But we spend a lot of time doing that. Our method is to connect with what is there among the people, so if there is a big difference some work has to be done [laughs].

The [SECC] branches are very uneven, and at the moment the struggle is to get them to, more or less, follow the same model. But, typically, a well
functioning branch – let’s say Meadowlands Zone 7, Pimville – the community meets once a week. . . . [W]e change venues because Pimville is huge . . . first week we’re going to Zone 1 and Zone 2 . . . until we round up the eight zones of Pimville. Usually that takes a month or two weeks. And then we have, once a fortnight, a general meeting for the whole of Pimville. . . . [T]he numbers fluctuate, mainly based on how we’ve mobilised . . . (we hardly have time to dish out the pamphlets). But maybe, on average, we’re going to have a hundred people, two hundred people, for the mass meeting, the big one, and then, for the zones, it might be between fifty and a hundred.

[PA: ‘Political education?’] In Pimville, our regular Wednesday meeting, which is the committee, has got a standing item – 20 minutes discussion. It is the same with the forum, the big meeting, Tuesday, for everyone – the tradition is, every meeting, for half an hour the first item is political education. Yesterday it was WTO, last week June the 16th, the week before it was trade unions. Also, we have regular workshop on Thursdays, for all the branches. . . . We do have workshops with the APF, but usually we send ten (maximum). And then we do have organisations who support us – like AIDC – they run special workshops for us. For example, they have a leadership course, and they took five of our comrades – for a week to Cape Town. The beauty of the Tuesday meeting is that you just sit there and listen to political speeches, because everyone who stands up gives a speech. When the topic is opened, the chairperson does a quick speakers’ list: ‘I’m only going to call ten – one, two, three, four, stop.’ Usually three or four will smuggle in at the back.

We think you can’t hold together an organisation like SECC without vision. That is why . . . we didn’t agonise about adopting socialism, we just knew it was the right thing. The AIDC warned us – because AIDC, in a way, for along time, was . . . sponsoring us, we had nothing – they said what about funding! But I feel, and my comrades agree, people are not in SECC because they want electricity. They might come to SECC because of electricity, but they are searching for something – a future for themselves and their kids. SECC cannot give then that, but it can give them that dream, and keep it alive.

**Youthful initiatives**

[PA: ‘On 16 June, whose idea was it to re-enact the events?’] Frankly, it was mine, but I told the APF and everyone just liked it. [PA: ‘Whose idea was it to use wireless microphones on the march?’] That came from the director of the play. [PA: ‘At the beginning, Tebogo had people singing a song that went “I’m a socialista.” How did that song come about?’] Ah, that’s a popular song now, people love it. That’s from Keep Left – the people who sing it quite well is their Potchefstroom branch, Papi [Molefe] and them. . . . [PA: ‘I noticed that, on the march, some of the young people were advancing in a formation,
disco style. What’s the implication of that?]

Look, if I see youth doing that I’ll be very happy, because it means that they are enjoying themselves, and they are putting their own stamp on the songs . . . It means they are embracing the struggle in the way the youth will do it.

This June 16th was very significant for us, because we had whole schools joining us. [PA: ‘On other SECC demonstrations that I’ve been on, if you ask people who Trevor is, they all know. On one occasion, a woman even told me you were like Jesus Christ. But, on this occasion, I asked young people if they knew Trevor Ngwane, and they said “no”. So it’s new people coming in. What was you’re overall assessment of the event?’] It was great. The mood was buoyant. The way we won the youth was through culture. The past two weeks we were rehearsing every day. It caught the imagination of the youth. They don’t want to come and listen to someone; they can come and see, and add. So, now we’ve formally decided culture is going to be an essential component . . . we’re going to have a youth play for the holidays; we’re going to have a choir.

Identity

Sometimes we don’t do it consciously, or we do it so much that we stop thinking of it as forming identity.

In South Africa the overriding identity was race, and it’s important for us that you have to change from that. It’s not to throw away the racial question, because for a long time, with capitalism, racism will be there. And we can’t wipe away the history of racial oppression, and black pride as an attempt to counter that. But we try to go beyond that now. The notion of ‘working class’ is a bit confusing for the unemployed, because they think ‘ah, I’m not working.’ So it’s most important for us to crystallise that identity. We want the unemployed not to be separated from the employed – their struggle is the struggle of the workers too. This is a conscious thing we try to cultivate. It’s also important for us to identify the enemy clearly . . . The ‘other’ is the bourgeoisie. We are trying to avoid this thing of people thinking the oppressor is a white person.

Of course there are other identities, such as women. We haven’t spent a lot of time addressing that, and I think, increasingly, that’s going to come up. Also, youths . . . it’s important for us to get the youths to identify with the class. Youth can still aspire for higher education . . . without actually discarding their working class background, and their allegiance, and the debt they own to the class. Because many youth, their parents sacrificed everything to get them through school.

[PA: ‘Do you see SECC/APF as an identity?] It’s important for us that people identify with the SECC and the APF and with the class [laughs], . . . But we
don’t want people to be so SECC that they don’t see the Orange Farm Crisis Committee as their comrades.

One last point on identity. The way we put it in the [Socialist] Group, is that our allegiance is to the class, not to the APF, so we emphasise to ourselves that the APF can be wrong. For example, we think the APF was wrong to hold its own May Day [a rally separate from that organised by COSATU]. The day might come when the APF no longer helps us to build among the rank and file of workers – that’s the day we leave the APF. But even with the Socialist Group, the day might come.

**Argument**

With May 1, we lost the vote. We had to go twice to the vote. The first time it was a tie. The second time they beat us. So, that was John, the chairperson – a split between the chairperson and the secretary. It was pretty bad, you know. I was very worried, because, if John and his group – they’ve got a group, just don’t declare themselves (still underground I suppose) [laughs] – I was more worried about where they’re going to take the APF. The debate and the vote was a rude awakening. It was a small turning point, where, from now on, the politics is going to be highly contested. It left a bad taste . . . but I was also happy that it was so clear cut.

**Language**

[PA: ‘Another aspect of leadership, which you referred to earlier, is the importance of communicating, and undertaking this with different kinds of audiences. What languages do you use in communicating, and how does this vary depending on the character of the audience?’] I mostly use Zulu, because that’s my language and people understand Zulu in Soweto. And, because I grew up in Zululand, I speak good Zulu, if I may say so [laughs]. The older people, they like that; even Sotho speaking they appreciate the language. I grew up in the rural area where language is important, language is idiom. You don’t speak straight, you decorate your words. I don’t do a lot of that, just clear political message. But I don’t have to throw in an English word 90 percent of the time; although I will do it, consciously, because I want to make a point. . . . I can speak for 15 minutes just in Zulu. People like that.

OK, the youth don’t like that so much. They associate a certain kind of Zulu as kind of rural, even backward. So, then I also use English. I use a bit of Sotho – I’m not good in Sotho at all. I can’t give a speech in Sotho, but I could respond. . . . Of course there are some words like ‘socialism’, which we have to say in English, because you don’t have a Zulu [word].

APF is English. People have complained. With APF, it’s because we are trying to accommodate the intellectuals. An unspoken task is to link the
intellectuals with the township activists, because there is no natural symbiosis. I know in Cape Town there is a real antagonism, especially the township guys. They are lumpen – it’s very easy for them to dismiss you: ‘ah, he’s white; ah, he lives in the suburbs.’ That can be used, well sometimes positively - you know intellectuals can impose themselves – but most times it’s used because people refuse to grapple with difficult ideas, with new insights. People don’t want to be judged, and intellectuals always judge you. . . But not so much now – people have made a name for themselves; people like John are respected, [and] Dale. In fact, I would say my job now is the opposite. . . .

We had a whole political discussion about three weeks ago on xenophobia, tribalism, nepotism. What came out strongly was the need to use the different languages – Venda, Shangaan. Already our newsletter has got a Venda name. Shangaan is suppressed, like Venda – people laugh at you. It would be quite a brilliant strike on my part to learn Shangaan.

**Networks and leadership**

I read the book [Brecher et al] – it’s a nice book. I learnt a lot . . . but I don’t agree with certain anarchist, autonomist, perspectives in the book. I agree, generally, that you need networks, direction from below, control leaders. . . . But then [people] start denying the role of leadership, or presenting leadership as a bad thing. [In] all human social intercourse there will be elements of leadership. I think you would agree with Foucault: ‘Power is everywhere!’ . . . So, I think [Brecher’s] formulation is correct: ‘let’s build networks of rank and file to control leaders.’ What I don’t agree with is when some who believe in him say: ‘we don’t need leaders.’ Because they are lying, or they refuse to have formal mechanisms or procedures to elect or appoint leaders, on the grounds that they don’t want a leader. . . . For real rank and file control of leaders, you need formal mechanisms.

Internet doesn’t work here, because people don’t have internet. I think the model of the internet is a wrong model. OK, the internet has helped the social movement – the need for communication. But people are trying to apply the model away from the internet. I can see the limitations of thinking that way. I think, in any case, the internet is quite an individualised means. Sometimes, I just don’t look at it for a week, not because I don’t want to, but because I don’t have the time. By the time I switch it on, the debate has moved a hundred miles [this is probably a reference to eDebate, a South African-based discussion list]. . . . It’s not collective, it’s intellectually biased (you have to know how to use a computer . . .).

**An organiser**
Our best organiser is our organiser, Bongani. Why is he a good? Because, firstly, he knows the branches. He goes there (which is something I don’t do in the APF). Secondly, he does the work himself. He was announcing on Friday that he’s going to Meadowlands Zone 2, to do door-to-door. He’s arranging with the comrades there to go house-to-house. He can show them how it’s done. And, by doing that, he gets to know all the people, more or less well.

He’s a member of our group. He’s a political guy. For us, politics is key - this means someone who thinks politically, not personally.

And he’s working class. He grew up with workers. He spends time in shebeens, so he talks with workers. At any given moment he’s able to tell you, ‘people think . . .’. There’s always a passing craze in the township – he knows. He’s a hard worker. The other thing, he’s brave – he faces the police, faces Eskom. Also, interpersonal skills – humility . . . he’s gentle, but quite strong. He’s a builder.

[PA: ‘Is leadership ability different from organisation ability?’] Yeah, it’s possible. Although, I don’t know what a leader would be without organisation. But, it’s possible. One can be a charismatic, messianic leader. Then, some people around you might handle the organisation. But you, too, must have an organisational perspective . . . I think a good leader would be a good organiser.

**Courage**

[Do you think bravery is an important part of leadership?] Oh yeah, I think so. People are worried that the ANC’s goin’ to kill you. . . . That’s something you have to live with. I went through those moments, especially when I got expelled [from the ANC], and I was getting the warnings from people. I would get real scared at night, especially when I drive home, because I know the moment, so I know it’s goin’a happen here. So you get cold sweats. But, after a while, you overcome the physical response to fear, then it’s more philosophical. Well they shot dead a friend of mine, who was also in our group – he was leader in Chiawelo, Bongani. I thought, they killed Bongani, so, you get defeatist, and reckless.

You also need moral strength or moral courage as a leader. Like you were saying: ‘Have you ever made mistakes?’ You can’t keep on making mistakes as a leader, but if you are scared of making mistakes then you can’t lead. . . . The reason so many people have so called ‘sold out’ in the ANC . . . is because they lost their moral courage and their vision. I think it’s got something to do with the Soviet Union collapsing. I think the ANC leadership, especially the Communist Party leadership, manipulated people’s emotions, people’s feelings, their sense of morality. For instance, they
exaggerated the role of activists in winning freedom. Like the ANC won us freedom – bullshit!

You need political courage – to question. Next door was the ANC region – I used to attend next door, actually. We were planning for a rally [at Orlando Stadium in Soweto], and then it turned out that only one man was going to speak, which was Thabo Mbeki. Usually you used to have the local branch for Orlando - starting with their SANCO, [then] SACP, ANC - then the Soweto sub-region, then Gauteng, including COSATU, until at the end, Mandela. So I asked them ‘comrades, what’s going on?’ ‘No, no, that’s the word, direct from the chief’s office.’ ‘Oh, who’s the chief?’ ‘Mbeki.’ They didn’t have to accept this, there was no threat to their lives, it was a problem of moral courage.’

Readers will interpret Ngwane’s various comments in a multitude of different ways. In the conclusion I will offer some suggestions aimed at relating them to our concern with anti-globalisation movements and identity.

**Conclusion**

Our central premise is that the development of a project identity is a conscious process. Real people with a vision of an alternative way of organising society must persuade others to support that alternative, and this persuasion requires leadership. In this paper, attention has focussed on the role of an anti-globalisation social movement, SECC, in generating a working class identity infused with a socialist project. Whilst the name of the organisation, and its origins, imply ‘resistance’, and people initially associate with it on that basis, its leaders and constitution advance a socialist vision of society. In other words, SECC acts as a vehicle for moving people from a resistance to a project identity. But this vehicle is not a South African taxi, travelling a fixed route at terrifying speed; it is a family car, in which both parents and two teenage children argue for diverse destinations and different routes. Most of the paper is concerned with leadership, a missing link that can help us to assess where the car will go – to explain the shape and the size of our project identity.

Much of the evidence presented here lends support the theorisation of leadership presented by Barker, Johnson and Lavalette. With the overthrow of apartheid still within the recent past, few people in South Africa would doubt the importance of leadership. There are, however, questions about style and form of leadership. In contrast to the ANC’s increasingly ‘top down’ style – Ngwane’s final story is one of very many that could be provided – SECC and its leadership are self-consciously democratic. This is reflected in Ngwane’s concern to relate to new moods (e.g. the establishment of SECC), his dialogical appreciation of language (e.g. moving between ‘good’ and township Zulu), and his followership skills (e.g. learning from Lubisi’s grounded knowledge). The purposive aspect of democratic leadership is represented at different levels, including the use of leaflets to persuade people to attend a movement event and arguments within the APF leadership. Generalship was apparent at Jeppe police station, when Ngwane attempted to prevent the arrest of ‘elderly grannies’ by taking responsibility for the
disorder, and on the 9 June 2001 demonstration, when he effectively took control of a police vehicle. There is evidence, too, of different levels of leadership - cosmological (articulating a vision), technical (pushing for a re-enactment of 16 June), and organisational (detailed knowledge of the workings of the Pimville SECC) – though, as suggested, there is also some specialisation (e.g. a separation between Ngwane activities and those of Lubisi). Moreover, Ngwane’s comments about the loss of moral courage among SACP members (who, we can reasonably assume, were not short of physical courage), is suggestive of limitations imposed by cosmological constraints.

However, our account also raises ways in which aspects of the theorisation might be further developed (and new research conceived). First, it highlights the importance of formal structures for the maintenance of democratic leadership. These ensure that leaders are accountable and provide a means of resolving conflicts (unlike lose networks and NGOs), and they assist followership and encourage activism. Secondly, and in somewhat similar fashion, the organiser is not only conceived as an implementer, but also as a person who can sense and communicate a mood on the ground. Thirdly, persuasion can be enhanced through the development of movement education, which reinforces the ability of activists to operate as leaders. Fourthly, communication needs to be considered broadly, encompassing, for instance, choirs, theatre groups and informal street dramas and crowd songs, as well as speeches, newspapers, etc. Good theatre, like a good speech, must talk to the heart, but what are the implications of different forms of communication for leadership and organisation?

Barker, Johnson and Lavelette (2001: 12) touch on the personal resources associated with leadership, commenting: ‘In large part, such personal resources are ‘trained’ or ‘learned’. Skills and capacities, with the confidence to use them, are honed by practice and testing.’ Clearly the fatalistic notion of ‘cometh the moment cometh the man [sic]’ has little value in understanding democratic leadership. As with any art, leadership entails an apprenticeship in associated crafts (and much of this involves watching and learning from others), but what about the ‘x’ factor that makes some leaders special. Partly this is about ‘the moment’, partly individual histories, and partly it concerns personal qualities. Perhaps these factors are too idiosyncratic and perhaps the really special leaders are too rare, for the ‘x’ component of leadership to be grasped by the generalising social scientist. However, in reviewing Ngwane’s biography – and, in my view, he is a very impressive leader – one is struck by two considerations. First, that, whilst confidence is doubtless related to achievements gained in movement contexts, it can also be affected by non-movement experiences. In Ngwane’s case, weight was placed on encouragement received from his father, on support from his wife, on good friendships, and even on social esteem associated with having a girl friend or ‘good kids’. Secondly, Ngwane’s exceptionally varied career has provided him with a rich storehouse of practical knowledge on which he can draw. He is familiar with rural and urban South Africa; has been an educator, a trade unionist and an ANC councillor; has built different kinds of organisation, and been expelled from some of them; and he has participated in countless meetings and mobilisations. Related to this, he is a movement intellectual, but has trained as an academic intellectual, and, with a critical awareness of both the strengths and the limitations of academic knowledge, he is able to use this as a further leadership resource.
Distinguishing an ideal typical democratic leadership from traditional, charismatic and legal-rational forms of *Herrschaft* is a necessary starting point for advancing the study of social movements. However, it would be wrong, I think, to assume that effective movement leadership is purely democratic (in the sense described and understood by Barker, Johnson and Lavelette). In the case of Ngwane, alongside his democratic commitment and style of leadership, there is also a charismatic appeal. Whilst it is difficult to know what, exactly, makes him an attractive leader – probably some people do appreciate his deadlocks, his trumpet playing, and so on – what has impressed me is his courage and his honesty (which comes through in the way he talks about himself). Moreover, as Ngwane acknowledged, successful movements do require some degree of bureaucracy (and thus, perhaps, even a modicum of legal-rational leadership). These issues – and especially that of charisma – are raised because their relationship to the ideal of democratic leadership are worthy of examination. At what point does charisma, which could be a valuable resource of democratic leadership, undermine possibilities for democratic advance?

One wonders, too, about the extent to which leadership is context specific; that is, the degree to which any theorisation of the phenomenon must be hedged with caveats. Barker, Johnson and Lavelette are rooted, in particular, in decades of British activism of various kinds, and this provides a pillar of strength to their work. However, having come from a similar British background, I am aware of implicit assumptions that permeate their conception of a ‘social movement’. First, even now South Africa provides a political environment that is more physically (and economically) threatening than that which exists in Britain. One should not exaggerate – there is not the repression of apartheid or of Mugabe’s Zimbabwe – but Ngwane’s fears for his life were not misplaced. As a consequence, courage becomes a more significant aspect of leadership than it is in Britain. Of course, successful leadership in Britain also involves particular qualities, and because leadership skills are context related it makes it difficult for a mass leader to move from one terrain to another.

The second point concerns the character of SECC/APF as a social movement. Whilst it started life as a single-issue campaign, it has subsequently broadened its range of concerns and extended its vision; its focus has moved from ‘resistance’ to ‘project’. In part, this shift is, doubtless, a consequence of leadership intervention aimed at politicising a movement. But it is also has organic logic. Poor households in Soweto are not only affected adversely by electricity cut-offs, they also experience high levels of unemployment and costs of transport, education, housing and food that, on a low income, are sometimes impossible to bear. Thus, there is also pressure from below to mobilise around additional issues. In confronting the immensity of the task, as now conceived, it becomes necessary to look for new allies – youth, employed workers, people in other townships, similar movements in other countries, and so forth – and thus to search for common goals and strategies that can unite this broader movement. This also raises the question of timeframes. If a movement is envisaged as akin to single-issue campaign, or as a recruiting arena or front for a political party, there is little to be gained from investing heavily in developing formal structures and education programmes and in producing new leaders. If, however, a long haul is foreseen, these components of leadership and organisation make better sense. There is, of course, a tension, perhaps a contradiction, at the heart of this process, because the more SECC/APF becomes a
general movement against capitalism, the more it takes on the characteristics of party. So far, the benefits of a socialist vision and a disciplined organisation have contributed to the success of the immediate campaign, but this will not always be the case.

In posing the problem of the fundamental character of a social movement, we touch upon the role of politics in defining the character of its leadership. This is raised in number of ways. First, if one has a long-term goal of securing a socialist society, it makes it easier to overcome the set-backs and disappointments that plague any movement (this is a point made by Ngwane in a variety of ways). Secondly, while a lose network form of leadership may suit the conditions and experiences of some well-funded northern intellectuals and relatively well-paid and well-educated activists, it is does not address the material circumstances or the long-term interests of ordinary workers and poorer people generally. Thirdly, for any movement linked to a governing party (or even to a would-be governing party operating within capitalist constraints), style of leadership is subject to divergent dynamics. In South Africa, this can be seen within all of the ANC’s allies, even COSATU. It is not that democratic leadership is completely absent from these organisations, rather that it is constantly being compromised by pressures to toe the line. So then, the character of leadership involves political choices and cannot be fully understood outside of the context in which it operates.

Finally, what is the relevance of leadership for our discussion of anti-globalisation identities? Given that movement leadership must respond to spontaneous moods as well purposive designs, is inherently dialogical and involves followership as well as generalship, those identities will be influenced by the lived realities of globalisation and the outcomes of struggles against its impacts. Since, as argued elsewhere (Alexander 2001), those realities are profoundly uneven (notwithstanding their many common elements), the specificities of the new identities will vary from one part of the world to another; though regional patterns may well emerge, as seems, to some extent, to be the case already. In addition, however, the new identities will be shaped by the outcome of political battles between leaderships offering different visions and divergent styles of leadership. If the outcome of such struggles is, as yet, impossible to determine, their existence is already a reality. We may yet see the emergence of new nationalisms, or of a cuddly capitalism, but if Ngwane and his ilk hold sway, it would mean, as he indicates, a strengthened working-class identity linked to a vision of a world without poverty and oppression. A luta continua!

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