Social Movements, Socio-Economic Rights and Substantial Democratisation in South Africa

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> I have always said; the struggle is not over yet. I can tell you, we are free politically because black people were not supposed to take top political positions, but economically it is a struggle. … Now we think we are free and yet we are in a struggle with our own children … who are now telling us that you are going to pay or out you are. It is a bitter struggle to me and it is very difficult. I knew my enemy and it was the then [apartheid] government. … But now we are talking about our own children who were in the struggle and who is giving hell to us. (VM, Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign activist, 06/2002)

In spite of the fact that leaders of the anti-apartheid social movements have entered into political power and defined the relations between state and civil society in collaborative terms, South Africa's democratic transition has not put an end to adversarial popular struggles (Ballard, Habib, Ngcobo and Valodia 2003). One decade into democratic rule, the South African state faces severe challenges in including and transforming a racially and socially fractured and polarised society. In fact, post-apartheid South Africa has been marked by an increase in social inequality, particularly in the context of neo-liberal macroeconomic policies (Daniel, Habib and Southall 2003). Material deprivation, combined with increasing use of force against popular protests, have produced and radicalised a range of new social movements that politicise socio-economic rights and demand access to land, health care, housing and public services (Desai 2003). Contestation over the meaning of democratisation, and the relationship between economic liberalisation and the pursuit of social justice lie at the heart of these struggles.

This chapter focuses on the politics of a post-apartheid social movement, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. We specifically examine how community organisations with the Campaign mobilise against state-driven privatisation and cost recovery initiatives to gain access to water, electricity and housing in Cape Town. The chapter analyses the Campaign's political strategies and capacity to fight for basic services and social justice by focusing on (a) the nature of and sources of political capacities organised through and around neighbourhood issues, (b) the ways such capacities scale up into a social movement such as the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, and (c) the implications of the mobilisation for substantial democratisation more generally in South Africa. Through this specific empirical focus, the chapter examines the clash between policies for economic liberalisation and struggles for socio-economic justice and their relationship to substantial democratisation, a democracy that should allow diverse actors both the possibility and the capacity to make use of democratic rights and institutions to promote their instrumental and democratic aims (Törnquist 1999, 2002b).

Substantial democratisation and social movements

South African democratisation has in many ways been emblematic of 'third wave'

transitions to liberal democracy that form part of a burgeoning academic literature on democratisation (see the chapter by Harriss, Törnquist and Stokke). Grugel (2002) points out that many of these transitions and the associated academic discourse have had a narrow focus on the minimalist institutional requirements of liberal democracy, most notably the repeated conduct of free and fair elections. Beetham (2000) describes this as a tendency to elevate a means to an end, to mistake institutional instruments with their democratic purpose. Instead, he proposes that democracy should be defined in terms of its underlying principles and only secondarily in terms of the institutions that uphold them. The core democratic principles of popular control and political equality over collectively binding decisions certainly require functional institutions, but these may take different forms in different contexts. A system of decision-making is democratic to the extent that it embodies these principles, and institutions are democratic to the extent that they help realise them. In consequence democratisation will always be an unfinished process and the challenge is to undertake contextual and comparative analyses of the dynamics of democratisation.

The parallel political and academic discourse on human rights and rights-based democratisation is marked by a tendency to reduce human rights to civil and political rights, leaving out the considerably more complicated relationship between democracy and socio-economic rights (Beetham 2000). Both clusters of rights are closely linked to democracy, albeit in different ways. Civil and political rights, on the one hand, are an integral part of democracy: 'Democracy without them would be a contradiction in terms, since the absence of freedoms of speech, of association, of assembly, of movement, or of guaranteed security of the person and due process would make elections a façade and render any popular control over government impossible' (Beetham 2000:114). Socio-economic rights, on the other hand, stand in a relation of mutual dependency with democracy: 'The widespread absence of such rights compromises civil and political equality, the quality of public life and the long-term viability of democratic institutions themselves; democracy, on the other hand, constitutes a necessary if not sufficient condition for the protection of economic and social rights' (Beetham 2000:114). The common view that civil and political rights constitute a necessary and sufficient condition for the realisation of socio-economic rights implies that liberal democracy will automatically lead to development. Beetham's position, on the contrary, means that it is necessary to examine the ways in which socio-economic rights are politicised, institutionalised and realised through the struggles of diverse actors within the political spaces of the liberal democratic state (Millstein, Oldfield and Stokke 2003).

In this chapter we address the relationship between democratisation and socio-economic justice through an analysis of social movement activism. Understanding processes of substantial democracy requires analyses not only of institutions and rights, but also citizens and social movement agency to make use of these as means towards instrumental and democratic ends (Törnquist 1999, 2002b). Following Törnquist's analysis, we focus on how different actors understand their political opportunities, where in the political terrain they position themselves, which issues and interest they politicise, and how people are mobilised into movements and politics. What remain under-examined however by both Beetham and Törnquist are the sources of political capacity for different groups of citizens to engage in political practice, conceptualisation necessary to analyse the differentiation of power or capacity to participate, protest, and organise for socio-economic and political change (Stokke 2002). The following section

considers this issue.

Sources of political capacity for social movements

Studies of social movements have focused on why and how collective actions emerge, but have paid much less attention to movement politics and the political outcomes of collective action. In consequence, analyses have depicted much about the structural grievances and internal organisation of movements but less about the relational and contextual aspects that are central to understanding local political dynamics. To address this issue the following section reads the literature on social movements relative to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of power (see the chapter by Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist). Bourdieu's (1991, 1998) basic argument is that social practices and the power to act are constituted by the actors' dispositions for practice (habitus), the different forms of capital (e.g. economic, social, cultural, symbolic capital) they possess and the fields (e.g. the political field) within which practices take place (Stokke 2002). This conception of social practice identifies principal sources of power in terms of *positions* (defined by the volume and composition of capital possessed by the occupants of different positions) and *forces* (defined by relations of domination, subordination or equivalence between different positions) within a field. Within the theme of collective action, these general concepts of power relate to more specific notions of political opportunity structures (relations within the political field), mobilisation structures (social capital), cultural framing (symbolic capital) and collective identity (habitus).

A primary source of capacity lies in a movement's relations with key actors and institutions in the political field. Tarrow (1994) observes that there are complex and dynamic political opportunity structures that social movements utilise to achieve their goals. It is common to highlight the importance of formal rights and institutions within the political system, for instance the presence of constitutional rights and institutions upholding these rights, as evident in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (1996). While rights and institutions might provide a formal framework for participation, political channels and relationships appear decisive for actual access to and transformation of rights and institutions (McEwan 2000). Movement theorists also emphasise that social movements exist within a political context of collaboration and competition in society, reflecting both formal and informal associations between and within organs of civil society (Della Porta and Diani 1999).

Another source of political capacity is found in a movement's ability to mobilise individuals and groups in society. Social movement theorists use the notion of mobilising structures to conceptualise social networks and institutions that serve as a social infrastructure for collective mobilisation and to explain organisational forms within a movement (Della Porta and Diani 1999). Mobilising structures can be formal or informal in character and exist within or outside social movements. The least organised and most commonly overlooked structures include networks of friends, neighbours and colleagues in everyday life. Informal mobilising structures also include networks of activists as well as memory communities. Such social infrastructures can facilitate communication and solidarity prior to and during collective mobilisation.

A movement's ability to participate in the struggle over meaning regarding rights,

issues, actors and policies constitutes an additional capacity. Social movements 'draw on the cultural stock for images of what is an injustice, for what is a violation of what ought to be' (Zald 1996:266). Cultural framing of injustice and political goals, of rights and responsibilities are contested and changeable. This means that there is an active and competitive process of strategic framing that occurs in a variety of arenas, within movements as well as between movement activists and authorities for symbolic capital, i.e. to be recognised as legitimate representatives of certain interests and groups.

Finally, collective action is also based on self-reflexive identities among the actors (habitus). Individual participation in collective action is not based on an objective reality but rather perceptions and interpretations of it, and, social movements themselves play an active role in constructing and communicating collective identities (Melucci 1996). Previous experiences with oppositional politics facilitate and frame new mobilisation, not the least through pre-existing cultural repertoires of how to protest and organise. This means that the classificatory principles and organising principles of action in the habitus constitute a main source of capacity for collective action (Stokke 2002).

Drawing on Bourdieu general conceptualisation of power and more intermediate level notions from social movement theory, these conceptual avenues provide a basis for analysing movement politics. More specific pointers are provided by Törnquist's (1999, 2002b) identification of three key issues for the study of movement politics. These address: (a) where in the political terrain the actors choose to work; (b) what issues and interests they promote and politicise; and (c) how people are mobilised into political movements and the political sphere. The following discussion of social movement political capacity in Cape Town considers these questions and their relation to community organisation and movement capacities in the post-apartheid context.

Liberal democracy and economic liberalisation in South Africa

South Africa's democratic transition in the early 1990s produced a radical constitutional reform that granted extensive formal rights for all citizens and numerous institutional reforms to ensure their actual implementation. These changes at the national scale have been followed by local elections, extensive local government reforms and political discourses endorsing local governance and popular participation (Atkinson and Reitzes 1998, Cameron 1999, Parnell, Pieterse, Swilling and Wooldridge 2002). Democratic elections have placed the tripartite alliance from the anti-apartheid struggle – the African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) – in a hegemonic political position at the national level. These transformations mean that historically well-organised political and civic associations have been placed in a situation with radically transformed and widened local, regional and national political spaces (Neocosmos 1998, Smit 2001). This combination of a vibrant civil society and a conducive political environment should, it seems, provide an ideal case for substantial democratisation, i.e. a situation where ordinary citizens have both the possibility and the capacity to make use of democratic rights, institutions and discourses to address their instrumental and democratic aims (Törnquist 2002b). Unfortunately, in practice, the post-apartheid political and socio-economic conditions have proven to be more complex and contradictory (Bond 2000a, Daniel et al. 2003, Desai 2003).

One major obstacle for political participation in South Africa remains the persistent and increasing problems of poverty and inequality. While the immediate post-1994 period was characterised by a remarkable political liberalisation, the ensuing post-apartheid period has been marked by a transition in macro-economic policy with important bearings on the realisation of socio-economic rights. In the early post-apartheid period, the state-led Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was designed, concomitant with other restructuring processes, to rectify socio-economic differentiation and discrimination. The macro-economic context on which the RDP built was, however, constrained and circumscribed by the structural imperatives of the domestic and global economy. Thus, state-led transformation battled with and, eventually, gave way to the neo-liberal government policy for Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (Adelzadeh 1996, Marais 2001). Current macro-economic policies, while designed to attract private investments and thereby enhance economic competitiveness in the long run, have perpetuated and deepened unemployment, poverty and inequality in the short run (Adelzadeh 1996, Nattrass 2003, Nattrass and Seekings 2001).

Although South African citizens have been granted extensive *de jure* socio-economic rights, the translation of these rights into *de facto* socio-economic empowerment has proven to be extremely complicated. While the constitution, for example, guarantees a right to adequate shelter for all citizens, it remains a daunting task to translate this into actual houses for marginalised groups. In this situation, new civil society organisations have emerged around issues of housing provisioning (e.g. the South African Homeless People's Federation) and state evictions and disconnections of services (e.g. Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee) (Millstein et al. 2003, Ngwane 2003, Oldfield and Stokke 2002). Effective political participation for new social movements, have turned out to be complicated in practice. Civic associations and trade unions, which were instrumental in the struggle against apartheid, have been curtailed through co-optation of civic leaders, declining popular support and the depoliticising effect of the neo-liberal and technocratic approach to development (Adler and Steinberg 2000, Adler and Webster 2000, Edigheji 2003).[1] Moreover the specificities of these struggles are bound up in broader politics about the role of civil society relative to the state and market (Greenstein 2003), paralleling global development debates discussed in Harriss, Stokke, and Törnquist's introductory chapter.

In popular and elite discourses on civil society in South Africa, a distinction is commonly made between two idealised types of civil society organisations – community based organisation (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – each with a distinctive relationship with the state (Habib 2003). Whereas CBOs are seen as adversarial collective actors that challenge state implementation of neo-liberalism, NGOs are seen as service-delivery mechanisms in sub-contracting partnerships with the state. This discourse constructs a binary opposition between adversarial politics and collaboration in governance, which conflates the diversity in actually existing civil society and frames civil society organisations in monolithic and simplified ways (Habib and Kotzé 2003). CBOs and NGOs choose, in reality, creative combinations of strategies of engagement and disengagement with the state. The South African Homeless People's Federation (SAHPF), for example, maintains productive political relations with state actors at national and provincial scales in order to mobilise resources for housing development that benefit local communities, but they also influence the formulation of national housing policy by providing alternative discourses and practical

experiences with local people-driven housing processes (Millstein et al. 2003). These strategies of working as a civil organisation in collaboration with the state and adversarial struggle, stand in a relationship of mutual dependency:

> The prime source of the SAHPF's political capacity has been their ability to mobilise local communities and achieve results through an alternative housing development model. These achievements and their own housing discourse have been crucial for successful political negotiations with state actors at different scales … Thus the SAHPF's ability to function as a civil/political movement has granted them a certain capacity to participate in the complicated process of turning de jure rights to adequate shelter into de facto rights for the urban poor as citizens of a democratic South Africa. (Millstein et al. 2003:467)

Another of the more well known new movements, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), has also adopted a 'strategic positioning at the interface between community level concerns and formal institutional channels' (Jones 2004:7). The TAC has grounded advocacy for HIV/AIDS treatment and health care within a human rights-based strategy. It has especially made skilful use of South Africa's system of extensive constitutional rights, and the currently favourable legal culture with judges who are sensitive to socio-economic rights and the courts maintaining autonomy and legitimacy vis-à-vis the executive (Greenstein 2003, Jones 2004). The prevalence of such combined political strategies means that there is a 'need to transcend the false divide that has emerged between opposition and engagement in South Africa' (Habib and Kotzé 2003:266).

This brief discussion points to important challenges of substantial democratisation in the context of economic liberalisation. Although South Africa has made progress towards formal democratisation at both the national, provincial and municipal levels, the experiences of 'everyday' South Africans and the diverse movements that represent them are mired in the complex ways in which the unequal legacies of the apartheid past are reinvented in the post-apartheid present (Reitzes 1998). In the variety of daily struggles occurring around the country, community organisations and social movements draw on extensive, yet differentiated, political capacity to utilise and transform democratic rights and institutions, particularly against the privatisation of basic household services.

Social movements and anti-privatisation politics

One of the most visible expressions of the tension between substantial democratisation and neo-liberalism is the contemporary shift from statist service delivery to a domination of private sector actors and principles: 'In the latter model, the state acts as a service 'ensurer' rather than a service 'provider' … and municipal services are 'run more like a business', with financial cost recovery becoming the most important measure of performance' (McDonald and Smith 2002:1). Set against the apartheid legacy of racially uneven service delivery and subsidies, the South African state has made repeated promises (especially through the RDP) about the delivery of basic services to the urban and rural poor (Bond 2000a). Although many South Africans do not have access to piped water and remain without electricity, there have certainly been important achievements with major expansion of service infrastructure since 1994. However, this impressive record is now being undermined by an increasingly

aggressive cost recovery on public services by local governments who are largely dependent on locally generated revenue (Jaglin 2002, Wooldridge 2002). Due to a limited ability to pay, a large and growing number of low-income families have experienced service cut-offs and evictions from their homes. This situation is more likely to be intensified than alleviated in the near future. Indeed, it has been observed that: ‘Privatisation, for the very poor, threatens to become the new apartheid, an instrument of exclusion, not just from a better life, but even the very basics’ (Rostron 2002).

The process of privatisation and cost recovery in municipal services is controversial and contested. Various anti-eviction and anti-disconnection organisations have emerged around community issues of housing and services. National and local labour unions have also challenged privatisation of public enterprises and associated restructuring of work. Anti-Privatisation Forums and community-based organisations have emerged and are seeking to coordinate joint struggles against state-initiated privatisation processes (Ngwane 2003). This has led one commentator to observe that: ‘Privatisation may yet provoke the most explosive political threat, post-1994 grassroots movements, ironically reminiscent of the anti-apartheid ‘civics’, organising to defend the same people against the ravages of a profit-driven democracy’ (Rostron 2002).

In Cape Town confrontations over payment for services have intensified. The City has instituted harsh cost-recovery policies in an attempt to recover arrears on rates and service bills.[2] City policies have charged, for instance, that:

> Action will be taken against those who do not pay – the Council will not hesitate to cut off services and take legal action where necessary. Residents who do not pay will be without electricity or water and will have to pay the additional costs of reconnection fees, lawyers’ fees and legal costs. They could ultimately have their houses sold (if they are ratepayers) or be evicted (if they are tenants in a Council house). (City of Cape Town, in Xali 2002, p.110)

Although the implementation of this policy has been piecemeal and has fluctuated with changing political party control of the municipality, disconnections of water and electricity, repossessions of furniture in lieu of rental payment, evictions, and arrests for protesting such actions have become commonplace. In response, residents live without water and electricity (even homes); many illegally reconnect themselves to services, and organise in their neighbourhoods and across the city (Smith and Hanson 2003). The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign marks one response to these service delivery policies (Desai 2003, Desai and Pithouse 2003, Oldfield and Stokke 2002).

Public service delivery was a key issue in the anti-apartheid struggle and has been crucial to post-apartheid attempts to ensure actual socio-economic rights. The current tendencies towards privatisation of public services calls into question the state’s parallel commitments to social justice and substantial democratisation. Thus, privatisation and cost recovery on services are not simple question of issue-based politics, but a more general test of the substance of democracy in the new South Africa. Critics of neo-liberalism argue that these tendencies demonstrate the turn to the right in South African governance and that this has come at the cost of socio-economic redistribution and justice (Bond 2000a, McDonald and Pape 2002). They claim that policies of cost-recovery in service delivery jeopardise the post-apartheid project by disenfranchising and further alienating black communities and citizens already disadvantaged by the

ravages of the apartheid system. Poor households and communities face an affordability crisis due to high unemployment levels and the real difficulties in eking out livelihoods in the post-apartheid period. Ironically, in the same way that community issues of housing and public services were contentious issues behind civic struggles against apartheid (Seekings 2000), similar issues are rallying points for new social movements striving for justice in the context of South Africa's new liberal democracy. This constitutes an immediate material basis for new social movements such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (Ngwane 2003, Oldfield and Stokke 2002); the latter group is investigated in the following discussion.

Political capacity and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign

The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC)[3] was officially formed in February 2001 to fight against evictions, water and electricity disconnections, and poor health services. A diversity of issues lie behind the emergence of the Campaign, although the initial impetus was Cape Town City Council-led evictions of families from two areas of state-owned flats in former coloured group areas. In both instances, communities confronted the City Council, the police and army who had been brought in to assist officials with the eviction process (Leitch 2003). Violence between police and residents ensued and activists were arrested in the process. In February 2001 the Campaign was publicly launched in Tafelsig in Mitchells Plain, including a call to any groups facing similar issues to join the struggle. The Campaign is an umbrella body now representing approximately 25-30 communities primarily within the City of Cape Town but also with representation in out-lying small towns in the Western Cape. In practice, the capacity of the Campaign is a reflection of the various organisations under its wing as well as the ways in which community-specific struggles coalesce in the Campaign's citywide actions.

Community organisations within the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign represent a wide range of contexts: from old apartheid rental housing and state-organised bank bonded properties to post-apartheid areas of state-built low-income housing and informal settlements. Not surprisingly then neighbourhood organisations organise around a variety of issues and have chosen different strategies regarding how and where to be active in the post-apartheid political terrain. Many communities seek to engage municipal and regional state institutions and political actors. However their experiences of accessibility to the state are diverse. Some CBOs have good access to, for instance, councillors (e.g. Athlone, Mfuleni and Delft) but most of the communities (e.g. Mandela Park and Tafelsig) have found it difficult to get councillors, the Provincial Minister of Housing or representatives from parastatals and banks to attend meetings and engage with the campaign in any meaningful way. This has led some organisations to a strategy of resistance through mass mobilisation and public protest (especially Tafelsig and Mandela Park) (Oldfield and Stokke 2002).

The modes of mobilisation and protest vary considerably among the organisations within the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. In some areas – many former coloured townships – activists tend to work one-on-one with residents and officials (e.g. Elsies River and Lentegeur). In other areas, it is normal to have community meetings and mass protests and residents are expected to participate in these types of activities

(e.g. Mandela Park and Mfuleni). In many communities, these two modes of organising are combined (e.g. Athlone and Valhalla Park). The repertoire of protest ranges from strategies that are compatible with the rules and procedures of the formal political system (e.g. community meetings, legal demonstrations and lobbying through petitions and negotiations, as well as legal challenges in the courts) to practices that are more confrontational and unlawful (e.g. illegal water and electricity reconnections, occupations of repossessed houses, obstructions of evictions and illegal sit-ins at banks and political institutions). Many of the organisations combine diverse kinds of protests and only employ the more radical resistance strategies when negotiations and legal demonstrations fail to yield acceptable outcomes.

To understand the source and potential of the Campaign in greater detail requires analysis of the differentiated political capacity of community organisations that constitute the Campaign, as well as the overall direction and challenge that the Campaign collectively presents in the local political arena, particular to the City of Cape Town. Drawing on the experiences of two community organisations at the forefront of the Campaign, the following discussion focuses on the plurality of political strategies they combine in everyday political practice, in particular strategies of territorial control, oppositional resistance, engagement, and legal challenges.[4]

Opposition through engagement in Valhalla Park[5]

The United Civic Front of Valhalla Park provides a useful illustration of the ways in which many community activists and organisations engage with state officials and institutions in order to oppose it and its policies through overt and covert actions. As one of the more successful community organisations in the Campaign, it has won significant gains from working within and outside of state-accepted norms of behaviour.

The Valhalla Park Civic has chosen persistent and direct engagement with officials in the police and the health and housing departments who work in the Valhalla Park local area. By building up relationships with local officials over a long period of time, Civic leaders have found ways in which to make them more responsive. In the case of the police, for instance, the leaders' personal connections and participation in the Community Policing Forum have helped to improve servicing of the area. A similar relationship has developed with the local Head of the Housing Office. Unlike officials in many poor communities in Cape Town, he has allowed unemployed residents who are unable to pay rentals to apply for indigent status to relieve them of some of the burden of their bills (WA, Valhalla Park, 05/2002).

Although Civic leaders engage with officials to improve public service delivery and resolve specific immediate needs in the community, they do not depend on these types of relationships to resist evictions or to improve conditions in the neighbourhood. Activists often take direct action – for instance occupying the local housing office until a response from the city was forthcoming (W.A. 05/2002) – to force the city to respond. The first community-wide protest occurred in response to the cut-off of the entire neighbourhood's electricity in the mid-1990s, despite many households paying their bills regularly. Through a series of persistent protests, the Council agreed to reconnect electricity. Two activists remember the event:

> People protested and we demanded, we actually demanded that they come

> reconnect the electricity… After a lot of ups and downs, they decided to come in, to put the people's electricity back on. We got onto that yellow van that rides from house to house to put the electricity on. We civic members, we got onto the van and we rode with them till past midnight from street to street. We didn't let them go until everybody's light had been turned on. (GR, GS, Valhalla Park, 14/08/2003).

Since this period, residents and activists have been vigilant about Council activities in the area. If residents see a Council vehicle entering the neighbourhood, they alert the Civic leaders. Residents and activists then respond immediately to ensure that Council does not take any action without negotiating with the Civic. Their persistence and insistence that Council must consult with the Civic has paid off from their perspective as the Council rarely enters the area without consultation. It is the savvy mix of engagement and opposition that has generated a series of successes for the community. When negotiations with Council fail, the Civic finds it appropriate to take radical action.

The United Civic Front has recently won a High Court case against the City of Cape Town, and the result could impact on the City's legal obligations in providing for informal settlement services across the city. 'Homeless' Valhalla Park residents – those families on the housing waiting list living in backyard shacks or as sub-tenants in overcrowded flats – have occupied state-owned land and built an informal settlement in the neighbourhood to address their own desperate housing needs. When the Council failed to respond or provide sanitation and water services, the United Civic Front took the Cape Town City Council to the High Court to demand their constitutional right to services. In July 2003, the United Civic Front won this landmark case in which the High Court held the City responsible for providing services to the informal area (Case 8970/01, 7 July 2003, Neville Rudolph and 49 others vs. the City of Cape Town). Although the City initiated an appeal against the Case, their appeal was rejected by the Court, which was a major victory for the Civic after two hard years of campaigning with the assistance of an NGO, the Legal Resource Centre (F.B., Valhalla Park, 18/11/2003).

Committed and continuous leadership that has been active in the area for a long time characterises community organising in this area. Leaders play multiple roles, but they are also supported by a structure of community activists operating at the street-level. A weekly meeting is held every Thursday night where street leaders and the executive committee report back to residents on progress on various issues. It is in these forums that decisions are taken on appropriate responses and strategies, in particular on when to work in the system and when to disrupt and challenge it. In general, leaders of the Civic continue to pursue goals through working with Council officials and politicians, but express little faith in the system:

> Council don't listen to us if we go through the right channels. They don't listen. They make as if they listen if you go through the right channels. They don't take notice of us. But, if we do what we do, then immediately they respond. (GS, Valhalla Park, 14/08/2003)

From experience, they have found that the Council responds only if they present a direct challenge to governance and the operation of the Council in the area. As long as the pressure from the community is maintained, relations with local state actors are critical for the identification and implementation of practical solutions to concrete local problems.

Resistance through public protest in Mandela Park

While evictions and disconnections in Tafelsig (Mitchells Plain) were the catalysts for the Campaign's formation, Mandela Park (Khayelitsha) is now the most visible arena for large-scale evictions and collective resistance. And whereas the Valhalla Park United Civic Front has successfully combined political engagement and mass mobilisation, the anti-eviction campaigns in Tafelsig and Mandela Park have gradually entered into a strategy of collective resistance and a confrontational relationship with local government, the banking sector, and the police.

The cornerstone of the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign (MPAEC) has been the weekly community meeting with large numbers of residents attending. The community meetings discuss the problems facing the community and make decisions about strategies and activities. Campaign activists also report back to the community about their communication with banks, councillors and state institutions. The Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign has sought an active dialogue with the banks and the Provincial Minister of Housing, inviting them to community meetings but refusing to send delegates to meetings outside the community. The campaign has raised collective demands regarding the sub-standard quality of the houses, ownership of the land, housing subsidies and the handling of outstanding debts. These demands have not been addressed in any meaningful way by the relevant state institutions. Instead the campaign activists have been met with what they see as attempts at diffusing the issues and confusing the activists, as they are told to take their housing complaints to the developers, their economic problems to Servcon (a parastatal negotiating between banks and communities where the majority of residents fail to meet bond payments), and their land demands to politicians. All the invited banks, Servcon and the Provincial Minister of Housing have failed to meet with the campaign in the community (MN, FG, Mandela Park 06/2002).

The explicit policy of the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign is to build alliances with those who support them in their struggle but not spend time on talks that can take the focus away from collective mobilisation. So far, no councillors, political parties, trade unions or NGOs have taken up this supportive role on terms that are acceptable to the community. This lack of meaningful political engagement combined with the actual practices and future threats of evictions have made the MPAEC take resort in various forms of public protest such as public demonstrations and occupations at banks and political institutions. The community has also mobilised against evictions and repossessions of property and has put evicted families back into their homes (Legassick 2004). These various actions have been met with increasingly harsh measures, including a court interdict on behalf of the banks against community leaders, arrests and lengthy periods of incarceration of activists, and increased use of police violence during evictions and repossession of property. At the time of writing, one Campaign leader is living under long-term bail conditions that prevent him from attending any public meetings, gatherings, marches, pickets of any nature or communicate with any evicted person. Others are moving between different 'safe houses' to avoid harassment and arrests by the police at night.

In general terms, the MPAEC has experienced a criminalisation of the campaign and its leaders. Community members and activists are spending time and energy in court and

trying to raise funds for bail and lawyers. While the Campaign has experienced a few unexpected victories at the local Magistrate Court, the MPAEC does not come anywhere close to possessing the material resources and legal skills required for successfully utilising the legal route of contestation that has been followed by the Treatment Action Campaign (Greenstein 2003). Despite this constant lack of funds, the Tafelsig and the Mandela Park campaigns nevertheless insist on maintaining their autonomy in regard to all non-governmental organisations:

> We don't accept money from anybody for a simple reason: we don't want them to direct us. We are on the ground, we will direct our struggle. So we don't want NGOs to rule us or to act on our behalf, because they don't have our interests at heart. They have their own interests at heart. We understand that and I always make it clear that the NGOs they get paid to be in the struggle, - we don't. We are forced to be in the struggle because of our circumstances at home. (AC, Tafelsig, 05/2002)

With limited economic resources, organisational fragmentation in the absence of a coordinating ideological movement and no political allies, the collective resistance in Mandela Park and Tafelsig face the danger of becoming 'isolated militant particularisms, unable to function in the face of sustained repression' (Desai and Pithouse 2003:23).

Scaling up to city and national politics

How do the diverse strategies of neighbourhood-based organisations mesh as a citywide and possibly national movement? Our analysis of this challenging question will consider the political field in which the Campaign operates at a city scale, the networks that formally and informally link Campaign community organisations together and that link the Campaign to other organisations within and beyond the city, and the symbolic capital that has been generated through Campaign organising since its launch in 2001.

The political field in which the Campaign operates is complex because of the co-existence and interdependence of local councils, a metropolitan government, and national and provincial government with often confusing divisions of labour between them. This complexity of political actors and the ensuing fragmentation of policy and implementation, provide both obstacles and opportunities for new movements like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. At the city scale the Campaign draws on many positive and negative relationships with state officials and with local councillors and politicians in more senior positions in provincial government in particular. Although the Campaign is officially non-partisan and rejects any affiliation with political parties, in practice many Campaign activists are ex-African National Congress (ANC) cadre, some maintaining their membership despite Campaign politics and positions that are often read as explicitly anti-ANC. In the context of a national election in April 2004 and local government elections in 2005, these types of political affiliations have become increasingly politicised in neighbourhood organising and at a city scale (I. Petersen, personal communication 3/2004).

In challenging policy, the Campaign also works with a range of parastatals (the Public Protector, the City Ombudsperson, and the Human Rights Commission) and NGOs (the Legal Resource Centre and the Alternative Information and Development Centre), as well as trade unions such as the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU)

and other progressive coalitions in the city. These relationships constitute the multi-dimensional nature of local politics in Cape Town. They are sustained not only through formal policy and legal channels, but also through the intimate relationships that are generated through engagement in local politics. Nevertheless, the general shortage of economic and organisational resources within the Campaign means that activists often find it very difficult to acquire the knowledge and political networks required for successful manoeuvring in the local political field.

In this situation, the Campaign has sought to build a social movement from local struggles while continuing to fight the city on its cost-recovery and indigence policies. At the neighbourhood scale, these are issues that constitute daily struggles between activists and municipal officials. Mass action has drawn neighbourhood organisations together, acting as a cement of experience through which collective 'anti-eviction' identities have formed. The generation of this collective habitus has proved essential in crossing the spatial and racial divides that previously separated poor neighbourhoods. An activist who is very involved in organising at the Campaign scale, speaks to the important of collective public action:

> Mass work is the most important form of struggle of the campaign. The strength of the campaign lies in its ability to engage in mass mobilisation, public meetings, marches, demonstrations and petitions. Mass mobilisation is the most effective way of stopping evictions and water cuts. Communities barricade streets, block entrances to prevent the sheriff from entering houses, local marches to clinics, council/rent offices, police stations and councillors. Mass marches take place during the Council Exco meetings of the Unicity, to the mayor of Cape Town and the MEC for housing. When water is disconnected, mass reconnections take place and private companies doing the disconnections are barred from entering the area. Evicted families are reinstated into their homes. Mass occupations of public offices take place to force officials to negotiate with communities. These methods have proven to be the most effective in resisting evictions and water cuts and forcing housing authorities to rethink their policies (Leitch 2003:5).

Such mass actions are crucial to the building of a coherent campaign, while it also provides symbolic capital for progressive activists and organisations in Cape Town.

It would be foolish to romanticise the concrete difficulties the Campaign faces in its organising, for instance: a dire shortage of resources that even makes Campaign meetings difficult, criminalisation of activists by the police and some officials, and the diversity of ideologies on organisation structure and leadership roles encompassed within the Campaign. Yet organisations that make up the Campaign are strong on the ground, and their collective strength has increased due to common structural conditions and shared political experiences. Activism in neighbourhoods across the city and the growing number of legal challenges to policy are the micro-scale bits and pieces that collectively push and stretch – in other words, substantiate – the nature of democracy in Cape Town. The question remains however to what extent and at what scales social movement activism yields political influence and thereby contributes to the continued process of democratisation beyond the local arena.

There are attempts at scaling up the struggle from community-specific single issues to a more co-ordinated and ideological movement. This is most visible in the Cape Town and Gauteng Anti-Privatisation Forums, which brings together trade unions (especially

SAMWU), community-based groups and campaigns and individual activists. The APF serves as a local meeting point and source of ideological and moral support, but also as a stepping-stone towards interactions and possible collaborations at the national scale as well as exposure to parallel struggles beyond South Africa.

There are also ongoing initiatives to draw together social movements like the WCAEC at the national level, for instance through the Social Movements Indaba that was formed in parallel to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, and reconvened for annual meetings of South African social movements in 2003 and 2004 in Johannesburg. Trevor Ngwane, at the forefront of this movement, describes the initial potential of such a political fusion as well as its fragility:

> The highlight was the [first] national meeting [in December 2001]. It was really a beautiful moment…. We went softly, softly to let co-ordination happen as naturally as possible, to exchange information, to see if we can support each other… We didn't select one campaign as we want to see how things develop and to let things develop properly so they don't fall apart later… we are going to let the organisation develop by working on our unity. (T. Ngwane, 16/01/2002)

Still in a formative stage, these processes attempt to bridge the diverse ideologies, tactics, cultures of protest and organisation and access to resources that threaten to splinter social movements on the national scale. These processes have, however, also brought out tensions among the new movements over the question of the needs for and content of joint political strategies with representatives from the Landless People's Movement and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign currently advocating a social movement strategy based on political autonomy and opposition. At the present juncture it seems safe to conclude that, although the new movements have a number of commonalities in their social basis and their struggle for socio-economic justice in the context of neo-liberalism, the process of building a co-ordinated alternative political movement is slow in the making. In the meantime, the new community-based struggles remain organisationally weak and politically divided. Despite this fragmented and particularistic character, the presence of new social movements nevertheless disrupts hegemony by posing a challenge at the symbolic level.

In simplified terms, contemporary South Africa is marked by an intensifying competition over the right to be the legitimate representatives of 'poor people in struggle'. On the one hand are the tripartite alliance and its civil society affiliates that were formed during the anti-apartheid struggle and has held state power throughout the last decade (McKinley 1997). This alliance now possesses extensive institutionalised political capital.[6] On the other hand there are the new social movements that mobilise communities in a post-apartheid struggle for socio-economic justice in the context of liberal democracy and a neo-liberal post-apartheid state. The power of these movements originates in their strategic handling of the political opportunity structures and, their familiarity with community issues and ability to mobilise communities for public acts of resistance.

The clash between policies for economic liberalisation and struggles for socio-economic justice is an ongoing multi-faceted struggle. The local and national politics it generates are diverse and dynamic with everyday civil society characterised by balancing acts between political engagement and opposition. While political engagement may grant access to material resources for community development, it may also undermine the

legitimacy of the movement as an independent representative of struggling people. Community mobilisation may empower the movement in dealing with state institutions, but may also lead to branding it as a disruptive force that is targeted for state repression. ANC representatives increasingly distinguish between positive (collaborating) social forces and disruptive (adversarial) 'ultra-revolutionaries'. The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign is increasingly placed in the latter category in the hegemonic political discourse (Makinana 2003, Ntabazalila 2002).

The political discourses of the 'old anti-apartheid' and 'new post-apartheid' movements revolve around shared reference points, as both claim to be the legitimate representatives of poor people that struggle for social justice. This congruence creates a political space for constructive collaboration. The present period seems, however, to be marked by a growing mistrust between civil society organisations and actors from the state. On the one hand, state officials and politicians interpret activities by organisations like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign as by definition adversarial. On the other hand, activists and organisations interpret state actions as, by definition, neo-liberal and therefore counter to the interests of the poor and progressive politics. Grounded analysis of community organising, as the one presented in this chapter, shows that community politics include both collaboration with and opposition to the state, as well as diverse strategies that reflect specific historically and place-generated political capacities. The manner in which the state handles this challenge from the new social movements to access socio-economic rights and to participate autonomously in politics, will be crucial to the continual process of substantial democratisation in South Africa.

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[1] The political and developmental roles of civics, especially the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), are the subject of heated debates (Seekings 1997). Theorists on the left write the organisation off as a puppet of the ANC and the tripartite alliance, hamstrung through its subordinated engagement with the state (Xali 2002). Equally often, SANCO has been used to account for community representation and the vibrancy of community-level input to state discussions at a national level. Heller (2003) argues that SANCO continues to play an important role at the community level, but not as an adversarial social movement.

[2] On 1 April 2004 the Cape Town City Council made a major concession to renters in public housing: Rental arrears accumulated until July 1997 have been written off; the City will match R1 for every R1 repayment on arrears accrued between July 1997 and June 2002; and, for the first time, families in arrears will be allowed to purchase their rental housing (Johns 2004).

[3] Research on the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign has included focus groups with activists in different organisation and interviews with leaders of organisations (Oldfield and Stokke 2002). The focus groups are ongoing and conducted in partnership with the Community Research Group, the research wing of the Campaign. Quotations and material drawn from these interviews and focus groups are credited to individuals, but initials are used to protect the interviewees' anonymity.

[4] Although each strategy is discussed in the context of a particular neighbourhood and activist organisation, many activists and organisations use such strategies.

[5] For a fuller discussion of the practices of opposition and engagement in community organising in the Campaign and the types of politics it challenges, see Oldfield (2003).

6 While Bourdieu presents a relatively weak theory of the political field and political institutions, he interestingly identifies politics as a symbolic struggle to define existing power relations as legitimate or illegitimate (Bourdieu 1991). Possession of political capital, which is a form of symbolic capital that is specific to the political field, gives 'the spokesperson' the legitimate right to speak on behalf of 'the

people'. Such capital can be the personal capital of the spokesperson (based on fame and popularity). However, it can also reside as 'objectified political capital' within permanent institutions – accumulated in the course of previous struggles and institutionalised in positions and instruments for mobilisation – and be granted to individuals as political delegates.