

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Zwelizima Vavi, 'SA still moving in apartheid direction', Irene Grootboom memorial lecture, Site B Hall, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 18 October 2010.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Sakhela Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa*, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010.
37. Hilary Wainwright, 'Transformative resistance: The role of labour and trade unions', in D. McDonald and G. Ruiters (eds), *Alternatives to Privatization: Public Options for Essential Services in the Global South*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 19.
38. Matuma Letsoalo, 'COSATU comes clean on internal divisions', *Mail & Guardian*, 25 November 2010–1 December 2011.
39. COSATU, 'Declaration of the Civil Society Conference held on 27–28 October 2010, Boksburg', Politicsweb, 28 October 2010, www.politicsweb.co.za/ (accessed 13 November 2010).
40. SAMWU, 'Mobilise and unite against privatization, casual jobs & pre-paid meters', pamphlet, September 2004.
41. See, for example, Heinrich Böhmke, 'The branding of social movements', *Dispositions*, Vol. 1 (2010); Luke Sinwell, 'Defensive social movements need to engage with politics', *Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2010).
42. Vavi, 'SA still moving in apartheid direction'.
43. Nigel Gibson (ed.), *Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006, p. 33.

Dawson, Marcella C. & Sinwell, Luke. (2012)
Contesting Transformation: Popular
 Resistance in Twenty-first Century South
 Africa. London: Pluto Press

Agents of Change? Reflecting on the Impact of Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Fiona Anciano

EARLIER ANALYSES OF 'NEW' SOCIAL MOVEMENTS¹

Scholars of democracy, both in South Africa and internationally, broadly celebrated the arrival of post-apartheid social movements, placing fairly high hopes on their role in the South African political landscape. A rich literature emerged written by both academics and activists looking at the composition, aims, leadership and impact of these movements. This chapter will use four key themes arising from this writing to assess the impact of social movements a decade after their emergence.

The first – and perhaps most dominant – theme was that of social movements challenging the hegemony of the African National Congress (ANC) and the state and, in so doing, creating a new political landscape. It was argued that social movements 'have implicitly launched a fundamental challenge to the hegemonic political and socioeconomic discourse that defines the prevailing status quo'.² The growth of social movements was seen to redefine the terrain of political identity and solidarity.³ Indeed, seasoned activist Trevor Ngwane explains that movements 'have to fight the state, destroy it and replace it with a workers' state'.⁴ This perspective was balanced by the view that new movements may want to challenge existing power relations, but do not always cast this as a political revolutionary project.⁵ Allied to the idea of challenging hegemony was the view that movements would concomitantly generate state responsiveness. Authors argued that social movements contributed to the restoration of political plurality by creating substantive uncertainty, which in turn kept politicians on their toes, making them responsive in particular to the country's most marginalised citizenry.⁶ Others argued that '[s]ocial movements

have grown into a potent and decisive force in shaping the political agenda and strategies of the state'.⁷

A second theme encompassed the view that social movements had explicit and progressive economic and political agendas. A key argument was that such movements were established with the political aim of mobilising the poor to contest the implementation of neoliberal social policies; many movements were deliberately founded on the principle of the redistribution of scarce resources in favour of marginalised communities.⁸ Where movements *did* focus on identity issues, these were actually driven by socioeconomic concerns. One view of the explicit political project of the movements argues that 'the bulk of the new social movements represent those who still believe in ... the possibility of a non-capitalist future' and are 'resisting global neo-liberalism and forging an ideological and organisational alternative to the capitalist ANC'.⁹ Authors note that although the majority of movements have explicit political agendas, political projects can be taken in different directions, for example, rights-based oppositions versus counter-hegemonic opposition. This contrasts fundamental transformation, on the one hand, with deepened claims to citizenship within existing structures, on the other.¹⁰

Thirdly, academic and activist writers held the view that social movements had the potential to generate mass mobilisation and support, through both individual movements and through building networks. There was a strong sense that the validity and strength of the movements lay in their real and potential mass support base; 'community movements' were distinguished by 'mass mobilisation' as their prime source of social sanction.¹¹ Reinforcing this notion was the outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Two marches took place from Alexandra township to Sandton, Johannesburg's key financial and commercial centre. The march organised and supported by social movements attracted about 25,000 supporters, while the ANC-backed march had fewer than 5,000.¹²

The idea of building mass-based organisations correlated closely to that of linking like-minded social movements together to form even larger sources of mobilisation and pressure: 'the existence of a range of struggles, even if not coordinated in a national liberation movement, can result in a "chain of equivalence" that confronts and transforms relations with dominant powers'.¹³ Others argued that the movements were starting to create new networks and make horizontal connections and linkages without coordinating structures

and resources from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and left activists.¹⁴

The final theme put forward by authors was the notion that social movements were agents of democracy and that organisations had the 'moral high ground', particularly in light of influencing democratic change: 'Civil society (and the state as well) is *made* democratic by the existence of social movements attempting to extend the notion of "rights" to the socio-economic sphere.'¹⁵ Ballard et al. argued that social movements were the 'new voice of the masses' there 'to complete the unfinished business of democracy'.¹⁶ The new movements represented the voices of the poor and marginalised and were able to apply pressure on government to pay greater attention to these groups. Indeed, 'even the more militant movements that engage in technically illegal activities ... use the language of rights to invest their activities with a sense that they are endorsed by a higher code of "good"'.¹⁷ For long-time activist Dale McKinley, the activities of social movements would result in an increasing number of people experiencing and practising meaningful democracy.¹⁸

How have social movements fared in relation to these four themes? The following sections will address these issues through close analysis of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and Sikhula Sonke. These movements have been chosen for analysis because they represent different ideologies (socialism versus rights-based), strategies (direct action versus negotiation), locations (urban versus rural), and approaches to the ANC-government and democracy.

THE SECC AND SIKHULA SONKE

Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.¹⁹

It was the embracing of small opportunities by a local group of activists that led to the formation of the SECC in May 2000. In 1999 the national electricity provider, Eskom, changed the electricity pricing structure in Soweto, resulting in a rise in electricity prices of nearly 47 per cent in one year.²⁰ Township residents spontaneously began forming small groups to fight this price rise.²¹ At the same time a group of activists leading the Campaign against Neoliberalism in South Africa were looking for ways to spread anti-neoliberal ideas in Soweto. They realised they needed an 'issue' to attach to their campaign and thus focused on the electricity crisis facing Sowetans. They called a Soweto-wide mass workshop and invited other groups

in the township to participate. This united smaller groups into a formal movement, named the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee.²² Sikhula Sonke (meaning 'We Grow Together' in isiXhosa) emerged in 2002 in a very different context to the SECC. It is a rural-based organisation in the Western Cape that defines itself as a 'women-led social movement trade union' that deals with livelihood challenges faced by farm women.²³ In many respects it developed organically out of the needs of farm workers, but it was also invented, in the face of necessity, by the NGO Women on Farms. Although Sikhula Sonke was not initially conceived as a trade union, the movement soon evolved in this direction, because one of the most pressing problems facing wine and fruit farm workers was limited access to effective union representation.²⁴ Sikhula Sonke's objectives stretch beyond those of a traditional trade union, addressing all issues that affect women and their children.²⁵ It aims to 'craft an organisational model that will not only challenge the unfair labour practices applied to women farm workers, but also to address the social and economic development needs of women who live and work on farms'.²⁶ Sikhula Sonke is thus neither a traditional trade union nor a conventional social movement, but a unique hybrid of both.

CHALLENGING HEGEMONY

There is little doubt that many social movements such as the SECC have clear ideological agendas and in this sense conform closely to earlier writings arguing that social movements challenge hegemonic political and socioeconomic discourse. The SECC leadership initially strongly promoted the idea of socialism as the ideology of the movement.²⁷ It followed the view that 'the working class must control and have access to all goods and services and the means to produce these'.²⁸ Several years later this strong focus on a counter-hegemonic political project has waned to some degree, and today fewer in the movement talk passionately of overthrowing the hegemonic state or implementing an uncompromised socialist programme.²⁹ Sikhula Sonke, on the other hand, does not have a clear political ideology governing its work, thus it is not its explicit intention to shape the political agenda of the state. Much of its focus is on day-to-day trade union issues; in this respect it challenges the entrenched patterns of subordination on fruit and wine farms rather than hegemonic political discourses. However, in tackling workers' rights and social concerns on farms, it has in practice – albeit it to a limited extent – engaged with and challenged the state.

In challenging hegemony through generating state responsiveness, the SECC and Sikhula Sonke, like many other social movements, have had notable – albeit sporadic – victories. For the SECC, the most significant of these is related to Operation Khanyisa (meaning 'to light'), a campaign focused on providing access to electricity for all by illegally reconnecting homes to the electricity grid in Soweto. The SECC's mobilisation of sections of the community in Soweto around electricity provision, its widespread reconnections and its success in generating media attention resulted in Eskom (South Africa's main supplier of electricity) announcing a moratorium on cut-offs and offering an amnesty on arrears.³⁰ As Papadakis explains, '[w]ithout the key mobilization of, massive rent boycott by, and pressure coming from the SECC, Eskom and the government might have probably never accepted to write-off such large amounts of electricity debts to the benefit of the poor township residents'.³¹ More recently, the work of the SECC has again compelled Eskom to stop cut-offs. By applying pressure from below through direct action, the SECC compelled the parastatal to change its technology: Eskom responded to SECC action by installing 'green boxes', which are essentially electricity meters that cannot be bypassed. In defiance of Eskom's response, the SECC organiser noted 'Eskom know we will reconnect'.³² These meters were initially installed in one area of Soweto, but with the support of the SECC, other communities, such as Orlando, have fought the installation of new meters and to date Eskom has had no success in installing meters more widely in Soweto.³³

In terms of creating uncertainty and facilitating higher levels of accountability, the SECC explain: 'We are the watchdogs for the residents of Soweto ... We put pressure on the state to deliver for working class residents'.³⁴ Certainly, in the early days of SECC activism, ANC councillors and local officials were very aware of – and wary of – the SECC's activities.³⁵ Johannesburg City Council's speaker explained that there had been discussions around why these movements were surfacing and whether there was a problem with the ANC's work.³⁶ In this regard, the SECC has been instrumental in keeping the debate about service delivery active. One official respondent noted: 'They are actually beneficial. What they do is make sure that those who are the leaders in council should exercise better leadership around how council governs'.³⁷ The SECC have also been an effective watchdog in regard to the process of policy implementation. Johannesburg Water explains: 'The SECC have not had much effect on policy, but they have changed the operational

side in terms of the quality of work we do ... It [the SECC's activities] has made us a lot more rigorous in our approach to make sure we do provide a quality service.³⁸ One example of this more 'rigorous' approach is the employment of community facilitators who went to every household to explain the facts about the implications of a pre-paid meter.³⁹ In this way, the SECC compelled additional communication – albeit in one direction – between service deliverers and those they serve.

A further way in which the SECC has attempted to challenge the political landscape is by forming a political party and contesting local government elections. The SECC formed the Operation Khanyisa Movement (OKM) with the intention of 'making people aware of how oppressed they are',⁴⁰ and 'exposing bourgeois democracy' and 'the capitalist class agenda of the ANC government'.⁴¹ In 2006, under the OKM banner, the organisation, although unable to gain a ward seat, won a proportional representation seat in the Johannesburg City Council. It contested the 2011 elections and again won one proportional representation seat. It recognises that its impact within the council is limited, but wants to 'bring a socialist voice into the bourgeois chamber'.⁴² It also believes that having a city councillor will increase knowledge of the movement in the region and its support base will grow.⁴³ The decision to form the OKM was not universally supported. The umbrella body to which SECC belongs, namely the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), and its affiliates were unable to reach an agreement about what line to take on electoral politics. This arguably weakened the APF substantially.⁴⁴

In challenging hegemony through generating state responsiveness, Sikhula Sonke too has had success. As part of a collective effort, it was able to win the first ever moratorium on farm dweller evictions. To fight against evictions in the Jonkershoek Valley near Stellenbosch in the Western Cape Province, which houses almost 80 farm-worker families, local farm workers formed the Jonkershoek Crisis Committee. This committee, with extensive assistance from Sikhula Sonke and other sympathetic partners such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), held marches and generated substantial media coverage. As a result of this ongoing action, key decision makers placed a moratorium on evictions in Jonkershoek and signed a memorandum agreeing that land tenure policy for farm workers is inadequate and needed to be reviewed. Indeed, the provincial Ministry of Agriculture felt that the process of dialogue and constructive engagement may well be the first of its kind in agricultural communities and could serve as a blueprint for

other provinces.⁴⁵ Sikhula Sonke was also somewhat successful in its sectoral determination campaign, getting the Employment Condition Commission, which establishes minimum wages for farm workers, to scrap the two-tier system prescribing different minimum wages for rural and urban areas.⁴⁶ Moreover, the organisation has also been successful in holding government departments to account in instances where it has presented individual cases involving working conditions or wages to the Department of Labour, or cases involving social grants to the Department of Social Welfare.

Sikhula Sonke does not actively attempt to 'alter the political landscape', yet through its alliances with other civil society organisations, such as COSATU, it has at times generated substantive uncertainty in a localised setting. Sikhula Sonke has also effectively used the media to generate responsiveness from political leaders, such as in the Jonkershoek case. In 2007 the Department of Agriculture acknowledged that Sikhula Sonke exposes irregularities and to some extent functions as its 'eyes and ears on the ground'.⁴⁷ Similarly, the district mayor's office accepted that Sikhula Sonke's general secretary 'speaks her mind ... she is listened to and in this way they [Sikhula Sonke] are effective in voicing farm women workers' issues'.⁴⁸

Although the SECC and Sikhula Sonke have generated some state responsiveness and taken a step in the direction of creating substantive uncertainty, they have neither fundamentally challenged the political status quo nor had a long-term impact in terms of challenging hegemonic socioeconomic discourses. For, example, the SECC's activities may have encouraged Johannesburg Water to explain to residents the reasons behind the installation of pre-paid water meters, but this is not a victory in the context of wanting to eliminate meters altogether. It must be recognised, however, that few policy decisions explicitly result from the actions of one group. For example, the government's free basic water and electricity policy may have been a response to action launched by the SECC and the APF; however, one cannot make a direct linear association between these variables, given the myriad other factors that led to the implementation of this national policy. Similarly, Sikhula Sonke has yet to have success in its long-term plan of improving land access and ownership for farm workers. This is partly because it is very difficult for any single organisation to influence government policy, but also because the majority of its programmes are targeted at employers and their members rather than at amending government policy. Its campaigns are reactive and primarily inward focused, looking

to either strengthen the union or improve the lives and working conditions of its members on an individual or a farm-by-farm basis.

As a former leader of a social movement explains, the SECC has 'not managed to fundamentally change the orientation of government'. The movements may have 'cushioned the rough edges of liberal policies and forced government to readjust'⁴⁹ on some policies, but this impact has been limited. There are several reasons why movements have had only marginal success in changing government policy and challenging the hegemony of the ANC. The following sections will address these concerns, primary among which is the difficulty of mobilising large numbers of supporters.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL AGENDAS

The SECC conforms to much of the earlier writings about social movements, particularly with regard to its leadership's support of explicit economic and political agendas. The leadership's economic agenda promotes the idea of independent mass mobilisation of the poor to contest neoliberalism and capitalism. It wants to 'bring the bourgeoisie and working class onto an equal economic level', with a long-term view of all citizens having employment, housing, improved health services, free education, water and electricity.⁵⁰ In terms of a political agenda, the leadership of the SECC has, as with its economic views, a clear sense of purpose: 'We have identified the enemy as the ANC government.'⁵¹ It wants to present an ideological alternative to the ANC and believes in fundamental transformation through counter-hegemonic opposition. Although no longer ongoing, in its earlier days, as part of its political agenda the leadership offered regular political training courses for members. It has also furthered its political project via the OKM.

Sikhula Sonke, too, supports mass mobilisation of the poor and marginalised. Its leaders, however, have not expressed an explicit desire to overthrow neoliberalism or capitalism. It is clearly a workers' movement, wanting to improve the livelihood of the working class, but it does this through working with capitalist structures rather than trying to overthrow them. Its 'economic agenda' functions predominantly on a small scale, farm by farm, or even individual by individual. To a very limited extent, Sikhula Sonke has tried to bring about economic reform at the national and international levels; however, its leaders do not follow a long-term ideological or anti-neoliberal project. Similarly, Sikhula Sonke does not follow a clear political agenda. Although the organisation does

have a positive relationship with the ANC, some Sikhula Sonke leaders are sceptical of political party competition: 'Politics is about dirty fighting when there are elections. It is just about getting votes and then those who voted for you are treated as nothing.'⁵² Sikhula Sonke's work may indirectly contribute towards strengthening a progressive economic and political agenda, but it cannot be said that the movement sees its work as an 'ideological and organisational alternative to the capitalist ANC'.⁵³

For both the SECC and Sikhula Sonke, their economic and political agendas (whether explicit or not) are not necessarily followed by the majority of the movements' members. Drawing from short interviews with members of the SECC, it appears that the overwhelming factor behind joining the movement is to obtain assistance with service delivery issues, in many cases specifically to have their electricity supply reconnected or their water meter bypassed. When asked why they joined the organisation, members said things such as: 'The SECC has helped me not to pay electricity bills'; 'I was trying to help my mum find a way to pay for electricity'; 'If you have a problem with your electricity, you go to the SECC. They will reconnect you.'⁵⁴ Other members have joined because they see the SECC as an effective community group that can improve conditions in the township. Indeed, some members who initially joined for help with water and electricity concerns have stayed active in the organisation because they are convinced of the link between local service concerns and the broader ideological change that the movement's leaders advocate. However, a large proportion of SECC supporters did not join the movement because they believe in socialism or because they want to drive other forms of economic or political reform. They joined to find help in sustaining a livelihood and mitigating the harshest effects of government policies. In this sense, members see the SECC as a conduit to free services and an advice office rather than a movement that will generate broader economic reform. The ideology and principles of the SECC leadership may in practice seem far removed from the everyday realities of Sowetans.

As with the SECC, the majority of Sikhula Sonke's members join because of personal or livelihood challenges facing them as individuals rather than because of a commitment to any wider economic or political agenda. Many of the original members started working with the Women of Farms project in the 1990s because this NGO encouraged the idea that 'women are important' and 'everyone should respect each other'.⁵⁵ Experiences of subordination and

powerlessness extend beyond gender relations in the farm-worker community. Male interviewees joined Sikhula Sonke because 'we had no one standing up for us whenever we had problems' and 'the union can help us to be treated fairly by the farmer, according to the law'.⁵⁶ This need to 'have someone on your side' is compounded by existing relations of paternalism on farms where workers are unable to effectively voice their concerns on an equal footing with employers. The history of paternalism has resulted in farm workers seldom being treated with respect or equality by employers.⁵⁷

The ineffectual actions of other trade unions in the sector also led to a rise in membership, as did the broad focus of its work beyond traditional trade union activities. Sikhula Sonke can help with 'the conditions we live in on the farm', 'alcoholism problems', 'evictions' or 'getting an ID'.⁵⁸ It is thus apparent that for many members, being a part of Sikhula Sonke is seen as a way of gaining some personal power, be it as a woman or as a worker, but it is seldom an avenue for expressing an explicit broader ideological agenda. Thus, contrary to the suggestion in earlier writings, the promotion of explicit economic and political agendas was not a priority for many social movements, even those whose leadership claimed such an agenda to be paramount. Sikhula Sonke, for example, is an organisation primarily focused on protecting and enriching individual livelihoods and alleviating workplace concerns. More significant, however, is that the supporters of many movements, including those belonging to Sikhula Sonke and the SECC, struggle to identify with leaders' broader ambitions. Sinwell makes this point when he argues that the radical tactics of some social movements should be seen as reactions to the exclusion of the poor, which is brought about by neoliberal policies, rather than an attempt to seek an alternative to neoliberalism itself.⁵⁹ Thus, members of social movements more often than not look to their movements to help mitigate the harsh effects of government policy rather than to follow a broader ideological, anti-hegemonic agenda. The same concern is true of some members' approach to political projects. In many cases, members do not want to fundamentally challenge the ANC or its policy framework; they want improved livelihoods within the historical political framework they feel emotionally wedded to. The inherent danger of this reality is that movements may struggle to achieve their long-term goals and thus feel demoralised by a protracted pace of economic transformation.

Ultimately, movements are currently too small – as the section below demonstrates – and are supported by too few members

with radical alternative political or economic views to generate a revolution that could significantly alter the economic policies of the state. For now, it is more likely that economic transformation, which encompasses improved access to opportunities to earn a living, will come through incremental reform.

BUILDING AND LINKING A MASS BASE

Have movements mobilised mass support and built effective networks? It is difficult to specify their actual membership numbers because by their nature they ebb and flow. Furthermore, mass support does not only equate to numbers of individuals verifiably active at one specific point, but can also include wider non-active community backing. In May 2005 the SECC had 7,652 members listed on its database, decreasing in 2011 to an estimated support of 6,000.⁶⁰ It is perhaps at the branch level where the true nature and size of *active* membership is most evident. In 2005 the SECC operated 37 branches across the township; however, in 2011 this had decreased to twelve functioning branches.⁶¹ Attendance at branch meetings varies widely from a minimum of about ten participants up to about 70.⁶² Taking into consideration branch attendance, observed support of marches and protests, and voter support for the OKM, a realistic estimate of the number of active SECC members may be around 2,000 people.⁶³ To put this figure into perspective, it might be worth adding that Soweto is the most populous black urban residential area in the country, with about 1.3 million inhabitants.⁶⁴ Even counting those who do not vote, the SECC has at best attained less than 0.2 per cent of the active support of this community. Yet, more broadly, many Sowetans have at times participated in SECC meetings, even though they do not consider themselves to be supporters of the movement. For example, an investigation on pre-paid electricity meters in Soweto in 2004 revealed that 8.6 per cent of respondents had attended SECC meetings.⁶⁵ The SECC is also part of the APF, which has approximately 30 affiliates in four regions in Gauteng. According to the APF secretary, support for these affiliates is in the region of 20,000 people.⁶⁶ Thus, the SECC has broader support than its membership numbers suggest, indicating that the movement is a legitimate organisation; yet this support does not go far enough towards constituting a mass base capable of achieving the SECC's goal of 'generating a revolution'. And indeed, over the years, its active support has waned.

Sikhula Sonke's membership is easier to quantify since, as a trade union, members are required to formally register. In 2011 the union had about 5,000 members drawn from over 200 different farms in ten geographic locations in the Western Cape, a significant increase from its 3,500 members in 2007.⁶⁷ It must be said that geographical constraints, including large distances between farms and a relative lack of central hubs, make recruiting and organising farm workers difficult, and Sikhula Sonke has some level of support beyond registered members. The organisation assists both workers and 'non-workers'. Certainly, the organisation is well known in the communities in which it works. As with the SECC, however, it is difficult to argue that Sikhula Sonke is generating mass mobilisation. As one commentator notes: 'It is possible to consider that they are movements that do not have a mass base, but a mass orientation.'⁶⁸

The discussion above raises two questions: why have these movements struggled to mobilise mass support and why has Sikhula Sonke been more successful than the SECC at generating and sustaining support? In terms of the first question, a key reason espoused by the movements themselves is a lack of resources, both financial and human. The SECC organiser notes that 'funding would help with mobilisation and getting more support; people need help with the costs of attending a meeting and other activities'.⁶⁹ McKinley (this volume) stresses that without 'committed activists to mobilise resources' and 'support and sustain organisation in communities', the movements will continue to struggle to generate mass action. Linked to this concern is the reality that potential supporters may want help to fix immediate livelihood problems, but in practice, movement organisers have limited resources to be able to deal with these concerns. Furthermore, generating mass support has to involve younger generations, or movements will not be sustained. However, in societies where running the household is historically the responsibility of the older generation, few young people see an immediate need to fight for better service delivery and thus challenge government and ANC policies. This limits the achievement of meaningful transformation for poor communities. The movements thus face the challenge of engaging and attracting sustainable support from the youth (see Alexander, this volume).

Some scholars argue that movements struggle to build a mass base because they are led by a small 'vanguard cadre' whose members are in turn disconnected from the reality of the communities they try to support.⁷⁰ In a trenchant critique of social movements, a former leader of the South African NGO coalition argued that some social

movements are 'largely led by intellectuals who were not rooted in the conditions of people ... They are led from without by white intellectuals with some black support and leadership. In reality they are NGOs rather than real social movements.'⁷¹ Although members may not identify with leaders' ideological views, it is clear that movements such as the SECC and Sikhula Sonke are not run by a (white) vanguard elite with no connection to a mass base. Both movements have rooted membership with functioning local-level branches. It is true that both organisations have at times been led by dynamic and charismatic leaders who play an essential role in mobilising support for and publicising the aims of their movements. However, these leaders have demonstrably focused on developing deeper layers of leadership by empowering and training a second tier. They also encourage members to drive decision making, ensuring that members have ample opportunity to effectively express their interests. That both organisations are composed of multiple separate branches encourages the cultivation of local leaders and broader participation in the movements. For many members, movement activity is not ad hoc, but rather part of a culture of participation and engagement.

Insight into why Sikhula Sonke has grown and the SECC has not can shed further light on the dynamics behind movement mobilisation. Firstly, Sikhula Sonke has at the top of its programme agenda the recruitment of new members. In practice, mobilisation comes before all other activities. Secondly, Sikhula Sonke has made a concerted effort to recruit younger members, whereas the SECC states that many of its original members are now too old to participate.⁷² Furthermore, as a fully staffed trade union, Sikhula Sonke is also more equipped than the SECC to meet the individual livelihood needs of its members. Finally, in contrast to the more-mainstream Sikhula Sonke, the SECC's technically illegal activities and strong anti-ANC stance may alienate some members of the community.

With regard to the issue of networking, both Sikhula Sonke and the SECC have made great strides in forming alliances and engaging with like-minded organisations. The SECC's ideology places it squarely on the left spectrum of South African politics and thus it has good relations with many left-leaning civil society groups. Sikhula Sonke also embraces the idea of networking and values learning from other organisations. However, it can be argued that over time the movements' relationships have not resulted in a 'chain of equivalence' that 'transforms relations with dominant

powers'.⁷³ There are several reasons for this. Firstly, neither the SECC nor Sikhula Sonke have effectively tapped into or linked up with other mass community protests,⁷⁴ particularly those that swept the country after the 2009 elections.⁷⁵ Several social movement leaders have noted that established civil society organisations were seldom the organising forces behind community protests.⁷⁶ Evidence has shown that although organisations such as crisis committees or concerned residents' groups were facilitating the protests, they tended to be small and sporadically formed and not linked to any project or organisation beyond their own community.⁷⁷ Some commentators have suggested that the instigators of the protests 'have nothing' and 'have been marginalised'; they are 'beyond COSATU and beyond social movements'.⁷⁸ For one activist, those who are most marginalised constitute the bedrock of an unofficial movement, but the agitators behind the wave of community protests are not linked to any of the established social movements: 'They are part of thousands of protests, but do not link ... there is no ideological coherence. ... Incidences [*sic*] of civil society unrest have not found expression through known forms of organisations, such as social movements.'⁷⁹

A second concern limiting the ability of social movements to build mass mobilisation is the lack of unity among organisations of the 'left', including social movements, other left-leaning NGOs and the South African Communist Party (SACP). SECC founder Trevor Ngwane highlights these strategic battles:

Disagreements in the left are often based on different ideological viewpoints ... Bickering in the left is an expression of the politics of individual leaders ... It is important that a united front starts to stay together, even if we disagree behind the scenes.⁸⁰

Although Ngwane describes a fragmented social movement sector, he does note that different personal ideologies are not always divisive. Overall, however, for Ngwane there has been a demoralisation of the left, 'because they have lost confidence in the power of the working class ... and the left [in the form of the SACP] is divorced from the masses'⁸¹ (see also Ngwane, this volume). Another activist agrees with this view, explaining that 'progressive civil society on the left is locked in silos, with no conscious effort to build a common campaign'.⁸² Others argue that after the successes of the WSSD march in 2002, the 'independent movement' has been 'chaotic, self-destructive, problematic and infiltrated' and that 'there is a

problem with civil society and social movements really uniting so that there can be a strong force against government'.⁸³ Although it is too soon to tell, this dissociation may change with the advent of the Democratic Left Front in early 2011.

An earlier attempt to bring the different movements together in a unified force proved unsuccessful. The Social Movements Indaba (SMI) represented social movements who felt they had similar political aims, meeting from 2002 on a regular basis. The annual SMI meetings indicated a move towards encompassing political projects that, if successful, could pose a more sustained and substantial threat to government policies than previously posed by individual movements. From 2006, however, the SMI began to atrophy because there was apparent division about who did in practice and should in principle control it.⁸⁴

In concluding this section, it must be recognised that the movements have yet to establish a large, consistent, mass base of support that is able to challenge the hegemonic status quo. Due to divisions in the 'left' and inadequate connections with wider community protests, the strength of some movements has been curtailed. Nonetheless, Sikhula Sonke and the SECC have continued to maintain consistent operations for a decade, and this in itself is a great achievement for any social movement.

MORAL-BASED AGENTS OF DEMOCRACY

Have social movements as moral agents strengthened South African democracy? In both case studies, it can be argued that they have done so.⁸⁵ Firstly, both the SECC and Sikhula Sonke create channels of articulation for the poor and marginalised and, in so doing, widen opportunities for participation between elections. The defining feature of SECC membership is that most members are unemployed or poor. Sikhula Sonke too undoubtedly represents the poor and marginalised. Although its paid-up members are employed, they earn very low wages. A government report explains that 'agricultural workers are worse off than those in every other sector of the economy'.⁸⁶ Farm workers, too, are marginalised in terms of their citizenship rights, experiencing, for example, 'great difficulties in accessing social services', which heightens their vulnerability and exposes them to 'human rights violations and abuse'.⁸⁷ Within the category of farm workers, women and non-permanent workers are further marginalised.

Secondly, the movements strengthen civil and political liberties through creating *representative* and *legitimate* channels for the articulation of interests. Both movements legitimately represent a citizen base – albeit a small one – and do so through internally democratic cultures, consolidating democratic decision making and internal accountability. Through their empowerment of branches and the frequent opportunities for participation in movement organisation and decision making, the movements are to a large extent functioning as ‘schools of democracy’.⁸⁸ It must, however, be noted that their democratic culture is not unproblematic: the inexperience and inactivity of some of Sikhula Sonke’s local committees means that members’ participation is limited. With respect to the SECC, Soweto Concerned Residents split from the movement, pointing to potential weaknesses in the SECC and reducing its effectiveness as a unified channel for the articulation of interests.

Thirdly, as discussed above, the movements have had some impact in improving government accountability and – albeit to a lesser extent – generating some government responsiveness. In strengthening democracy, civil society needs not only to monitor government actions, but also ensure that government responds to the preferences of its citizens.⁸⁹ The SECC, more so than Sikhula Sonke, pays close attention to government policies, service delivery and the actions of political actors. Through its various electricity, water and housing campaigns, the SECC challenges not only what it perceives to be policy failures, but also the processes employed in policy making. The SECC is thus a vocal watchdog, monitoring and highlighting government shortcomings.

Although Sikhula Sonke focuses on non-state actors, paying more attention to union matters than government policy, it too is an effective watchdog in that it monitors labour and social security issues such as minimum wages and farm dweller evictions. The SECC and Sikhula Sonke are also both very effective in knowledge and information sharing. They use other civil society organisations and their own internal capacity to generate alternative sources of information to those provided by the government. This information is then distributed, either verbally or through pamphlets, to their membership and potentially beyond. This activity not only monitors government accountability, but also strengthens civil and political liberties and, by improving awareness of their rights, empowers citizens. Both organisations may be good watchdogs, but neither Sikhula Sonke’s nor the SECC’s successes have directly translated

into sustained positive policy changes. Although these movements have had only a limited effect on government responsiveness, their strong performance in monitoring government actions results in an overall strengthening of accountability and a deepening of democracy.

Fourthly, these organisations have acted as agents of democracy where they have engaged with or, indeed, contested political institutions. In so doing, they potentially strengthen institutions, thus helping them to constrain executive power, and widen opportunities for participation in political processes. Sikhula Sonke in particular has engaged consistently with state institutions such as the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). Its use of government commissions, labour centres and the courts is highly beneficial for its members. Many state institutions and government structures are legally required to listen to citizens’ views and communicate information in return. For Sikhula Sonke members, this often has the immediate effect of improving working conditions and delivering economic benefits at the micro level. It also directly increases participation in legal and policy processes. Engaging with state institutions also empowers members, and farm workers are turned from subjects of their bosses into citizens of the state, able to exercise their rights.

Although less active in this arena than Sikhula Sonke, the SECC has engaged with state institutions, including the Constitutional Court, by challenging the limited state provision of free basic water. Although ultimately unsuccessful, in this instance the court battle held the potential not only to strengthen political institutionalisation, but also to appreciably minimise poverty on a national level. Other strategies, such as the SECC’s contestation of local government elections, have also impacted on political institutionalisation. In forming a political party, the SECC has offered both a democratic alternative to voters in Soweto and increased engagement with and participation in the political system. Utilising and at times contesting state institutions strengthens state bodies, which are then better able to constrain executive power where necessary.

Moreover, it can be argued that these movements have successfully promoted a rights-based discourse and, in so doing, empowered their members. Sikhula Sonke in particular has fostered greater gender, work-based and racial equality for what is one of the most socially and politically marginalised communities in South Africa. In providing training for farm workers in labour rights, developing women leaders, and helping workers to engage with employers

as social equals, Sikhula Sonke potentially reduces poverty and directly empowers citizens. The SECC too consistently informs its members of their socioeconomic rights and encourages members to express opinions. The focus on socioeconomic rights as a key part of democracy signals that social movements are pushing for a substantive democracy that strives towards the 'broader ideal of democracy as liberation' rather than a liberal or electoral democracy that emphasises 'formal procedures'.⁹⁰ Thus, the activities of these organisations develop citizenship skills that can be used to deepen participatory democracy. The efforts of both movements in relation to honing citizenship skills and promoting social equality are significant in the broader struggle against oppression and injustice. Fostering empowered citizens is important as it helps to create a 'balance of power'. This in turn can be used to ensure that existing power holders do not capture public spaces for deliberation.⁹¹ Where participatory decision making does occur, it is thus more likely to be democratic and reflective of all voices.

CONCLUSION

Social movements have undoubtedly had a significant impact on the South African political landscape over the past decade. As Habib notes, '[o]rganisations that were most influential post 2001/02 were not the organisations that were participating through state structures but ... those involved in contentious politics'.⁹² Although social movements have had small successes and some influence on making the state more socially accountable, they have not fulfilled the prediction of earlier writers that they would fundamentally challenge the hegemony of the ANC. Indeed, the ANC – although its support declined from 69.69 per cent to 65.9 per cent – actually received 772,497 *more* votes in 2009 than in 2004.⁹³ Where ANC votes were lost in the 2011 municipal elections, these were to parties on the 'right' of the ANC.

Why has this been the case? Firstly, as discussed in the second theme above, many social movement members do not join an organisation because of conscious ideological beliefs; instead, they are looking for help to improve their livelihoods and mitigate the harsh effects of government policy. Thus, even where movement leaders have explicit political and economic agendas, they may struggle to engage their members in broader ideological, anti-hegemonic battles. This is linked to the second concern, namely that movements have had limited success in building and linking mass bases. Constraints

in mobilising mass support hinder the ability of movements to effectively challenge the political and economic status quo. To have a greater impact on hegemonic discourses, movements need to tap into society's wider discontent, as demonstrated by social protests; link more effectively; and use the democratic space they have created to generate greater state responsiveness.

Social movements have, however, met the predictions of earlier analysts where they act as moral agents of democracy. In particular, they offer channels of representation to the poor and thereby widen opportunities for participation between elections, and they create empowered citizens who are better able to demand their socioeconomic rights and engage in participatory democracy. Where social movements have deepened democracy, they have contributed to the social transformation of South African society. However, it is economic transformation that is the country's principal concern and arguably this is where movements face their biggest challenge.

NOTES

1. In South African writing, the term 'new' refers to movements surfacing post-1999, which is different to European 'new social movement' theory.
2. Richard Ballard, Adam Habib and Imraan Valodia, 'Social movements in South Africa: Promoting crisis or creating stability?', in V. Padayachee (ed.), *The Development Decade? Economic and Social Change in South Africa, 1994–2004*, Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006, p. 403.
3. Nigel Gibson (ed.), *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006, p. 6.
4. Trevor Ngwane, 'The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF)', *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2003), p. 32.
5. Ran Greenstein, 'Civil society, social movements and power in South Africa', unpublished paper presented at a Rand Afrikaans University sociology seminar, 2003.
6. Richard Ballard, Adam Habib and Imraan Valodia, *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006, p. 415.
7. Franco Barchiesi, *Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-apartheid South Africa*, CCS Research Report, No. 20, Durban: Centre for Civil Society, 2004, pp. 3–4.
8. Tshapo Madlingozi, 'Post-apartheid social movements and the quest for the elusive "New" South Africa', *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007), pp. 76–97; Ballard et al., *Voices of Protest*.
9. Dale McKinley, 'Democracy and social movements in South Africa', in Padayachee, *The Development Decade?*, pp. 418–19.
10. Ballard et al., *Voices of Protest*, p. 400.

11. Ashwin Desai, *We Are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-apartheid South Africa*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002.
12. McKinley, 'Democracy and social movements'.
13. Ballard et al., *Voices of Protest*, p. 403.
14. Gibson, *Challenging Hegemony*, p. 9.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
16. Ballard et al., *Voices of Protest*, p. 413.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
18. McKinley, 'Democracy and social movements'.
19. Demosthenes (384–322 BC).
20. Maj Fil-Flynn, *The Electricity Crisis in Soweto*, Johannesburg: Municipal Services Project, 2001.
21. Interviews with Trevor Ngwane, Anti-Privatisation Forum and SECC, Soweto, Johannesburg and Durban, 17 March 2004–25 June 2009.
22. Peter Alexander, 'Anti-globalisation movements, identity and leadership: Trevor Ngwane and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee', unpublished paper presented at the South African Sociological Association Conference, Durban, 2006.
23. Interviews with Wendy Pekaer, general secretary, Sikhula Sonke, Stellenbosch, February–May 2007; Sikhula Sonke, 'Profile', unpublished document, Stellenbosch, 2006.
24. Interview with Sara Claassen, president, Sikhula Sonke, Stellenbosch, 19 April 2007.
25. Interview with Evelien Ockers, organiser, Sikhula Sonke, Stellenbosch, 19 April 2007.
26. Sikhula Sonke, 'Profile'.
27. Interviews with Bongani Lubisi, SECC organiser, Soweto, March–May 2005.
28. SECC, 'The struggle for affordable electricity for all', unpublished document, n.d.
29. SECC forum meeting, Soweto, 28 June 2011; interview with Zodwa Madiba, SECC organiser, Soweto, 4 July 2011.
30. Jeff Radebe, 'Speech by minister of public enterprises', Workshop on Service Delivery Framework, Gauteng, 2001.
31. Konstantinos Papadakis, *Civil Society, Participatory Governance and Decent Work Objectives: The Case of South Africa*, Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 2006, p. 72.
32. Interview with Madiba.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Interviews with Lubisi.
35. See Comrade Tankiso, 'Beyond dreadlocks and demagogy', *Umrabulo* (June 2003).
36. Interview with Nandi Mayethula-Khoza, speaker, Johannesburg City Council, Johannesburg, April 2005.
37. Interview with Masego Sheburi, public petitions official, Office of the Speaker, Johannesburg, April 2005.
38. Interview with Lesego Lebuso, divisional manager for new services, Johannesburg Water, Johannesburg, April 2005.
39. *Ibid.*
40. SECC forum meeting, Soweto, 9 March 2005.
41. SECC Political Committee, 'Ideas on the SA local government election 2006', unpublished document, 2004.
42. Siphwe Segodi, 'Thembelehle Crisis Committee contesting elections through Operation Khanyisa Movement', 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/3uzw46x> (accessed 9 August 2011).
43. Interview with Executive Committee member B, SECC, Soweto, 23 May 2006.
44. Marcelle C. Dawson, 'Social movements in contemporary South Africa: The Anti-Privatisation Forum and struggles around access to water in Johannesburg', DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2008.
45. Ministry of Agriculture, Western Cape, 'Statement by Cobus Dowy, minister of agriculture Western Cape: Road forward for Jonkershoek', unpublished document, 2006.
46. Department of Labour, 'Farm workers' minimum wage increases 2007/8', 2 March 2007, www.labour.gov.za (accessed June 2007).
47. Interview with Alie van Jaarsveld, spokesperson, Western Cape Ministry of Agriculture, Cape Town, 30 April 2007.
48. Interview with Clarence Johnson, Cape Winelands district mayor, Stellenbosch, 8 May 2007; interview with Gwebs Qonde, Cape Winelands deputy municipal manager, Stellenbosch, 8 May 2007.
49. Interview with John Appolis, Anti-Privatisation Forum, Johannesburg, May 2005. Subsequent to this interview, the government shifted economic focus towards a developmental state, but the influence of social movements in this shift is difficult to trace.
50. Interview with administrator, SECC, Soweto, 5 May 2005; interview with Madiba.
51. Interview with Ngwane.
52. Interview with Ida Jacobs, organiser, Sikhula Sonke, Stellenbosch, 8 May 2007.
53. McKinley, 'Democracy and social movements', pp. 418–19.
54. Interviews with branch members from Dube, Soweto, 4 July 2011; SECC Senaone branch meeting, Soweto, 17 March 2005; SECC Rockville branch meeting, Soweto, 10 March 2005; SECC Noordgesig mass meeting, Soweto, 7 April 2005.
55. Interview with Estelle Coetzee, organiser, Sikhula Sonke, Stellenbosch, 8 May 2007.
56. Interview with Sikhula Sonke member and CCMA case applicant; interview with farm worker A, De Klapmuts Farm, Western Cape, 25 April 2007.
57. Employer–employee relations do differ from farm to farm and there are examples of good practice on some farms, although these are in the minority.
58. Interviews with Sikhula Sonke members from farms in the Cape Winelands, Western Cape, March–May 2007.
59. Luke Sinwell, 'Is "another world" really possible? Re-examining counter-hegemonic forces in post-apartheid South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 38, No. 127 (2011).
60. Interviews with Lubisi and Madiba.
61. Interview with Virginia Setshedi, SECC, Johannesburg, 10 March 2004; interviews with Lubisi and Madiba.
62. SECC Dube branch meeting; SECC Senaone branch meeting; SECC Rockville branch meeting; SECC Noordgesig mass meeting.
63. The protests observed were: March to Protea Magistrates Court, Soweto, April 2005; demonstration at Moroka Police Station to hand over a memorandum,