Under the Rainbow
Migration, Precarity and People Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa

CARL-ULRIK SCHIERUP, Linköping University
carl-ulrik.schierup@liu.se

Norrköping Sweden, 6 January 2016

Carl-Ulrik Schierup. Work in progress intended for publication in a collected volume with Brill: Politics of Precarity: Migrant conditions, struggles and experiences. A shorter version of the paper has been accepted for publication in Critical Sociology

Photo: Gold Mining in South Africa - Archival - Stock Image. © www.alamy.com
Our communities are so broken. Millions of South Africans go to bed hungry. There is so much despair. We live with so much inequality, poverty, hunger and unemployment. When real movements emerge, this infuses humanity and social consciousness in our people. They provide a terrain of urgency as opposed to the politics of the messiah.

Kota Ayanda,
Chairperson of the Unemployed People’s Movement (2014)

Ubuntu shattered?

‘Apartheid’ was the ideological keystone of white supremacy in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. It has been recycled as a negatively loaded metaphor in numerous studies of the political economy of migration, citizenship and labour in the global ‘North’ as well as in the ‘South’. It remains an ideotypical signifier for ‘unfree labour’ founded on class violence, exclusion from rights of citizenship and expulsion into subdued ‘homelands’, legitimised through mythologies of race, culture, ethnicity or national identity. Simultaneously, the anti-apartheid movement and its struggle for a democratic non-racial society was one of the most important emancipatory anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. In both senses, the memory of apartheid has remained crucial for critical social studies and it remains essential to examine the challenges, disjunctions, social struggles and still undecided trajectory of South Africa’s post-apartheid development when researching migration, post-coloniality and imperialism in its neo-liberal appearance of ‘globalisation’, allegorically dubbed ‘global apartheid’ (Bond 2004; cf. Richmond 1994).

At the end of the 1980s the long struggle against apartheid in South Africa, led by the African National Congress (ANC), headed towards victory. Supported by an alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the ANC entered negotiations in the early 1990s with the former enemy and political pillar of apartheid, the white Afrikaner-led National Party. This resulted in the formal termination of apartheid in 1994, followed by free democratic elections and the rise of a new ANC led government. The South Africa born out of this ‘National Democratic Revolution’ was to be transformed into an inclusive ‘Rainbow Nation’; a metaphor coined by Nobel Prize Winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu to designate the new multicultural community of a ‘Rainbow People of God’ in a state earlier defined by apartheid’s deep rift between white and black. It was a dream of a non-racial South African
‘exceptionalism’ embodied in the *Ubuntu* philosophy that speaks of ‘the very essence of being human’ (Tutu 1999: 31) in terms of universal bonds of compassion, sharing, caring and generosity. It embraces the value of African hospitality illustrated through Nelson Mandela’s parable of a ‘traveller through a country’ who ‘would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water’ (Mandela 2012). It cherishes the qualities of forgiveness and appeasement guiding the celebrated South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was supposed to close the era of apartheid’s race-class oppression and internecine violence.

In a more laconic mood this has been depicted as a South African variety of a humanitarian discourse coming in ‘as a consensual bridge between the reformed colonial racist traditions of the outgoing White nationalist elite and the reformed African nationalism of the incoming one’ (Neocosmos 2011: 368). However, for leftist political forces in the movement against apartheid, the establishment of liberal democracy and the formal equality of citizens stood for a still ‘unfinished revolution’ (Alexander 2010). From this perspective *Ubuntu* means more than a humanitarian gospel. As enshrined in the Congress of the People driven Freedom Charter from 1955, it enveloped the wider vision of a sustained activist countermovement contesting a predatory capitalism; a countermovement that would build ‘power to the people’ (*Amandla Ngawethu*) on the basis of unbounded processes of cooperative and collectivist organisation (Richards 2012). It included promises to harness South Africa’s extraordinary natural wealth to create dignified livelihoods for all, through nationalising the mines and redressing centuries of white land grabbing by redistributing the land ‘to those who work it’.

Dreams apart, the Rainbow Nation actually became a rocky edifice designed by ‘architects of poverty’, contends political economist, Moeletsi Mbeki (2009). Riches and power for today’s elites stem, as before, from South Africa’s gargantuan underground resources of metals and minerals. Yet, there is no ‘pot of gold’ under the Rainbow’s end, but a toxic trap of a predatory extractionism that continues to drive poverty and precarity of work and citizenship in a still deeply racialized society. There is in substance ‘no black in the rainbow’ argues human rights fellow, Reshoketswe Mapokgole (2014)), in another critical exposé which depicts a multifaceted ‘xenophobia’ as ‘Afrophobia’ or ‘Negrophobia’; pitting poor black ‘natives’ against poor black ‘aliens’ in a society where inequality remains oceans deep and where a hyper-exploitative migration regime continues as one of the most controversial issues.

Against the background of these and other outspoken voices in debates over a current crisis of economy, polity and society, in this essay we tap into a rich fund of critical research on South Africa. Without pretentions to reviewing an extended polemic of often mutually conflicting positions on the post-apartheid transformation, the objective is to merge perspectives on populist politics and migrant labour with a dialectic take on the precarity of work and citizenship.

The essay starts with a condensed review of the post-apartheid transition focusing on systemic drivers of poverty, inequality and precarious livelihoods. We
discuss the transformation of South Africa’s labour force management and its migratory system from a centralised regime of unfree labour run by the apartheid state bureaucracy to a post-apartheid state of precarity, driven by ‘flexexploitation’ (Bourdieu 1999a: 84). We stress (with Goldring and Landholt 2011) the complex intertwining of precarious work and a fracturing citizenship; a synthetic merger of two trends in contemporary globalisation. It represents a ‘duality of flexibility’ (Lazaridis and Psimmenos 2000) linking practices of employment and labour control to areas like welfare benefits, citizenship status, political participation and informal livelihoods, applicable to migrants and natives alike, but with migrants being particularly ‘flexible’. We go on to look at the politics of xenophobia as a stratagem for retaining hegemony at a moment marked by fierce labour struggles and by an insurgent citizenship of the poor, beyond the reach of neoliberal governance. Our argument concentrates on ‘precarity’ as representing ‘both a condition and a possible rallying point for resistance’ (Waite 2008: 412).

Unfree labour as colonial legacy
Apartheid, installed as the ruling ideology in the Union of South Africa with the ascent to power of the Afrikaner-dominated National Party in 1948, was a re-forged white hegemony founded on an alliance between English speaking capitalists and an Afrikaner political elite. It integrated a white working class, benefiting from citizenship, social welfare and privileged access to skilled occupations but exposed the republic’s black majority population to deepening disenfranchisement, segregation and unfree labour. It represented, as such, a new exceptionally austere phase in the accumulation strategy of capitalism in South Africa, in the dispossession of black Africans from their land and in the making and remaking of a system of migrancy designed for the hyper-exploitation of cheap, unfree labour.

Differential Afrikaner practices for ‘turning indigenous people into unfree wage labourers’ (Terreblanche 2003: 9), with roots back in 17th century white settlement, were fundamentally remoulded in the context of a state driven and institutionally embedded racial capitalism under 19th century British colonial rule (Keegan 1982). Gold mining, a central interest of British imperial capitalism from the late 19th century, created an increasing demand for cheap, unfree labour. Politics for controlled proletarianisation and a steady supply of cheap African labour for the mines under late colonial rule progressively crafted a centrally monitored system of oscillating rural-urban migrant labour covering large swathes of Southern Africa. It was an antecedent of and model for the management of labour in the South African economy in later times (Terreblanche 2003: 239ff; Jeeves 1985; First 1982). After the end of the South African War and the establishment of the Union of South Africa as a British dominion in 1910, an Afrikaner political elite with skills and interests in the procurement of cheap, black, unfree labour became a strategic ally of white Anglo-capitalists who controlled the mining industry. It was at the time favoured over a potential alliance with a black professional and business elite with roots in 19th century British colonialism (Mbeki 2009).
‘Native Reserves’ - instituted through the Land Act of 1913 and based on an alliance between Anglo-controlled mining companies and Afrikaner landowners - meant a critically extended legal-institutional step in systemic politics for controlled proletarianisation of Africans and the enforcement of unfree migrant labour. The Land Act forced the majority of black South Africans to live in restricted rural areas, functioning as downsized reserves for cheap labour. Men of working age were forced to work in the mines outside of the restricted reserves in order to secure the livelihoods of rural households. A ‘free rent’ was attained by capital through the continuous partial reproduction of this predominantly male migrant labour force through unpaid female labour in the subsistence economies of the rural reserves (Wolpe 1972; cf. Meillassoux 1981 [1975]). Thus, Sampie Terreblanche (2003: 261) concludes in summarising accomplishments of the Land Act, ‘[t]he fact that the African “reserves” and foreign southern African countries originally bore part of the cost of gold production made it possible for the gold industry to create an extremely successful system of plundering not only African men but also African land’. It was a racial capitalism that was progressively consolidated politically and made to serve not only capitalist mining but the labour needs of Afrikaner farmers. It was underpinned through systemic disenfranchisement and discrimination of non-white South Africans. It built a pervasive order of racial segregation, designed to accommodate the particular interests and harness the loyalty of a growing white Afrikaner proletariat.

Apartheid, formally instituted in 1948, remodelled and further exacerbated this historical process of alienation. Rationalised through a politics of so-called ‘separate development’ it turned former ‘natives’ into ‘foreigners’ contained in shrunken native ‘Homelands’ or ‘Bantustans’; by design phoney nation states under the spurious authority of ‘native chiefs’ and, in actuality, a revamped system of colonial indirect rule. Apartheid barred black Africans from citizenship in the ‘white’ Republic of South Africa, and - through a centralised state-monitored labour regime powered by a forceful state bureaucracy and draconic security trapped millions of ‘foreign natives’ (Neocosmos 2015) in a permanent condition of racial and unfree labour (Wolpe 1972). White farmers’ control of the vast majority of agricultural land (progressively grabbed by settlers during centuries of colonial rule) and a range of discriminatory measures directed against black peasants, remodelling colonial precedents, deprived the African rural population of the security of land ownership. This was combined with temporary labour contracting administered by centralised agencies, a system of quasi-military regimented male migrant workers’ compounds in mining areas and peri-urban townships, together with restrictive pass laws designed to contain black urban settlement (Frankel 1979). The policies of urban segregation included bulldozing racially mixed neighbourhoods in favour of establishing securitised black peri-urban townships. Through an administrative Bantustanisation of townships many black urban dwellers lost their right of residence in ‘South Africa’ and were in effect made subject to the contractual labour regime. ‘Forced removal’ involved the
resettlement of black South Africans from mixed townships and white rural areas to the Bantustans (Henrard 1995-96).

Apartheid’s system of migrant labour within South Africa was paralleled by a wider southern African regional regime procuring contracted migrant labour for South Africa’s mines, commercial agriculture and industries. Like migration within the territory of South Africa, this took off in the mid-19th century, connected with colonial diamond and gold mining industries and it continued throughout the 20th century. In the colonial period, sending communities across the southern African region were controlled through ‘indirect rule’ in alliance with ‘native’ authorities (e.g., Mamdani 1996). It continued during apartheid through Pretoria’s collaboration with ‘traditional chiefs’ in the Bantustans and its political influence across the region. The republic had struck bilateral recruitment agreements with most bordering territories and states, 9 from which migrant workers were drawn (Wentzel and Tlabela 2006). In the South African mines 40 percent of the workforce were not South Africans throughout most of the 20th century, and about the time of liberation this had gone as high as 60 percent (Crush 2003:3). Migration to the mines was mostly formally regulated during apartheid, while undocumented labour was more common in agriculture. A prevailing circular migration was consistent with the control of settlement by blacks in urban areas. Like Bantustanised ‘internal’ migration, it engaged countless unsalaried workers, mainly females, labouring in the sending communities. This constituted a precondition for the reproduction of a mainly male, underpaid and hyper-exploited migrant labour force (Wolpe 1972). But whereas the control of urban influx was relinquished for migrants from the Bantustans in 1986, cross-border workers were never granted urban residence.

From racial Fordism to neo-liberal precarity

Apartheid with its comprehensive system for mobilising hyper-exploited unfree black migrant labour was designed primarily to serve the labour needs of the mining industry and capitalist agriculture. Yet it came into conflict with rival capitalist claims as South Africa was developed into Africa’s most industrialised state through a policy of import substitution (e.g., Legassick and Wolpe 1976). It was a particular version of ‘peripheral Fordism’ (Lipietz 1982). Gelb (1987) referred to it as a ‘racial Fordism’, the industrial dynamism and economic differentiation of which was curbed by apartheid’s deep racial dualism and a political economy grounded on a path dependent (post-)colonial accumulation scheme. This disjunction has been identified as an important driver for a long-run economic decline in the 1980s and it has remained an exacerbating structural predicament following the democratic South Africa into the new millennium in spite of a radically changed political framework and changing relations of race and class (Mbeki 2009).

The decade preceding the final caving in of apartheid in the early 1990s was marked by recession, international sanctions and widening cracks in the white hegemony. The exclusion of black Africans from qualified professions had become
increasingly inopportune for influential factions of capital, and a powerful anti-apartheid popular mass movement – in particular, the growing strength of a ‘community unionism’ breaching workplaces and black townships, city and rural areas, with migrant workers on the forefront (Bramble 2003) - had turned apartheid’s strategy for procuring cheap labour down a cul-de-sac.

The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), negotiated between the ANC and the National party in the early 1990s, brought an end to apartheid and eventuated in the first universal multiparty elections in 1994. It established a non-racial political democracy and universal citizenship and avoided a protracted civil war but it came at the price of a compromise with domestic and international corporate capital that, seconded by pressure from the international monetary institutions, was to sell out on values of social equality and policies of redistribution that had been pivotal for the trade unions, the SACP and left factions of the ANC. It pertained moreover to the ditching of demands for nationalisation of the mines and land reform to benefit the rural poor. It actually speeded up, a development that had already taken off under the crisis-ridden apartheid of the 1980s and transformed a state-regulated regime, characteristic of Africa’s post-colonial developmental state, into a neoliberal one (Buhlungu 2010). In 1996 this was inscribed in a neoliberal structural adjustment programme, the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution programme (GEAR), which led to the dismantling of national currency regulations, the adoption of free trade agreements, tax reduction, corporate restructuring detrimental to labour rights and the organisation of workers, welfare state retrenchment and the privatisation of public services.

COSATU initially won the battle to embed social democratic labour market institutions in economic governance but lost the battle within the ANC government to pursue corresponding fiscal and monetary policies (Fine 2014: 336). The tripartite alliance’s original neo-Keynesian Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), spearheaded by COSATU, was put on the backburner together with the vision of a social democratic, post-apartheid ‘social compact’ which prioritised employment growth, labour rights and an inclusive redistributive policy for combating poverty and social inequality (Maharajh 2011; Barchiesi 2011; Fogel 2015).

One strand of South African critical research focuses on ‘elite transition’ and shifting race-class alliances driving this development: from ‘white Afrikaner political rulers to blacks in Pretoria, with Johannesburg’s white English-speaking capitalists retaining overall control of the economy, yet permitted to disinvest their apartheid-era wealth’ (Bond 2000: 575). The transition reflects, argues Mbeki (2009: 39-100), the persistent post-apartheid power and influence of the South African Minerals-Energy Complex’ (MEC). It was, argues Terreblanche (2003: 95ff) in his monumental work on the history of inequality in South Africa, headed by the powerful Anglo-American Corporation in a ‘fourth phase’ of the search for an advantageous accumulation strategy at the point when apartheid’s centralised bureaucratic state and its vast security apparatus had - under the impact of unionisation and the anti-apartheid struggle - played out its role in procuring cheap
labour for the mining industry. MEC ‘oligarchs’ now intensified a search for a new alliance with a modern liberal black South African urban middle class with its roots in British colonialism. It had historically been a driving force within the ANC. In the political and business strategy of late apartheid since the end of the 1970s it had, although discontented with the political arrangement, come to be seen as a social layer with vested interests in the prevailing economic system, essential to promoting a perceived ‘buffer zone’ between the privileged white elite and ‘the hungry and oppressed black multitudes’ (Mngxitama et al. 2008: 16).

The lynchpin of the new post-apartheid elite alliance was to become ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ (BEE). It meant a transfer of corporate shares to a limited number of selected black so-called Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (PDIs), including prominent union leaders, with the manifest aim of supporting the making of a prosperous black bourgeoisie. Its effects were supposed eventually to ‘trickle down’ and alleviate poverty among the black majority. An initial step in its realisation was the setting up of the Black Economic Empowerment Commission (BEEC) in 1998 chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa. In the 1980s he was a prominent trade union leader credited with the building up of one of South Africa’s most important labour unions, the National Union of Mineworkers. Today he is deputy president of the ANC and the country, and one of South Africa’s wealthiest and most powerful individuals.  

Through their alliance with an emerging black political and economic elite the white MEC oligarchy could retain their grip on the huge natural resources of South Africa, while at the same time, aided by the provisions of the neoliberal compact, they could safeguard their capital against possible political perturbations through transferring corporate headquarters and profits abroad (Bond 2013:575). The deal provided a radical opening for the importation of manufactured consumer goods. This lowered the cost of labour for the MEC but resulted in overwhelming international competition with the domestic non-MEC manufacturing sector shedding permanent jobs and creating precarious ones mainly located in retailing and services (Mbeki 2009; Newman and Takala-Greenish 2014; Barchiesi 2011). It produced a multi-million post-apartheid South African precariat caught between a toxic web of agencies forging temporary, contingent and insecure employment and the commodification of ‘de-racialised’ policies for combating poverty and inequality.

Growing welfare transfers and policies of service delivery and the provision of housing for poor South Africans during the 2000s may, seen from this perspective, have served to secure survivalist livelihoods, to boost the hegemony of the ANC and to safeguard its victory in consecutive general elections. With ‘the sons of the nation… in charge after all’ it has kept the poor anticipating a more prolific ‘trickle down’ of the wealth of the nation, which will, however, hardly materialise under the conditions of the prevailing political economy. ‘[B]lack people who had been reduced to an impoverished and vulnerable proletariat by the

1 Paraphrasing Ayi Kwei Armah’s (1968:10) reflection on Africa’s post-colonial predicament in The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born.
cruel system of apartheid were now exposed to the relentless tyranny of “free market” forces’ (Terreblanche 2003: 77). In the final analysis, contended Terreblanche, the Rainbow Nation reproduced a despondent condition of multidimensional poverty and systemic exclusion among poor blacks, passed down from the late crisis ridden phase of apartheid. Similarly, a report by OXFAM (2013) ten years later concludes it has only marginally faced up to a ‘triple challenge’ of ‘poverty, inequality and unemployment’.

According to World Bank statistics, in 2011 over half of all South Africans lived below the national poverty line of around four US$ a day; more than twice as many as in Mexico, Brazil or Peru. This exceptionally high level of poverty for a middle income country reflects South Africa’s apparent inability to reduce inequality. South Africa has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world. Measured by a Gini coefficient close to 0.70 it outdoes the United States (Gini 41), Brazil (53) or Russia (40 in 2009); themselves three of the globe’s most unequal societies. Inequality in incomes is not limited to wages and wealth, but also encompasses the means of obtaining access to, and use of, services, public goods and natural resources (OXFAM 2013). One factor pushing poverty and inequality is unemployment which is measured at 25 percent according to official statistics but is closer to 40 percent if those who have given up applying for formal employment are counted. Unemployment is particularly high among poor blacks, black youths and in former Bantustan areas (Leibbrandt et al. 2009:12; OECD 2013). A profound race-class inequality is reproduced through a two-tiered public-private health service and through a school system which fails to favour poor black youth in terms of quality of education, pass rates and employment prospects.

Average interracial income inequality has decreased during the post-apartheid period, but remains massive. In comparison intra-racial inequality among black South Africans has risen. Black representation among the professional and managerial strata has grown substantially. Increasing numbers have entered the nation’s professional and business elites through, among other factors, affirmative action and the BEE but at the expense of the continued exploitation of a huge reserve army of cheap, precarious labour, particularly amongst black women, youths and internal and cross border migrants (Gentle 2011). Poverty and unemployment remain concentrated in former Bantustan areas, but increasingly tilt towards peri-urban informal settlements; black ‘townships’ with conditions similar to ‘shanty towns’ or ‘favelas’ in the globe’s least favoured states, and with a high inflow of internal as well as African cross-border migrants. Poor people who have been evicted, as their homes have been seized on the frontlines of housing privatisation, gentrification or prestigious governmental projects, have, time and again, become concentrated in the ‘blikkies’ (new build corrugated iron shacks) of depressing so-called ‘temporary relocation areas’ (Ranslem 2015).

These trends notwithstanding, a more adequate analysis than that which is mostly offered by critics of South Africa’s alleged neoliberal trajectory, contends Habib (2013) in South Africa’s Suspended Revolution, should build on a thoughtful understanding of shifting constellations of power energised by progressive
democratisation. The side-lining of the ANC’s leftist partners (COSATU and the SACP) within the tripartite alliance in the 1990s must be seen against the background of the global neoliberal political surge of the time, an overwhelming power of corporate capital at the moment of the republic’s initial democratic transformation, along with the National Party’s continued grip on the army and police. Made possible through democratisation the balance of power has changed during the 2000s with the strengthened clout of COSATU and the SACP and the empowerment of a differentiated and critical post-apartheid civil society. It has meant a progressive reorientation in social policy and infrastructural development, in particular after the election of a supposedly left leaning Jacob Zuma as leader of the ANC in 2007 and as president of the republic in 2009 (pushed by COSATU, the SACP and the ANC Youth Alliance). It has brought forth a change from neoliberalism to a factual social democratic neo-Keynesian regime with ‘hopes and prospects’ for the formation of a new inclusive social compact.

This alternative narrative seems however to have missed what has, in the European context, been discussed in terms of social democracy’s ‘Third Way’ neoliberal turn, rationalising a transformation of northern welfare states through the commodification of social policy, health, public services and infrastructure, with widely polarising consequences in terms of class and ‘race’ (Schierup et al. 2014). A similar policy of ‘commercialisation by stealth’ (McDonald and Ruiters 2012: 170) has been applied by the IMF and the World Bank to transform the developmental state in the global South. A comparable trajectory in South Africa has been analysed by critics in terms of ‘Zuma’s Own Goal’ (Maharaj et al. 2011); that is losing the Rainbow Nation’s ‘war on poverty’ through devising a ‘talk left, speak right’ commodifying policy agenda embedded in an austere fiscal policy (Bond 2014).

The argument relates to a policy of providing ‘Free Basic Services’, guaranteeing a minimum of water and electricity to poor households; yet jeopardised through its marriage to a neoliberal doctrine of ‘cost recovery’, which allows service providers to demand exorbitant prices for everything over that minimum and to subcontract public service delivery to private corporations or NGOs plus the option to establish austere systems of prepayment for basic necessities. It runs in tandem with ‘Corporate Welfare’. This means providing discounted electricity to industrial users, the MEC in particular, while ‘citizens cannot get a dependable supply at any price’ (Bond 2006; also Bond 2012a). It amounts to the public policy promotion of an ‘electric capitalism’ with adverse consequences for health, gender equity, environmental sustainability and socio-economic justice (McDonald 2012). ‘Microcredits’ is another instrument supposedly combating poverty. However, this operates through distorting microcredit rules and mechanisms administered by the large South African banks and according to several in-depth studies functions as another medium for ‘accumulation through dispossession’, driven by an oversized post-apartheid financial sector. It pushed survivalist strategies over the brink to debt peonage and ignited combustible divisions of race, class and gender in the process (Bateman
2014; Hietalahti 2013). It relates, finally, to the embeddedness of amplified state-funded welfare transfers in a dysfunctional wedlock between path dependent paternalistic regulations, reminiscent of the apartheid era, and disciplinary means testing circumscribed by fiscal rigour. Although de-racialised and greatly extended in breadth it is seen as largely ‘tokenistic’, without the capacity to lift the weight of the World off the backs of South Africa’s poor (Bond 2014). It is a stalemate, argues Barchiesi (2011), which needs to be discussed with a synthesising focus on the nexus of a disciplinary citizenship and precarious labour.

Vagaries of flexploitation

A critical element in South Africa’s post-apartheid transformation was the deracialisation of labour legislation during the second half of the 1990s, through which apartheid’s labour legislation (introduced to protect unionised skilled and semi-skilled white workers), was reformed and extended to cover all unionized, skilled and semi-skilled South African workers. Thus legislation that formerly protected the privileges of an elite of white workers should in future ensure privileges for an elite of post-apartheid workers, of ‘whatever race or skin’ (Seekings 2007: 18). But in the same instance it moved, argues Seekings, ‘vestiges of the apartheid era’s division between insiders and outsiders inside the workplace [to the] outside of the workplace, so that the (formally) employed were now all insiders whilst the unemployed, casual workers and informally employed remained outsiders’. Here Seekings, following from his work with Nattrass (2005), focuses on one of the drivers of poverty and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. Yet the argument succumbs to a weakness similar to that of Standing (2011), who sees the ‘precariat’ as a particular ‘class’ beyond the insider interests of what remains of Fordism’s protected, privileged blue-collar working class and the unions representing them; whereas, following Seymour (2012), ‘precarity exerts effects right up the chain of class strata, throughout the working class and into sections of the middle class’. Seeing an enduring opposition between privileged ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ without skills and formal employment, comes up short when facing a post-apartheid intellectual and political discourse on ‘flexibility’ that has entered social reality as a ‘material force’ (Bezuidenhout and Kenny 2000; Bezuidenhout et al. 2004).

This ‘force’ poses, as elsewhere (Schierup et al. 2015), an immense challenge to unions. It is manifest in legislation pushing the commodification of labour, but no less through installing a quo ante bellum state of flexibility through informalisation, disregarding or covertly circumventing formal regulations. Employment triangulation, ‘externalising work’ through outsourcing, subcontracting and the displacement of responsibility for recruitment, employment, salary and working conditions from large, profit-making corporations to the practices of a multitude of private labour brokers have been identified as drivers of the informalisation of labour and the growth of new forms of unfree labour (Benjamin 2013b, 2013a) perpetuating colonialism’s and apartheid’s ‘legacy of systemic exploitation’ (Terreblanche 2003). Thus, a multitude of opaque corporate
practices of ‘informalisation from above’ (Theron 2010a) has replaced apartheid’s top-down extra-economic force as driver of a casualised, socially insecure and disempowered multitude, bound into unfree labour (Benjamin 2013a). This prescription is established by the repression of organised agency. It is contingent on systemically embedded de-regulation, de-unionisation and an ethno-racially rationalised disbanding of broader solidarities.

A composite precarious labour pool is overwhelmingly black, to a considerable degree migrant, and increasingly female. The spaces it occupies become, in turn, sites for active reproduction of ‘informalisation from below’ where the poor employ inventive livelihood strategies which are beyond the reach of formal regulatory frameworks. A widening grey area has come into existence ‘where the boundaries of formal and informal production become hazy and undistinguished… and where employment is hardly conducive to social inclusion and citizenship’ (Barchiesi 2010: 68). A majority of the employed have been recorded as falling into the precarious category of ‘working poor’ (Altman 2006: 11ff). In the wide zone of informality and the vortex of temporary agency work migrants have a ‘comparative advantage’ for many employers, as they make a particularly cheap and flexible labour force. This pertains to cross border migrants who are bereft of powers to negotiate due to their dispossessed status (Fine 2014; Gordon 2010), above all the undocumented, but is also matched by the ‘comparative disadvantage’ of domestic migrants, squeezed into unfree labour through forces of unequal regional development, poverty, debt, and their desertion by organised labour (Xulu 2010).

Migrants from the Bantustans were at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid and yet they remain among South Africa’s most disadvantaged and are currently neglected by the unions (Xulu 2010; Fine 2014). Abject conditions in former Bantustan areas drive them into poverty stricken townships. Here they share spaces with a medley of South Africa’s most disadvantaged, including a growing population of irregular, trans-border labour migrants and refugees and asylum seekers whose lives in informality are conditioned by an ostensibly liberal, but allegedly unreliable, asylum regime flourishing with corruption (Northcote 2015; Amit 2015). Trans-border migrants travel from neighbouring regions, whence the apartheid regime used to recruit labour but come also as undocumented labour migrants and as refugees from more distant parts of Africa, such as the Congo and Somalia (Tati 2008).

Their concrete situation and opportunities depend on the geographical hinterlands they migrate from, the specific dynamics to which they respond, their claims on the South African state, and their respective skills, qualifications and networks (Kok et al. 2006). But as a general trend, the centre of gravity of African cross border migration has shifted from a preponderance of formally regulated contract labour under apartheid to the employment of undocumented workers in the 2000s (Tati 2008; Gordon 2010; Fine 2014). The adoption of internationally monitored structural adjustment programs across sub-Saharan Africa, often combined with internecine conflicts, has produced increased reliance on informal
livelhoods, premised on cross border migration and petty trading, with South Africa as the prime destination. The prevalent South African response has been to stem migration through a reaffirmation of state sovereignty, exclusionary migration policies and securitisation (Evans 2010:105; Trimikliniotis et al. 2008); a condition reinforced by new legal restrictions on cross-border migration and the acquisition of citizenship in 2014 (Dube 2014).

This reflects the ANC’s efforts to craft a new national identity after liberation and a politics of confirming citizenship rights for insiders through exclusivism towards neighbours, which consequently incites xenophobia (Fine 2014; Johnson 2007). Throughout the post-apartheid period ‘illegal migrants’ have been vilified by politicians and the media. They are exposed to daily harassment by black ‘native’ township dwellers. Educating the citizenry in ‘migration issues’ and encouraging them to “‘root out” and report “illegal immigrants” to state authorities’, together with empowering police officers, has allegedly exacerbated the situation (Neocosmos 2006: 96-7). Yet inconsistent border control and institutional practices across the political and administrative apparatus give rise to ‘permeable borders’ (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010) in spite of restrictions. A ‘Fortress South Africa’ (Crush 1999; Trimikliniotis, Gordon and Zondo 2008) is thus similar to ‘Fortress Europe’ and ‘emerging economies’ of sub-Saharan Africa (like Nigeria, Ghana and Botswana), in ‘profiting from irregular migration while denouncing it’. Unlike earlier times when trans-border migrants were concentrated in mining and agriculture they have now become a preferred cheap and flexible labour force in a range of low wage economic sectors, including municipal services, construction, retailing, and health care (Fine 2014). Police round-ups in informal peri-urban townships and continuous deportations reign in tandem with entry through the clandestine practices of private transporters, labour brokers, the police and other public agencies (Kihato and Landau 2006; Tshabalala 2015) which are allegedly shot through with corruption (Amit 2015). Thus the mostly formal and centralised regulation of cross-border African migration under apartheid has been replaced by a predominantly informal regime (Segatti 2011:56) according to the logic of which ‘periods of “tolerance” and “crackdowns” appear to conveniently alternate with periods of labor needs and labor surplus’ (cf. Gordon 2010).

Undocumented migration is neither an entirely new phenomenon nor is it far from being the only route for African labour migrants into contemporary South Africa (e.g., Fine 2014; Vigneswaran 2007). At the same time migrants need not be ‘undocumented’ in order to be incorporated in novel types of informalised precarious labour. They may be formally recruited through temporary contracts, they may be refugees or asylum seekers, and yet be entangled in covert webs of informal labour relations. A range of studies has scrutinised the differential impact of informalisation, spurious labour relations and the manipulation of migrant status, race and gender in, among others, capitalist agriculture (Theron 2010b), municipal services (Barchiesi 2011; Miraftab 2004), hospitality (MiWORC 2014), manufacturing (Barchiesi 2010) and the building industry (Cottle and Rombaldi
all confronting the South African labour unions and with strenuous predicaments and vexing dilemmas.

Still, it is the precarisation of work and livelihoods fuelled by the post-apartheid accumulation strategy of the MEC that could bring these predicaments and, in connection with this, the ANC’s ‘social contract’ with South Africa’s poor to breaking point (Cohen 2013).

Marikana and the demise of community unionism

On August 16, 2012 this was put under national and international spotlight owing to the massacre enacted by the South African Police Service on striking mineworkers protesting against the management strategies of the Lonmin mining company17 at its site of operation bordering the township of Marikana in the Rustenburg platinum belt. It was the macabre climax of a protracted labour conflict, involving - on the one side - the company management, leading cadres of the ANC and the National Union of Mineworkers (one of COSATU’s most important affiliates), and – on the other side – the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Unions (AMCU), mobilising the protesting workers, including numerous migrant workers.

This fatal act of police violence tarnished the glorious reputation of South Africa’s exceptionalism internationally and brought a looming crisis of the ANC and the labour movement to a head. Yet this was only, comments Frankel (2013: 163) acidly in a piercing study of the South African mining industry, one ‘small massacre’ amidst an ocean of less reported everyday destruction of labour, human lives, land and money related to the MEC. Beyond polished corporate reports portraying sustainable labour force management and responsible community development, this ‘vast scale of things’ (Frankel 2013: 163) underlying the Marikana imbroglio exposes an extended illicit undercutting of labour standards (Forrest 2013) causing frequent work-related accidents, injuries, illnesses and early deaths with both the unions and the government complicit (Frankel 2013: 24ff). It is contingent on methodical strategies of ‘informalisation from above’, on inept management of migration (Frankel 2013: 82ff) and a proliferating micro-financial industry’s ‘deliberate and programmed engagement with some of the most vulnerable and exploited individuals in the country’ (Bateman and Sharife 2014).

Migrant workers are recruited to the industry’s most arduous jobs from the same impoverished regions across South and Southern Africa whence the apartheid regime drafted migrant labour. They are exposed to illicit practices of labour brokers, traffickers, township landlords and usurers. Many are undocumented and unprotected ‘irregulars’. Others belong to the most vulnerable among the mining districts’ numerous temporary ‘contracted workers’. The contracted workers are, contends Frankel (2013:99), the precarious labourers who are for fear of dismissal, ‘persuaded’ to enter ‘hazardous areas where permanent workers will not go … and do not have to go under existing legislation’. Migrant workers make up, he reports, a rising proportion of the contracted workers. Their factual conditions will depend on the ‘unscrupulousness of brokers and end-users, the nature of demand in the market, the availability of men, women and children desperate for work under any circumstances, and in the last analysis, the capacity of the Department of Labour to
monitor its own laws and regulations’. Dependence on criminal networks of traffickers, local or international, and on community-based money lenders, debt collecting thugs and tight-fisted landlords, forces them into debt peonage and a position of de facto unfree labour. This means a state of insecurity and bondage, which may apply to many locally domiciled workers and to South African migrant workers alike, but to which trans-border migrants are particularly at risk due to their conditioned and often ‘illegal’ residence. The employment of a mainly male labour force reaps, as under apartheid and the colonial regime, hyper-profits through the subvention of sub-minimal wages by unpaid productive and reproductive work of women in poor migrant hinterlands. Young women trafficked to the mines have scant opportunities for employment and often end up as prostitutes in destitute shanty towns surrounding the mines. Thus colonialism’s and apartheid’s migration systems, built on hyper-exploited unfree precarious labour, are reproduced under the current informal conditions.

The Marikana crucible became the ultimate proof of Sakhela Buhlungu’s (2010) piercing analysis in A Paradox of Victory depicting a post-apartheid demise of South Africa’s inclusive community unionism. Alongside acts of overarching labour solidarity in the fair new world of ‘flexibility’, ethno-nationally rationalised conflicts loom; in the mining industry as well as in other economic sectors and across townships. This mirrors the refurbished politics of labour force control as well as jeopardised union strategies for the containment of informal labour (Theron 2010a). In retrospect, 1994 was a moment when union leaders and activists started to move into positions within the ANC and state institutions, and many black workers climbed the occupational ladder to take up key positions in enterprise hierarchies. But it ushered in, as well, new modes of corporate control. Control in the apartheid period was, contend Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2011), subject to centralised bureaucratic and police containment whereas today’s corporate control is dominated by a fragmenting differentiation driven by ‘the market’. It is inscribed in a political economy of re-racialisation, with the black political elite as well as the labour movement being complicit.

Under cover of a discourse on working class unity and ‘decent work’, COSATU – leaving its community unionism behind after the demise of apartheid - has, according to its critics, failed to address the conditions of precarious workers and poor township dwellers in general and migrants in particular (Fine 2014; Barchiesi 2011; Hlatshwayo 2010; Buhlungu 2010). It has taken a defensive stance, rather than an active one, on the organisation of cross-border migrants in South Africa and across the region. They are the people who, through their ‘foreign’ backgrounds, the informality of their livelihoods, their precarious position in terms of rights and their exposure to vigilantism and harassment, represent the embodiment of today’s South African precariat. The labour unions have, in general, not been willing or able to include in their ranks this multi-ethnic precariat of ‘natives’ and ‘foreigners’ embroiled in informal conditions of work and vulnerable livelihoods (Barchiesi 2011; Theron 2010a; Fine 2014). Migrants, in particular, are – as recorded by several critical studies - seldom seen by unions as social agents to be included on their own premises in a broader struggle for changing the balance of forces in workplaces and townships; therefore the unions...
share responsibility for the persistence of a fragmenting xenophobia (Hlatshwayo 2010; Fine 2014).

**Xenophobia – A strange fruit of democracy**

What conventionally figures in the South African debate as ‘xenophobia’ has been a feature of the post-apartheid era since its beginning and remains a persistent daily reality (Crush 2000; Neocosmos 2015). It is reflected in a strange discursive transition from ‘Kaffir’, a pejorative term for black South Africans under apartheid with colonial roots, to *KwereKwere*; today’s principal derogative term for the black African ‘foreigner’, with a ‘peculiar speech’, an ‘alien culture’ and with an imagined darker pigmentation than ‘native’ black South Africans; here in Ndumiso Mbatha’s (2013) *Chronicles of a Slave Chain* condensed as a lived migrant experience:

My accent is ridiculed and I am mocked as I walk by the street; greatly prejudged and discriminated because my skin is different. I am called Nigger, Kaffir, Nyukunyuku, Kwerekwere, Cockroach and Chocolate by my brothers of my blood.

Far from being shared by all South Africans, so-called ‘xenophobic attitudes’ have been proved common and equally represented among “the poor and the rich, the employed and the unemployed, the male and the female, the black and the white, the conservative and the radical” (Crush and Pendleton 2004: 2). Yet, it is a violent, repeatedly deadly, black-against-black harassment and looting across poor black townships which has come to embody the image of a virulent ‘sickness of xenophobia’ (Neocosmos 2015); or read with Fanon (1967) as an internalised white ‘Negrophobia’ (e.g., Mapokgole 2014; Mbembe 2015).

And it is *Alexandra* - one of South Africa’s most destitute black townships - bordering Sandhurst, one of Johannesburg’s richest residential areas, and South Africa’s prime business centre, with the stock exchange and the gold and diamond exchange - that continues to figure as its corporeal symbol. In May 2008 attacks on migrants in the township hit the headlines of the South African and the international press. From this ‘spark’ it spread like wildfire to townships across the country. It left more than sixty dead migrants, hundreds injured, more than 150,000 homeless and much demolished or looted property; most of the victims were cross border migrants, but they also included victims belonging to groups of internal South African migrant workers deemed not to belong to the local community.

Although brutally separated and seemingly worlds apart, today no less than during apartheid settlements like affluent Sandhurst and shanty town Alexandra are intimately connected (Mingxitama 2008: 197). Similar to other global cities of the world, the historically accumulated wealth of areas like Sandhurst, Johannesburg - under apartheid all white, today shared by whites and a growing class of wealthy blacks – is produced through the backbreaking labour of a sprawling multi-ethnic precariat in destitute townships like Alexandra. At the same time, whites and the wealthy black middle class were the ones that ‘expressed the most surprise and disgust at the violence that had taken place’ (Mapokgole 2014: 45). They quickly, notices Mapokgole, ‘in an act of bad faith, separated themselves from the Alexandra residents who committed the violent acts’ which were judged...
'incomprehensible’. This placed, she concludes, the violence in a vacuum ‘disconnected from the lives they, the wealthy, lead’, thus absolving them of any responsibility.

These widespread 2008 so-called ‘pogroms’ (Neocosmos 2008) were, actually, only one instance of violence inflicted upon the bodies, shelters and property of labour migrants, refugees and street vendors across South African townships. Xenophobia remains a persistent daily reality and a painful political issue. A new extensive wave of violence in 2015 started with attacks on Somali petty traders in Soweto and rolled on with deadly attacks on foreigners living and working in Durban. It was allegedly fanned by malign statements directed against foreigners on the level of regional governance and ministers of the republic. We are as a society, concludes the African Diaspora Forum (ADF 2015) in its aforementioned letter of appeal to the president of the republic, ‘worse off as a society than in 2008, as xenophobic attitude and speeches have now penetrated state institutions and affected both the basis and the top of the state’.

South Africa’s poor-against-poor violence has been projected as the consequence of persistent race-class inequality (Bond et al. 2010). Others have, with reference to Franz Fanon and Steve Biko, depicted today’s ‘xenophobia’ as ‘apartheid vertigo’ (Matsinhe 2011); a ghost from the past representing ‘[a] “darker” as you can get hacking a “foreigner” under the pretext of his being too dark — self-hate par excellence’ (Mbembe 2015). The urgency of ‘exorcising the demons within’ (Landau 2011: 2) is, however, about more than a wretched state of a black post-colonial psyche. It concerns ‘cracks in the contemporary legal order and social compact’ with roots in the history of ‘South African statecraft’. This is manifested, argue Misago et. al. (2009), in practices of the post-Apartheid bureaucracy in the form of labelling, marginalising and separating populations, with ‘non-nationals’ as the ‘functional equivalent’ of black South Africans under the old regime. It is reproduced through and exacerbated by a micro-political clientilism in local communities that, under certain conditions, may turn these ingrained divides between ‘aliens’ and ‘natives’ into ‘resources’, through violence and looting.

Gordon (2010), for one, advances a synthetic explanatory framework of law, political economy and struggles over privileges of citizenship embedded in the prevailing post-apartheid hegemony. The ‘division between citizen and foreigner’ is, he argues, stipulated through legal discrimination, echoed in common sense political discourse, the media and in popular lore shared across the nation. Yet this all functions not simply to highlight cultural or genetic ‘difference’ but to ‘create the particularly intensive vulnerability that leaves migrants open to forms of violence and exploitation’ (Gordon 2010: 7). In order to perform this function ‘such migrants must be exempt from constitutional norms that were designed to protect individual liberties’. It is a condition forged through a ‘“state of exception” seen as a state’s right to its own self defence’. ‘Xenophobia’ emerges in this account as a precondition and tool of a legal-political regime’s engineering of a ‘xenoracial’ multitude of ‘new black’ alien working poor. It is evidenced by the daily harassment of migrants in black townships, and increasingly the inner-city
ghettos of Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Durban. They become victimised as
struggles over realising citizenship, social and economic rights, benefits and access
to public services promised by the transition to democracy grow callous across
townships exposed to un- and under-employment, informalisation of livelihoods,
commodification of public services, and the debt-trap of a microcredit industry
destroying ‘thin reserves of intra- and inter-ethnic community trust, mutuality,
reciprocity and solidarity’ (Bateman 2014: 94). Thus apartheid’s racist system
‘maximising cheap labour with little financial burden on the state’, contend Desai
and Walsh (2010: 12), has been supplanted by ‘a cheap labour pool without rights
within a cheap labour pool of black South Africans’. They are the alienated
‘members of society without recourse to the state…policied through violence both
by the state and by other poor South Africans who see themselves as bearers (and
possible beneficiaries) of certain rights and concessions’.

A multitude of marginalised actors, sharing lack of protection, extreme
vulnerability and dependence on opaque institutional arrangements, may appear a
fertile ground for the proliferation of a society with the ‘psychology of violence’
operating ‘on the basis of the weakest link’ (Mingxitama 2008: 196). But
discriminatory politics engineering precarity for flexploitation can ‘lead to all sorts
different reactions from self-immolation to class struggle’ (Neocosmos 2015). In
spite of the apartheid state’s determined efforts to exploit and engineer ethno-racial
divisions, labour migrants from the wider southern African region have been
mobilised in the anti-apartheid struggle alongside de-nationalised ‘foreign natives’
(Neocosmos 2006). Is not this the conundrum at the centre of the xenophobic
puzzle? From where should one embark on a complex analysis, asks Neocosmos
(2006)? From this perspective the xenophobia of today emerges as the strange fruit
of the ‘National Democratic Revolution’. It encapsulates a discrepancy between a
broadly mobilising pan-African discourse and inclusive activist ideas of citizenship
during the struggle against apartheid with a community-anchored trade unionism as
vanguard, and an exclusive xenophobic conception of citizenship marking the post-
apartheid ideology of nation building. Here, in the name of human rights and
settling the bill of historical injustices, the ghost from the past is represented, not as
xenophobia, but as migration, in the Rainbow Nation’s narrative of nation building
associated, per se, with apartheid’s malign system of forced labour.

Whither the ‘unfinished revolution’?

‘A society comes through fire a nightmare and it ought to heal through dreaming;
not a dream of sleep but the dream of vision’, avows the Nigerian poet and novelist
Ben Okri (2012) in his memorial lecture in honour of Steve Biko; a critical
message at a junction when unceasing xenophobic violence has brought the
contradictions of a deepening political and social crisis into the open and lent
momentum to critiques of disjunctions between dream and reality. The embrace of
neoliberalism has ‘stolen the South African Dream’, bewails Satgar (2011). The
past two decades of the republic’s integration into global circuits of accumulation
has, he contends, brought an end to any substance in the positive post-apartheid
discourse of a ‘South African exceptionalism’. South Africa has become one of many ‘laboratories’ of a discriminatory ‘neoliberalism with African characteristics’ (Satgar 2012); an ‘ugly world of … capitalist barbarism’ marred by ‘racist and xenophobic dog-eat-dog conflicts’, mourns Alexander (2010) in ‘South Africa: an unfinished revolution’. Yet South Africa remains ‘exceptional’ in the wider regional and African context; that is to say in its role as a sub-imperial hegemon inherited from the apartheid state, albeit dressed in new clothes (Bond 2012b; Samson 2009). The republic figures as a regional force in the 21st century’s new ‘Scramble for Africa’ with demands for ‘regime change’ as strings attached to the politics of investment and loans. It is a ‘Fortress South Africa’ that has refurbished a system of migrancy and unfree labour with colonial origins across the Southern African region and sub-Saharan Africa (Evans 2010). It is at the same time a society where xenophobic imaginations represent the embodiment of an idea of exceptionalism, depicting ‘South Africans as superior to the rest of the continent… [and] fellow human beings who exhibit differences from the supposed norm as outsiders to community and therefore as enemies of the nation who can then become legitimate targets for violence’ (Neocosmos 2015).

Marikana’s bloody Thursday– labelled ‘democracy’s Sharpeville’ (Frankel 2013) – can be seen as a ‘turning point’ (CASAC 2012) in the short history of post-apartheid South Africa; ‘a final disillusion’ as foreshadowed by the late Neville Alexander (2010). It exposed the need for South Africa’s political and social crisis to be understood against the background of a crisis of neoliberal globalisation in general and of the post-apartheid accumulation strategy in particular, with a continued dominance of the minerals-energy complex (Mohamed 2007). It has been described as situated within a corporatist ‘triangle of torment’ (Alexander et al. 2013: 146), the perimeter of which circumscribes the extractionism of a globalised corporate business, a political elite directing a chilling security apparatus, and a canonised trade union movement corrupted through capture by the power of covert elite alliances (Bell 2016). From this perspective we may see Marikana as the crucible from which arose a new increasingly violent phase in the search for a viable accumulation strategy with no accord, so far, in sight. But twisting the optic, we may as well, in a Polanyian mood (1957 (1944)), discern a crisis of the neo-liberal accumulation strategy riding in tandem with a multifarious popular ‘countermovement’ which contests the accumulation-through-dispossession that has shattered the dream of and struggle for social justice, welfare and dignity invested in the National Democratic Revolution. It heralds, read through Gramsci, a moment of crisis where the still not so old post-apartheid hegemony may be dying, but where what is yet to be born remains obscure, and with plenti of morbid symptoms.

The post-apartheid trajectory has meant ‘a paradox of victory’ for the labour movement (Buhlungu 2010); bled through complicity in elite transition and corporate restructuring and with a promised dawn of dignified work and inclusive citizenship clouded by precarious labour and debt peonage. The events at Marikana broke the camel’s back, agitating large swathes of union members, including many
migrant workers stuck in the most arduous jobs for a pittance. A subsequent storm of labour unrest across the country resulted in a deep split in the movement which eventually manifested itself through the dramatic splintering of COSATU, the political consequences of which remain indefinite (Bell 2015; Jim 2015; Fogel 2015).

In the meantime the informal precariat persists on the margins of a labour movement which has sold out its celebrated ‘community unionism’ once rooted among the township’s poor. ‘Insurgent citizenship’ (Miraftab 2009) erupted as a new political subject with ‘We are the Poors’ (Desai 2002). It is manifested as daily micro-political resistance, with thousands of protests against housing privatisation, forced evictions and the commodification of basic needs like electricity or water. In contrast to ‘invited spaces’ for ‘stakeholder deliberation’ between civil society, business and the state, the poor create their own ‘invented spaces’ as sites for protest and unsolicited community action (Miraftab 2009). This informal movement of the South African precariat, on the margins of substantial social rights and beyond state control, deserves, intimates Neocosmos (2011), the honourable designation of an ‘uncivil society’; often met by rubber bullets, pepper spray and criminal charges (e.g., UPM 2013). It is one seen to stand out from a ‘civil society’ of CSOs and NGOs, streamlined by conforming to a legalistic and depoliticising human rights agenda, and bounded through incorporation in neoliberal governance as service providers or as ‘think tanks’ financed by the state or international donors. It signifies a conspicuous divide, conclude Fioramonti and Fiori (2010: 35), between ‘well-resourced NGOs that enjoy quite limited popular support (and often refrain from taking a direct political stance) and widespread grassroots movements with few resources and a strong focus on socio-economic rights, which have become increasingly vociferous on issues of social justice and have not hesitated to enter the political terrain’.

No matter whether we subscribe to Guy Standing’s (2011) controversial designation of the precariat as a new dangerous class, we may agree with the proposition that it is indeed dangerous. But ‘dangerous’ in being a floating and yet genuinely political ‘uncivil society’, situated on the borders of informality and beyond the reach of a governance co-opting, disciplining and depoliticizing an authorised ‘civil society’ (Neocosmos 2011). Thus the creative ‘informalisation from below’ by the poor may carry with it more than a flexible and affirmative adjustment to a corporate ‘informalisation from above’; a transmutation from facilitator of ‘flexploitation’ to a ‘politics of informal people’ (Bayat 1997) resisting ‘the tyranny of the market’ (Bourdieu 1999a).

A composite South African ‘uncivil society’ harbours, beyond volatile and localised day-to-day service delivery protests, a range of articulate social movements. Among them is the Unemployed People’s Movement (UPM) taking inspiration from Martin Luther King’s dream of building a coast-to-coast poor people’s alliance, and the Landless People’s Movement – a member of the international Via Campesina movement. Faced with the current historical moment’s ‘farce of economic apartheid’ replacing the ‘tragedy of apartheid’, a new
social movement of the poor needs to develop, declares the chairman of the UPM, Ayanda Kota (2012). It will require complex and long-term counter-hegemonic strategies from the ground up for the revolutionary transformation of the ‘whole society’, the ‘participation of the people’, and the ‘sharing of political power and control over resources’. Such strategies must, explains Kota (2014), merge everyday informal confidence with a ‘second task’ of creating a wider oppositional subjectivity. This will eventuate only through linking informal every day action for the improvement of livelihoods (e.g. starting community bakeries, crèches and urban gardens) with ‘infusing political and social consciousness and building a mass movement’, potentially in alliance with a rejuvenated Labour movement.

These movements of ‘the poors’ came in 2015 to be seconded by the flaring upsurge of a rebellious student movement heralding ‘the re-emergence of people’s power’ (Naicker 2015). Using the slogan #RhodesMustFall - and with reference to the radical literature that inspired the anti-apartheid struggle, like Fanon, Biko and Cabral – it has recalled memories of colonialism’s chilling ‘rainstorm’ down the spine of black people and contested today’s political elite’s alleged subservience to the colonial legacy (Kunene 2015). Operating as #FeesMustFall, demanding the reduction of prohibitive tuition fees, it went on to contest race and class-based prerogatives and disadvantages that continue to permeate the post-apartheid educational system and to protest against the outsourcing of service work on the campuses to private entrepreneurs employing sub-contracted workers for ‘poverty wages’ (IOL 2015). By stirring memories of the students fighting fierce street battles in the liberation movement against apartheid, this struggle for affordable education is intricately connected with broader struggles for economic and social transformation in today’s South Africa. It links a ‘struggle against tuition fees to everyday struggles for survival occurring in the country’s most impoverished communities’ (Webb 2015).

A multifarious insurgent citizenship may at times hold a ‘xenophobic’ component but often embodies civic organisation in solidarity with African non-citizens, highlighting commonality beyond origin or nationality, and thus contesting the politics of xenophobia (EAC 2008; Payn 2015). South Africa’s defiant multitude counts also vibrant organisations and a critical movement born out of African diaspora communities, raising their voices against Afro-phobia, in defence of precarious livelihoods and for an inclusive non-racial South Africa (e.g., ADF 2015). These voices of a defiant migritude (Willén 2015) are, however, too often marginalised, contend Desai and Walsh (2010), in favour of civil recommendations to the state by polished reports funded by international human rights organisations; the same state that - while officially denouncing it - plays with fire through both fanning and exploiting xenophobic violence.

As South Africa’s deep social divisions are heading towards breaking point and a widening gulf of mistrust has opened between the ANC leadership and its constituencies, ‘xenophobia’ enters as a stratagem of a still hegemonic power block in an ongoing political contest. As elsewhere - not least across the changing political landscapes of an ‘integral Europe’ (Holmes 2000) – nationalist endogeneity has become the ideo-political bedfellow of ‘fast capitalism’: ersatz for
a social policy undercut by commodification. Marking out boundaries of belonging operates a populist stratagem for boosting legitimacy and containing the social crisis through co-opting, redirecting, pacifying and exploiting a multifarious, but politically volatile, poor people’s upheaval (Hart 2013). It represents a specific South African articulation of the general problem of elite transition in post-coloniality raised by Fanon. It authorises a re-traditionalisation of society and expounds a post-modern style of patriarchy and conspicuous consumption among the political elite as role models for poor, black, broken families (Hart 2013). It is perceived as being en route to reinventing the British colonial regime’s hated ‘indirect rule’; already once replicated in apartheid’s attempt to bond with ‘traditional chiefs’, and manipulated as a counter-force against those days’ township rebellions and an increasingly powerful trans-ethnic community unionism. In this sense a current day retrograde politics of indigeneity may loom in the shape of a Balkanising ethno-national fragmentation of the rainbow nation’s liberal ‘non-racial democracy’, of which the ‘native’ versus the ‘alien’ from beyond the nation’s border will be only one facet (Motsepe 2015). Yet, the ANC does not stand alone in vying for the bodies, minds and souls of South Africa’s unruly precariat. The reigning tripartite coalition is riven with deep internal conflicts and has been challenged by major emerging counter-hegemonic political projects growing out of deepening fractures in the post-apartheid political hegemony itself; out of a disenchanted ANC, and out of a traumatised labour movement. At this juncture of social and political crisis, with the presidency itself in the eye of the storm, the fortunate days of the particular class-race alliance on which the post-apartheid South African hegemony was first founded may be counted, it begs the question of whether ‘hopes and prospects’ for a refurbished social compact are likely to be carried forward from within the original tripartite political coalition, promising a ‘more radical phase’ of the national democratic revolution to come (Umsebenzi 2015), or alternatively out of nascent forces of contestation challenging it from beyond. In any event, precarious labour, poor people’s movements, migration and xenophobia are crucial stratagems of the moment. They relate to the need for building inclusive alliances with movements of a precariat of ‘natives’ and ‘aliens’ in a society where the politics of xenophobia and a twisted nationalist narrative, reading migration as the spectre of South Africa’s apartheid past, has become a smoke-screen covering up the ‘suspended revolution’ of its present.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for critical comments and suggestions by David Johnson, The Open University, Aline Mugisho, African Diaspora Forum and the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, Raúl Delgado Wise, University of Zacatecas and by Editor of Critical Sociology, David Fasenfest. I appreciate the many valuable suggestions made by colleagues participating in the REMESO seminar 11 November, 2015. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Martin Bak Jørgensen, Ålborg University and to Xolani Tschabalala and Aleksandra Ålund (REMESO) for their critical readings.
I acknowledge generous funding by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare [FORTE grant No. 2006-1524] and through a Research Links Grant by The Swedish Research Council [No. 2013-6682].

References


Alexander, Neville (2013) Thoughts on the New South Africa, Auckland Park: Jacana

Alexander, Peter, et al. (2013) Marikana. A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer, Auckland Park: Jacana Media


Armah, Ayi Kwei (1968) The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born, Oxford & Johannesburg: Heineman


Bateman, Milford and Khadija Sharife (2014) 'The destructive role of microcredit in post-Apartheid South Africa', in Bateman, Milford and Kate Maclean (eds.) Seduced and Betrayed: Exposing the Contemporary Microfinance Phenomenon, Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press

Bell, Terry (2015) 'SACP's flag is palest pink', Available at: http://groundup.org.za/article/sacps-flag-palest-pink_3156
Bond, Patrick (2012a) 'In South Africa, the poor pay the electricity bill of the world's largest mining company', EJOLT. Available at: http://www.ejolt.org/2012/10/in-south-africa-the-poor-pay-the-electricity-bill-of-the-worlds-largest-mining-company/


Bramble, Tom (2003) 'Social movement unionism since the fall of Apartheid: The case of NUMSA on the East Rand', in Bramble, Tom and Franco Barchiesi (eds.) Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa', Aldershot: Ashgate


Cohen, Robert (2013) 'The Marikana tragedy: South Africa’s social contract with its working poor breaks down', Inroads, 32


Eid, Haidar (2015) ‘An independent homeland or bantustan in disguise?’, The Electronic Intifada. Available at: https://electronicintifada.net/content/independent-homeland-or-bantustan-disguise/9905


Fanon, Frantz (1967) Black Skin, White Masks, New York: Growe


Forrest, Kally (2013) 'Marikana was not just about migrant labour', Mail & Guardian. Available at: http://mg.co.za/article/2013-09-13-00-marikana-was-not-just-about-migrant-labour


Mandela, Nelson (2012) 'Ubuntu Told by Nelson Mandela', *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HED4h00xPPA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HED4h00xPPA)


Mbata, Ndumiso A. (2013) 'Chronicles of a Slave Chain', Thoughts From the Bishop. Available at: https://ndumisombatha.wordpress.com/2013/09/24/chronicles-of-a-free-slave/


Mingxitama, Andile (2008) ‘We are not all like that. Race, class and nation after apartheid’, in Hassim, Shireen, Tawana Kupe and Erik Worry (eds.) Go Home or Die Here, Johannesburg: Wits University Press


Naicker, Camalita (2015) 'South African student protests herald the re-emergence of people’s power', Scroll.in. Available at: http://scroll.in/article/764715/south-african-student-protests-herald-the-re-emergence-of-peoples-power


Also Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhre8OP7Rkw


Seymour, Richard (2012) 'We Are All Precarious - On the Concept of the ‘Precariat’ and its Misuses', New Left Project. Available at: http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/we_are_all_precarious_on_the_concept_of_the_precariat_and_its_misuses


Theron, Jan (2010a) 'Informalization from above, informalization from below: The options for organization', African Studies Quarterly, 11 (2-3): 87-105
Theron, Jan (2010b) 'Sour grapes', Law, Democracy and Development, 14: 1-21
Tshabalala, Xolani (2015) 'Waiting on the Move: The Social Life of Mobility Governance Across the Beitbridge Border’ REMESO. Linköping University,
UPM (2013) 'Unemployed People's Movement',
Waite, Louise (2008) 'A Place and Space for a Critical Geography of Precarity?', Geography Compass, 3 (1): 412-33

Notes
Thus contradicting the Marxist doctrine seeing ‘free labour’ as the quintessential character of labour under capitalism. That is the wage labourer’s ‘freedom’ from ownership of the means of production, but also her basic freedom to sell her labour through negotiating, signing or terminating an employment contract (Marx 1976 [1885]). More broadly, reflecting on new trends in the international migration of labour in the 1980s, Miles (1987) and Cohen (1987) argued that ‘unfree labour’ more appropriately reflects the actual conditions of a wide range of workers under capitalism, past and present, exposed to social exclusion, racism, discriminatory labour market segmentation and differential forms of formal and informal coercion, and thereby not having the capacity to freely circulating their labour in the market.

The idea of the ‘National Democratic Revolution’ was first formulated by the SACP in 1928 and was later adopted as a political charter for the broad ANC led anti-apartheid struggle. The CPSA originally departed from Lenin’s understanding of the French revolution and later ‘bourgeois revolutions’ - including Russia’s first revolution of 1905 - as a still ‘unfinished’ (socialist) revolution (Sewell 2004; Slovo 1988).

This metaphor was also used by Alexander (2013: 181), arguing that ‘[w]e will have to demonstrate to the people of South Africa and the world that the rainbow is nothing more than “the united colours of capitalism” and that the pot of gold does not lie at the end of the rainbow, but that it is an ideological construct that benefits the owners of the gold mines of South Africa and their associated multinational investors’.


With reference to, among others, Wolpe’s (Wolpe 1972) work on the political economy of racial capitalism and cheap labour in South Africa.

Influenced by parallel politics of segregation in the United States … Terreblanche (sida)

Among others, what are present day Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Swaziland.

Formal BEE legislation passed in 2003 and later consecutively amended.

For details see The Republic of South Africa (2013).


Referring to Harvey (2005)

My allusion to Bourdieu (1999b).


London registered with its operational base in Johannesburg.

Sivandanand (2001) coined in ‘Poverty is the new Black’ the notion of ‘xenoracism’ is an attempt to analyse the plight of the new poor, stigmatized and hyper-exploited population of phenotypically white eastern Europeans in terms of British attitudes to race and class traditionally focused on post-colonial migrants of ‘colour’.


As, e.g., foreseen by Marais (2001 [1998]).

Notably the Economic Freedom Fighters (a party founded by the former chairman of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema, who was expelled from the ANC after having criticized its leadership for complicity in the Marikana crucible) and the United Front (a coalition of left leaning forces with its spine in unions that have ceased toeing the line with COSATU).
At the time of writing with all across the country demonstrations mounting a mass petition for the resignation of president Zuma under the hashtag slogan ‘#Zumamustfall’ (ironically paraphrasing the earlier ‘#Rhodesmustfall’). Yet, in spite of a widespread demand for Zuma’s resignation (e.g., Jara 2015; Motsepe 2015) this campaign has been denounced by several critics of Zuma and ANC hegemony. A petition ‘initiated by white capital which called #Marikana workers criminals’, contests Malema, the head of the opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters. Zuma will fall from office but ‘it will be the work of the black majority and not a “hashtag of white capitalists… genuine revolution against the #ANC and #Zuma will be black-led and will ultimately overthrow the white monopoly capital and transfer land’ (as quoted by Jacobs 2015).