

In addition, local governments have to adjust to recent laws that give more rights to citizens. Emdon points out how the shift from a parliamentary democracy to a constitutional democracy has led not just to political rights but also legal rights that enable people to protect themselves from discrimination and the arbitrary behavior of landlords and government. Throughout its existence, the apartheid state had maintained a commitment to the law (even unjust ones). Today, those laws have been strengthened and augmented.

This section ends with a chapter on the history of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Built early in the city's history, the Gallery was an institution white in its conception but never explicitly a part of the apartheid regime. Over many decades, it has served as a "cultural recorder and resource," as Carman describes in detail. To survive, however, it will have to foster strong relations with its immediate environment and the changing social mix of Johannesburg.

## 9

### Reclaiming Democratic Spaces

#### CIVICS AND POLITICS IN POSTTRANSITION JOHANNESBURG

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The posttransition period in Johannesburg has witnessed a dramatic reconfiguration in the relationship between political and civil society. The African National Congress (ANC) has rapidly consolidated its control by either incorporating or marginalizing the popular movements that brought it to power. In addition, the imperatives of a top-down vision and strategy of transformation have resulted in the increasing centralization and insulation of the institutions of municipal governance. A number of observers have read into these trends a decline in the autonomy and vitality of civil society. Indeed, it has become something of a cliché to claim that the civic movement in Johannesburg—celebrated not so long ago as the most vibrant urban social movement in the world—is in complete disarray.

Reports of the death of the civic movement in South Africa are premature. First, as Cherry *et al.* (2000) argue, there has been a conflation of the demobilization of the civic movement with a generalized crisis of civics. Although it is true (and hardly surprising) that civics no longer engage in the kind of broad-based mass actions that marked the height of their power, ample evidence exists that civic associations continue to play an important role in the lives of the urban poor.

Second, many analysts have judged the civics movement against a narrow and instrumentalist measure of how civil society organizations (CSOs) contribute to democracy; they focus on governance questions and the extent to which CSOs shape state policy and assist state intervention. But CSOs, and social movements in particular, often have their most lasting and

democracy-enhancing effects in civil society by promoting horizontal (rather than vertical) ties of association and creating new spaces of voice and participation.<sup>1</sup> Independently of whether such efforts are successfully scaled up (that is, impact on the state), they have the valuable cumulative effect of enhancing citizen capacities and cultivating (or recultivating) solidarities (Cohen and Arato, 1995). The particularly strong brand of fiscal conservatism and technicism that has marked the transformation process in Johannesburg has seen the civic movement displaced from the center to the periphery of the organized political forces reconfiguring the city. Despite this political marginalization, and in part because of it, local civics continue to strengthen citizenship.

Third, social movements are, almost by definition, cyclical in nature. Their strength waxes and wanes in terms of their capacity to mobilize resources (internal and external) and with respect to the political opportunity structure.<sup>2</sup> In reviewing a number of cases of democratic transition, Hipsher (1998) found that in all those in which a dominant posttransition party emerged, urban social movements experienced rapid demobilization. Township civics that once made Johannesburg ungovernable have explicitly abandoned the politics of contention in deference to the authority and legitimacy of the ANC.

The consolidation of representative democracy has led many commentators, as well as the ANC, to question the very *raison d'être* of civic structures. But although the civic movement in Johannesburg is now ineffective and virtually invisible as a *corporate actor*, civics in Johannesburg at the branch level continue to play an important role in community life.<sup>3</sup> Based on research conducted between March and December 2000,<sup>4</sup> we found that a large number, and quite possibly a majority, of townships and informal settlements in and around Johannesburg have active civic branches, most of which are affiliated with the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO).

In this chapter we explore three factors that explain why civics in Johannesburg have persisted. First, civics represent an important means of bridging the gap between communities and the increasingly distant centers of authoritative decision making. Second, they provide important social protection functions in local economies that are exposed to the dislocating effects of liberalization and global integration. Third, they embody a powerful civic imaginary that represents an ongoing search and struggle to define *workable and virtuous* communities against a tide of socially disintegrative forces.

The political position of civics is fast undergoing significant changes. Throughout the transition period and through much of the democratic period, civics in Johannesburg affiliated with SANCO have enjoyed a close and almost symbiotic relationship with the ANC. This relationship reflects the strategic decision by SANCO to forgo the social movement politics of building autonomous civic structures in favor of a politics of incorporation. The latter has led to a unitary, hierarchical, and formal organizational structure designed to maximize SANCO's leverage in corporatist structures. Both politically and organizationally the strategy has failed. But somewhat paradoxically, the decline of SANCO has been accompanied by a revitalization of local civics. The most significant manifestation of this revitalization has been the increasing tension between local civics and the ANC. In many cases local conflict amounts to little more than intraelite struggles for political ascendancy or control over development resources. In most instances, though, this assertion of civic autonomy marks a revival of participatory democratic traditions as a reaction to the increasing centralization and insulation of representative structures. Specifically, this revitalization embraces the idea of a solidaristic, civic community in the face of the clientelization of politics and asserts a public moral economy in the face of the commodification of life chances.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY

There have been two peak moments for civics. During the mid-1980s the civics reached their height as a *movement*. They mobilized and contested state authority across hundreds of communities with the thinnest of organizational infrastructure. This was a movement in the classic sense: mobilizational, contestatory, and loosely and horizontally organized. Under apartheid, the civics initially arose in direct response to local grievances and functioned primarily as self-help organizations. As one Soweto civics leader explains, "We did not see civics as political structures—the majority of members were not ANC members, although many of the activists were. Organising was primarily around bread and butter issues like leaky roofs, water bills and rent."<sup>5</sup> But the civics soon became the fulcrum of an incipient urban revolt against the illegitimacy of Black Local Authorities.<sup>6</sup> As civics mushroomed across the country, regional civic structures—most notably Civic Association of the Southern Transval (CAST)—provided critical coordination functions. Direct, issue-based local protest actions were scaled-up into political actions that challenged apartheid directly. In this respect, this civics movement transformed local, immediate, and largely inchoate moments of protest and resistance into a cohesive, self-sustaining

structure that produced its own distinct modes of contention (the boycotts) and its own ideology and vision of transformation.<sup>7</sup>

Organized movement capacity was rapidly brought into play with the political opening of 1990. The Soweto Accord of that year ended the civics-led boycott and resulted in the establishment of the Central Witwatersrand Metropolitan Chamber (CWM) "which aimed to set in place processes of remedying the apartheid city" (Tomlinson, 1999:8) and in many ways pre-figured national constitutional negotiations (Friedman, 2000). The Chamber became the model for the 1993 Local Government Transition Act, which set the stage for local negotiations based on principles of nonracialism, democracy, and a single tax base to establish new local government structures (Tomlinson, 1999). The civics were so central to this process that Chris Heymans could remark that it was "well-nigh impossible to discuss, plan or implement development in South Africa without engaging with, or at least having to take into account of, civic associations" (quoted in Seekings, 1997:10). However, tensions were already emerging between the ANC and the civics movement. As the role and legitimacy of the CWM expanded, so did apprehensions among ANC provincial leaders that the chamber was a "threat to their own desire to centralise political control of the transition" (Swilling and Boya, 1997:182).

This period marked the civic movement's second peak, one that was distinctly corporatist. With the opening in the political opportunity structure and the unbanning of resistance organizations, the power equation shifted from mobilization to negotiation. In 1992 the civics responded by creating SANCO, a unitary structure designed to centralize the civics movement into a corporatist interest group.<sup>8</sup> The immediate payoff was significant. SANCO was given the lead role in shaping the Local Government Transition Act and granted representation in the peak corporatist chamber, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). SANCO authored key sections of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (the new government's blueprint for economic and social transformation), notably the chapter on housing. Civics were assigned a direct and critical role in the transformation process.<sup>9</sup>

SANCO's corporatist moment was short-lived. Two factors undermined its efforts to institutionalize its influence. First, SANCO never had the organizational capacity to translate a conjunctural opportunity into a sustainable presence. Second, despite popular support, in the absence of a formal membership base SANCO could neither deliver nor withdraw support for government policy in a credible fashion. This problem was com-

pounded by the rapid absorption of SANCO's leadership into ANC and government structures, blurring SANCO's identity and emasculating its independence. The 1995 local government elections dealt the civics a particularly harsh blow as most local councillors were plucked from the ranks of the civics movement. Not only did this virtually deplete the civics regional leadership, but by creating what were presumed to be robust and direct links between communities and local government the need to sustain independent civic structures outside of political society was all but obviated.<sup>10</sup> SANCO's corporatist stature and its ability to influence government policy were rapidly eviscerated, a turn of events most dramatically illustrated in SANCO's failure to stop the government's abandonment of the RDP's housing program in favor of a more market-and-bank friendly policy in 1995.<sup>11</sup> To make matters worse, the endemic violence of the transition period, in which civic leaders and structures were often directly targeted, saw many civic structures lapse into inactivity.

#### CRITICALLY ASSESSING THE CIVICS MOVEMENT

The civic movement's potential for deepening democracy in the posttransition period can be conceptualized along four dimensions. First, local civics provide a space in which ordinary residents of townships and informal settlements can associate and deliberate around community issues. Not only can common issues and needs be identified, but solidarities can be nurtured. Second, local civics can provide the resources and the framework for collective action, whether this involves self-help activities, various forms of social protection and development, or engaging the state. These roles have the potential to close the institutional and political gap that exists between the state and society and create modes and channels of participation outside formal political society. Third, civics can act as a "watchdog" by monitoring the actions of the state and holding public authorities accountable. Fourth, SANCO can proactively shape and influence policy as an organized interest group.

If the role of the civics movement in the antiapartheid struggle has generally been celebrated, its posttransition role has been the subject of controversy and criticism. Critics have focused on three legitimacy problems. As a peak organization, SANCO was created to scale-up the civics movement. In doing so it exposed itself to the classic dilemma faced by a maturing social movement: the need to manage the trade-offs between the two institutional goals of operational autonomy and political engagement.<sup>12</sup> On this score, the critics have been quite vociferous. Local level SANCO

activists and leaders of breakaway civic movements argue that SANCO, as a national organization, has become so hierarchical and bureaucratized that internal democracy has become a sham and branches have lost their autonomy. SANCO has moreover been compromised by its close association with the ANC. In the words of former SANCO stalwart and president of a rival national civic organization, Mzwanele Mayekiso, the problem with SANCO has been “the introduction of a corporate culture into the civic movement, meaning both the imposition of a top down instructions instead of the bottom up approach associated with the participatory democratic culture of the civic movement as well as the introduction of business as an integral part of the organisation, namely SIH (SANCO investment holdings) with its projects that have commodified civic membership.”<sup>13</sup>

A second critique concerns SANCO’s representativeness and its claim to speak for the “community.” Given that SANCO branch members represent only a small percentage of the community and that the communities for which it claims to speak are highly differentiated, with varied and often contradictory interests, SANCO’s claims to be representative are specious at best and represent a usurpation of power at worst. The danger to civil society and democracy is significant. The claim to monopoly representation crowds out other interests and forms of representation, a threat made all the more serious by SANCO’s close relationship to the party in power. In this role SANCO becomes little more than an instrument for the hegemonic colonization of civil society by the ANC (Friedman, 1992).

A third critique, and the one that has received the most media attention, sees SANCO as little more than a vehicle for local factional or elite interests. Acting as the gatekeeper between the state and the community, SANCO becomes a platform for opportunistic actors to build local power bases and to position themselves for future political or government careers.

### THE CIVICS MOVEMENT TODAY

In evaluating the state of the civics, the first observation is that in areas such as Johannesburg where civics have a long history, SANCO is not a civic movement but a *movement of civics*. The character of local civics—that is, branches—has less to do with the formal unitary structures and the chain of command laid down in SANCO’s constitution than with local dynamics and configurations. Mayekiso’s assertion that the movement has become overly bureaucratized is accurate, but only with respect to the strategic intent of the higher leadership. In practice most SANCO branches operate quite independently of higher structures and have maintained a strong sense

of local identity. In Johannesburg, SANCO is often little more than the title taken by existing and very rooted civics (mostly in townships). In other instances it is a useful framing logic and structure for constituting a new local civic. This is especially true in informal settlements.

In comparison to the early 1990s, civics have lost much of their clout. They are no longer capable of coordinated action beyond the local civic. In April 2000 Johannesburg civics did organize protest marches against the banking council to protest conservative bank lending practices, and in November 2000 a number of Alexandra civics marched on Pretoria to protest housing policy. Such extralocal actions are rare. At the local level there are occasional protests, but these receive little media attention and have little political effect. Civics are not in a mobilizational phase. Demobilization, though, should not, as Cherry *et al.* (2000) have argued for the Western and Eastern Cape, be confused with the demise of civics. In fact, Cherry *et al.* found that current levels of support for and engagement with civics are as high today as they were in the past.

Interviews with regional and branch level officials in Johannesburg and outlying areas paint a picture of a precipitous decline of civic activity in 1994–1997, followed by a modest but significant revitalization of civic structures since 1998. Of the six SANCO regions in Gauteng, all except the Vaal have registered a significant increase in the number of active branches over the past two to three years. Johannesburg—the largest of the regions—currently has twenty-eight active branches (SANCO, 2001). Most of the growth has come in informal settlements. Dissatisfaction with SANCO and its close ties to the ANC have also fueled the creation or revitalization of independent civics. After bitter and debilitating internal struggles, the Alexandra Civic Organisation (ACO) has reemerged alongside the SANCO-affiliated civic and at least three other civics. SANCO dissidents—most notably Ale Tleane of the Tembisa Residents Association, Maynard Menu of the Soweto Civic Organisation, and Mzwanele Mayekiso (ACO)—launched a Gauteng chapter of their breakaway National Association of Resident and Civic Organisations (NARCO) in late 2000. To this can be added the mushrooming of concerned resident associations, derisively referred to by established civics as “popcorn” civics.

Many have seen in this proliferation of civic organizations the fragmentation of a once powerful and unified civic movement at the hands of ambitious political operators. Though this is certainly part of the story, it obscures two equally important points. First, this proliferation of civic organizations can also be interpreted as a healthy pluralization of civil society

that was the inevitable result of the decline of the unifying logic of liberation politics. Second, although many civic associations may indeed be little more than vehicles for the personal ambitions of local powerbrokers, the most active and visible ones are governed by robust democratic practices and enjoy high levels of community support.

A number of case studies have documented the elite capture of civics. The Community Agency for Social Inquiry (1997) found that in the Soweto community of Tladi-Moletsane the local civic only represents homeowners. Shack dwellers have been left to depend on "a mysterious Mr. K to act as their benefactor." The study concluded that an observed rise in xenophobia and assertions of ethnic identity are the result of a "retreat of some community groupings either into organisations that represent their parochial interests or into clientelist relations with local power-brokers" (cited in Beall *et al.*, 2000:34). Everatt (1999) similarly argues that civics are controlled by petty bourgeois professionals and have been used primarily to defend middle-class homeowners against perceived threats of informal settlement encroachment. Some NGOs, such as Planact, have reduced their involvement with civics because internal fighting, such as in Alexandra, made cooperation impossible. In some communities, SANCO branches continue to stake a monopoly claim. In the Soweto community of Diepsloot, for example, efforts by Planact to build a multistakeholder community development forum were actively and often violently resisted by the local SANCO branch, which saw the forum as a threat to its control.<sup>14</sup> For at least one former civic activist who is now in city government, "SANCO still has the attitude that it is 'the' voice of the community and that if you don't go through them, they won't co-operate."<sup>15</sup> SANCO officials themselves note that in some civics the chairperson behaves "like a chief" and one SANCO organizational document noted that in many branches, "Members form consortia with unscrupulous developers for personal rapid upward mobility and delivery [sic] substandard housing products" (SANCO, 2000a:10).

These sobering assessments represent an important corrective to the often romanticized assessments of the liberation struggle. Not only did many commentators exaggerate the democratic character of civic structures, but they often took at face value civic leaders' claims that they represented the "community." Yet recent assessments also suffer from reductionism. Most notable is the tendency to take well-documented cases of elite capture and gatekeeping and extrapolate them to the whole of the civics movement. The resulting canvass depicts a Hobbesian world in which anomie, violence, distrust, self-

interest, and fragmentation predominate. It is a world of clients, not citizens; of strongmen, not democrats. It is a world in which formal institutions (the powers of the state) and informal institutions (norms and values) have all but collapsed. Survival becomes a matter of investing in exclusive, interpersonal, and often extralegal networks of protection and patronage. This marked trend in urban South Africa can hardly be contested.

The other trend is one in which civics (as well as other civil society organizations) are actively resisting the pulverization of civil society (to borrow O'Donnell's [1993] term) by reconstituting communities through democratic and participatory structures. One such example is Beall's (2000) case study of a successful environmental movement in Meadowlands. She found that SANCO was the most prominent community-based organization (CBO) in Meadowlands and that it represented the "more marginalized members of the community." Respondents expressed faith in SANCO as a watchdog and in its ability to "represent their interests in relation to the local councillors and to ensure the latter delivered on their promises" . . . "SANCO was seen as both more accessible and more accountable to the community than local politicians" (SANCO, 2000a:20).

Given the above, there is only one safe generalization: the state of civics today is symptomatic of the state of civil society in Johannesburg—uneven, changing, diverse, and highly differentiated. Moreover, not all forms of associational life promote democracy. Associational ties can be based on exclusive and clientelist exchanges rooted in unequal relations that ultimately promote narrow and parochial interests, just as much as they can be based on more horizontal forms of interaction rooted in non-hierarchical forms of communication and trust and geared toward securing public goods.

#### CIVICS AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Under apartheid, state repression made it virtually impossible, outside the union movement, to build transparent democratic organizations. Accordingly, despite broad-based popular support, civics never had formal memberships. This posed problems of representiveness and made formal democratic practices difficult (White, 1995). Most civics today, and especially SANCO civics, are membership-based organizations governed by a constitution and formal democratic practices of elected representation and accountability. Office holders are elected at every level of the organization and branch level elections are held every year. Regional officials preside over branch elections and branch officials over zonal, street, or area elections. None of this guarantees that

officials will be accountable; it does provide the rank and file with significant leverage and moral authority.

The higher one goes up SANCO's organizational structure, the more influential the ANC. Though the ANC does not intervene directly in elections, candidates for key positions at the regional and provincial level are often "tipped" or selected by ANC structures. The Chairperson of the Gauteng Province, Richard Mdakane, is also the ANC Gauteng Legislator's Chief Whip. Most of the Johannesburg leadership also has close ties to the ANC. The disciplinary powers of the ANC at this level are directly felt. SANCO leaders such as Ali Tleane and Mzwanele Mayekiso who have defied the ANC have been quickly expelled.<sup>16</sup> But at the branch level, leaders seek and sustain their legitimacy by accounting to the community, not to the party. The operational autonomy of SANCO branches is also quite substantial. With the exception of making political endorsements, branches enjoy full discretion of action, including organizing protests. Criticisms of upper structure leadership moreover are fully aired at regional and provincial council meetings.

Based on attendance at ten branch meetings (all in Gauteng and half in Johannesburg), including branch executive meetings, branch councils (in which substructures attend), and mass meetings (open to all community members), local-level democratic culture appears to be robust. Each branch has its own mix of executive, substructure, and open meetings, but on average Branch Executive Committees (BEC) and substructure meetings are held weekly and councils are held fortnightly.<sup>17</sup> In some of the larger branches, heads of department from different substructures also meet routinely. Branch conferences in which the leadership is elected are held yearly. Meeting procedures are fairly uniform, with the reading of agendas, review of attendance, presentation of minutes, and discussion of agenda items as the basic format. Attendance at meetings is very uneven. Weekly branch meetings in Diepkloof, Wattville, Winnie Mandela Park, and the Joe Modise area in Alexandra attract anywhere from 30 to 100 people.

However, community support for civics extends well beyond regular members. When the SANCO branch in Wattville held a mass meeting (the third that year) in November 2000, more than 700 residents attended and sat patiently through three hours of report-backs that included an hour long presentation (and critique) of the government's housing policies. A protest march on council in May attracted over 2,000 participants. Protests in Fine-town and Winnie Mandela Park attracted similar numbers. The responses from the focus groups we conducted were especially revealing.<sup>18</sup> Though we

selected only residents of townships and informal settlements who were not members of SANCO, virtually all claimed to support SANCO. Though only a small number admitted to having attended a meeting, a majority could provide examples of instances in which they had approached a SANCO official for assistance.<sup>19</sup> When we visited SANCO offices in Diepkloof and Vosloorus we found long lines of local residents seeking help with bills, bond payments, and other problems.

The participatory and deliberative quality of branch meetings is high. Though we have witnessed rather autocratic styles of leadership at higher levels, presiding officers at the branch level are made to answer to fairly robust and clearly highly valued rules of order and accountability. Participation from the floor is built into every agenda item and discussions are often quite animated. Officials who monopolize or divert the discussion are often called to order. Discussions are conducted across the full range of African languages spoken in Gauteng, and we have yet to observe any patterns or language indicative of ethnic affiliations or alliances. The membership and leadership, as far as we can tell, reflect Gauteng's African ethnic plurality.

Most of the branches we visited have fairly homogeneous constituencies, being predominantly either townships or informal settlements. Of the two mixed branches we examined—Alexandra and Wattville—there is ample evidence that local civics represent a cross section of residents. In Alexandra the SANCO branch has significant representation in squatter areas and hostels. Alexandra moreover has witnessed the multiplication of civic structures, with no fewer than four civics currently active. In Wattville—which is mostly a township but also has a significant squatter population—the leadership comes entirely from the homeowners strata. The squatter camp, Harry Gwala, does however have a SANCO subbranch. Its leaders regularly attend branch meetings and are extremely vocal. The branch executive has been actively engaged in pressuring the Benoni city council to provide property titles to shack dwellers and adamantly opposed the demarcation board's decision to locate another informal settlement under a different jurisdiction.

The most observable barrier to equal participation is gender. Although it is widely accepted that women form a disproportionate percentage of SANCO's membership, they are dramatically underrepresented in elected positions. This becomes less true at the branch level where women constitute roughly 30% of elected leaders. Women's participation in branch meetings is quite high, representing at least 60% of those in attendance.

### ENGAGING THE STATE

In the early 1990s liberation politics were animated by a hegemonic impulse: “the central problem was that the unity of the ‘people’ tended to be conceived in terms of an abstract and monolithic ‘general will’ . . . embodied in a single movement . . . there was a tendency for ‘unity’ to be imposed from above.”<sup>20</sup> In 1990, for example, some civic activists from Johannesburg insisted “that there was no need for local elections because civics already constituted a democratic form of local government” (Friedman and Reitzes, 1995). This hegemonic impulse posed two intertwined threats to civil society. On the one hand, political elites claimed for themselves the right to interpret community needs and, on the other hand, they elevated the strategic and organizational imperatives of resisting the state above the principle of nurturing associational life. The politics of hegemony demanded that the communicative rationality of civil society (deliberation and pluralism) be subordinated to the instrumental rationality of capturing state power. As Shubane (1992:37) has argued, there “are characteristics inherent to liberation movements that militate against the emergence of civil society. This arises fundamentally from the structural limitations imposed by colonial domination and the exclusion of the dominated from the state.”

More problematic for the civic movement, at least in its expressed aspiration to be an autonomous organ of people’s power, is that this ideological and strategic reflex carried over into the postapartheid period. As early as 1992 Friedman could detect the emergence of a “new hegemony” in which a civics movement aligned to the ANC would act as “a hegemonic power annexing civil society on behalf of the movement, not as a guarantee of its independence” (Friedman, 1992:88). The formation of SANCO in 1992 can be interpreted as an effort to rein in the centrifugal tendencies of independent civics. The ANC itself has never been apologetic about its determination to control the civics movement. In a 1991 discussion paper, the ANC demanded that civics recognize their role as leaders of the liberation movement, asserted its primacy in all matters of political concern, and argued that civics “in a democratic South Africa need not remain as ‘watch-dog’ members of civil society.”<sup>21</sup> SANCO quickly and rather quietly accepted these terms in exchange for inclusion in the state. Thus, despite the fact that a large number of civics continued to be involved in the direct negotiations with white municipalities in the CWM, SANCO supported the ANC’s call that local government negotiations take place within the process of national transformation.

SANCO’s decision to forgo a politics of contention for a politics of incorporation was a reasonable strategic calculation. Social movements are notoriously difficult to sustain. With the demise of the apartheid state, the civic movement lost the unifying and mobilizing frames of resistance to an oppressive, racist state. The civics’ intimate ties to the ANC and a transformation project that envisaged a central role for community structures promised to give the movement influence and resources, and hence the means to secure new sources of legitimacy. A movement can engage the state, even to the point of incorporation, without compromising its autonomy.

To do so successfully requires that the movement maintain a credible exit option—the operational capacity to disengage from the state when inclusion is no longer meeting movement objectives. This in turn requires sustaining an independent support base and an independent set of goals and commitments. On both counts SANCO’s position has rapidly deteriorated. The problem stems from the complete organizational disconnect between SANCO’s higher structures, which are close to the ANC and primarily concerned with exerting political control, and its grassroots branches, many of which have significant support and are willing to engage in contentious actions. The result is a catch-22. Branch-led efforts to organize citywide actions have been actively discouraged and even sabotaged by the region and the province in the name of alliance discipline. At the national level, SANCO has been unable credibly to threaten mass action since 1992 when it threatened a bond boycott.<sup>22</sup> This “fear of rocking the boat” (as SANCO’s president puts it) has undermined the credibility of SANCO’s claims to mass support and hence its bargaining leverage with the ANC.

To compensate for the loss of corporatist influence, SANCO has relied increasingly on interpersonal ties and a form of elite pact making. This has involved deploying large numbers of SANCO officials to government and extending direct political support to the ANC. When SANCO’s National Conference decided in 1997 to allow its officials to simultaneously hold positions in government, it was banking on the advantages of being an insider. It assumed that its deployees could be held accountable to SANCO. Instead the lure of the ANC’s internal labor market proved far more powerful. Having forgone the bargaining leverage associated with mobilization, and with it any autonomous support base, SANCO had become almost exclusively concerned with securing its place in political society. In doing so it compromised its historical role and its core capacity *as a movement*. More than anything this explains the precipitous decline of civics in Johannesburg in the 1994–1997 period.

On issues that directly impact the urban poor, rather than mobilizing support through public actions, SANCO has opted to work through its "channels of influence," that is discretely and without embarrassing the government. Not only has this strategy proved futile, but it has preempted efforts to do what regional coordinating structures are supposed to do, i.e., provide conduits for aggregating and framing local sources of moral outrage and protest.<sup>23</sup> Thus, if at the local level the problems of bond and rate payments and the non-performance of local government remain (along with crime) the most important sources of popular outrage, their political articulation remains inchoate. As a result, at the branch level, SANCO is engaged in a firefighting action. Extraordinary energy and commitment are put into defending households threatened with evictions or cut-offs, but in the absence of regional leadership there is little strategic or programmatic engagement of the issues. Most notably, whereas local branch leaders despair about the lack of access to and accountability of councillors and bemoan the disappearance of local development forums, with rare exceptions none of the leaders we interviewed expressed strong opinions on local government transformation. When asked about the transformation of Johannesburg into a unicity, the standard response was to endorse the "one city, one tax base" principle.<sup>24</sup>

The most serious consequence of this failure to interrogate the role of the state has been the erosion of the institutional infrastructure of participatory democracy. By lending almost unequivocal support to the ANC's transformation agenda, SANCO has endorsed not only the *substance* of transformation (where there is much common ground) but also the *modalities* of transformation. These modalities have increasingly been marked by an emphasis on neoliberal and neomanagerial criteria of delivery, including a heavy reliance on technocratic forms of decision making. As one commentator has noted, "The push towards technicism has resulted in struggle NGOs and mass-based organisations losing their previously clear political direction" (Meer, 1999:112). In a context of fiscal constraint and tighter regulatory frameworks, outsourcing, and increasing technocratic dominance, community-driven and politically negotiated initiatives have been marginalized (Khan, 1998).

Similarly, by privileging the role of a ruling political party SANCO has invested in the media of authority and discipline (the modalities of state power) rather than in the media of communication and contestation, which are the powers (of persuasion) of civil society. Contentious politics have given way to the politics of bargaining and lobbying. SANCO's pact with the state has been to deliver, not to build democracy. Although SANCO branches retain a strong and potentially democratizing presence in civil soci-

ety, the institutional terrain through which participation was to be given substance is rapidly shrinking.

### THE EROSION OF PARTICIPATORY SPACES

Between 1991 and 1994, the CWM was described as "the most consultative policy development process for a single metropolitan area that has ever been conducted in South Africa" and was applauded by the World Bank as unique in the developing world (Swilling and Boya, 1997:182). But as the city has progressed through its multiple rounds of reorganization, the decision-making process has become increasingly insular, driven by small committees of high-level technocrats and private sector consultants. SANCO denounced the Transformation Lekgotla (or meeting) appointed in 1999 as an unconstitutional structure that reduced elected representatives to mere spectators. The formulation of Johannesburg's overall strategy (*iGoli 2002*) for long-term development has also been contested. Though peak-level consultations were initiated, public employee unions and SANCO withdrew in protest over the Municipality's unilateral decision to privatize public services. Repeated protests from SANCO's Gauteng office against credit control measures, the failure to introduce an effective system for registering indigents, and tariff increases for water, sewage, and electricity have fallen on deaf ears. The regional secretary of Johannesburg even goes so far as to compare the city's decision-making style with "the old system."<sup>25</sup>

The city has opted for a transformation trajectory that is essentially a neo-Thatcherite model calling for reducing the municipality's role to "core" functions. In parallel will occur the expansion of private sector provision based on a "purchaser-provider" contract management model "that rests purely on the assumption that everything can be managed by contracts, financial controls and performance management" (Swilling, as quoted in Tomlinson, 1999:27). The downsizing of the state to its neoclassical incarnation as nightwatchman marks a clear rupture with the vision of integrated local development laid out in the Constitution and the Local Government White Paper. Technical and economic merits aside, the model's political impetus is of a classically high modernist inspiration (Scott, 1998). In the high modernist worldview, state managers have an unbounded faith in the ability of experts to apprehend and transform the world.<sup>26</sup> In this light, the primary effect of reducing local government to a contractor of services and making fiscal principles of cost recovery the key measures of good governance are political: citizens are reduced to customers, and democratic principles of accountability (including participation) are replaced with market signals.



If SANCO has been marginalized from the decision-making process at the city level, the situation on the ground has been even more dramatic. Local governments in South Africa are mandated by law to engage in two separate but overlapping planning exercises: the preparation of Land Development Objectives (LDOs) under the Development Facilitation Act and the preparation of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) under the Local Government Transition Act. Both processes were designed to be consultative and to engage civil society. In Johannesburg, the process has been a largely top-down affair dominated by technocrats that has afforded few, if any, opportunities for meaningful community participation. When local councils submitted their LDOs in 1997, those that had adopted a technocratic approach were accepted whereas those that had relied on more participatory approaches were rejected (Bremner, 1998). Bremner (1998) concludes that "because [the process] is seen as imposed by both political and administrative officials [it] has been left to the planning departments of the metropolitan and local councils to co-ordinate and manage (118)."

Interviews with civic leaders in Johannesburg paint a picture of increasing exclusion from the planning process whether in its intensive IDP phase or in various ongoing fora and steering committees. Not a single civic official claimed to have made effective use of participatory structures. The problems ranged from criticisms of the top-down and technocratic nature of the process to conflicts between civics and local government and politicians that resulted in outright exclusion.

In one case civic organizations were invited to participate, but largely to review plans that had already been elaborated by line departments and consultants. The problem was only exacerbated by open tensions between the SANCO branch and ANC councillors. As the SANCO branch chair explained:

At first we did participate in Community Development Forums (CDFs) at the ward level which were supposed to submit to the LDO. But the CDFs were controlled by ANC, and individuals who wanted to enrich themselves. The councillors did not follow the recommendations. When SANCO became more involved, the ANC scuttled them [the CDFs].

Even where ANC-SANCO relations are good, the LDO process has been a dismal failure. Diepkloof was the first community in Soweto to establish a civic. Today it remains a very active branch with a permanent office and an estimated membership of 11,000. Its chair, Vuyisile Moedi, a young, energetic, and extremely well-informed activist, was nominated as ward can-

didate for the ANC in the December 2000 elections. He won with 94% of the vote, the third highest winning margin in Johannesburg. Yet when asked his experience with the LDO he explained:

The process was hijacked by consultants. Consultants were called in to make things easier. But it became a nightmare. The community submitted a list of priorities, but it was not taken into consideration. In the end the LDOs went their own way. . . . We were so frustrated by experience that we stopped attending meetings and wrote letters of protest. The consultants betrayed the aspirations of the people.

A regional official echoed this view:

You go to meetings and the well paid consultants have done all the research and have all the answers. There is no place for the community leader to intervene. The problem is that councillors, officials and consultants are all more capacitated than community leaders. So in the end you get a document that has a list of participants, but if you go through the document you won't see where there has been any real community input.

Given the virtual collapse of formal participatory spaces, SANCO's ability to influence local government has been limited to working through representative structures. Yet even these channels of influence have become increasingly subject to centralized authority, especially under the new executive mayor structure. The medium of influence in Johannesburg has shifted decisively in favor of structural power. One has but to consider the immediate effects of a white residents' rate boycott, redlining by banks, threats of capital flight, or the emigration of professionals to underscore the weak bargaining position of SANCO and other black civil society organizations.

#### RECLAIMING DEMOCRATIC SPACES

The failure of SANCO's politics of incorporation coupled with the shrinking of institutionalized participatory spaces has made effective engagement of the state increasingly difficult for the civics movement. Yet civics continue to play an important role in many communities. They do so neither through control or delivery of development nor through large-scale mobilizations, but through far more prosaic, even mundane interventions. Most of these activities can be conceived as efforts to bridge the gap between community needs and state action. Broadly speaking, SANCO's local level activities can be grouped into three clusters: providing brokerage services, advocacy and watchdog functions, and conflict mediation.

Across a wide range of issues, SANCO officials and volunteers provide assistance and guidance to all residents in addressing individual and community complaints. These brokerage functions are provided either as direct assistance or advice to an individual or group or by engaging the relevant authorities on behalf of aggrieved parties. The most common services provided in Johannesburg are assistance in dealing with billing problems and cut-off threats, renegotiating bonds, and bringing (and following up) cases to the police. In informal settlements, civics assist residents with securing title deeds and registering for government benefits.

The representation of community interests can also assume a more contestatory character. Civics often get involved in bargaining for services or exposing the poor performance and corruption of elected representatives and government officials. These activities involve competition with other interest groups for scarce resources and often involve challenging the authority and probity of local government officials.

The most successful civic-led interventions that we documented in Gauteng were instances of responding to state failures. In Winnie Mandela Park and Finetown (both informal settlements), SANCO branches identified the need for a secondary school (in each case schoolchildren were traveling long distances to school and were often the victims of crime) and lobbied the Department of Education. When these appeals fell on deaf ears ("We got the duck and dive treatment"), the SANCO branches raised money and labor to construct or rent facilities and then identified volunteer teachers and principals to staff the schools. The schools are now operating and SANCO continues to lobby the department for support.

In addition to these brokerage and advocacy functions, many SANCO branches, and most of its subbranches, also take on significant conflict mediation functions. These are not the people's courts of the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> Officials do not sit as judges, instead they simply hear disputes brought to them by complainants and limit their interventions to providing advice or referrals. The vast majority of the disputes involve domestic issues or minor conflicts between neighbors and are handled by subbranch structures. These meetings are particularly well attended and point to the fact that civic leaders enjoy significant legitimacy and respect in the community.<sup>28</sup>

Many complainants are actually referred to SANCO by the police. Focus group respondents repeatedly expressed a preference for "first trying to solve the problem as a community" and "resolving disputes as neighbors" rather than taking matters directly to the police. One mother noted that when it came to dealing with children involved in petty crimes, "I prefer SANCO

because it disciplines in a parental manner unlike the law." Another township resident explained: "SANCO . . . helps us with our youth when they've been involved in crime. Instead of getting them arrested we take the matter to SANCO . . . we meet together and the youth get a scolding."

Brokerage and conflict resolution functions have long been the bread and butter of the civics movement. That this role has persisted, despite the ebbs and flows of the civic movement, attests to the degree to which civics have gained a significant institutional presence in many communities.<sup>29</sup> It also points to the extent to which the postapartheid state has failed to bridge the gap between communities and government. SANCO's brokerage role remains important because of the distance and insulation of local government and the difficulties ordinary residents have in interfacing with local authorities. Government bureaucracies and service providers (e.g., of electricity) are distant and often user hostile, and many residents have neither the skills nor the resources to effectively engage them. As one shack dweller succinctly noted, "They (SANCO branch officials) are our mouthpiece to government." Another said that "SANCO negotiates better for us than if we go there personally. If SANCO goes as SANCO we get quick responses."

Support for civics is clearly tied to a critique of the effectiveness of formal representative structures. When we asked our focus groups why they would turn to SANCO rather than their councillors, one participant responded:

We don't even know where he (our councillor) stays (laughter). When you go to look for him you are told he stays in the suburbs. With SANCO it is better because we live with these people in the informal settlements.

Another added:

It's different with SANCO officials because they are easily accessible. Your presence applies pressure whereas councillors don't feel the pressure because we do not see them. With SANCO, if they've made a promise and don't report, you are able to call them to a meeting after a week and ask for feedback. If you've reported something to him [the SANCO official] he will see that you are desperate, he must feel the pressure because he is your next door neighbour. Every time he steps out of his door he remembers that this person has made this request.

Although residents and SANCO leaders remain overwhelmingly supportive of the ANC, they have quite clearly become increasingly critical of the logic of party politics. Councillors, they argue, are primarily interested in advancing their careers and are as such more accountable to the ANC

than to the community. As for the ANC they see it as more concerned with rewarding its supporters (examples of patronage and nepotism are readily given) than with promoting development. That access to power breeds self-interest ("from the struggle to the gravy-train" in the words of one local activist) is hardly a new idea. What is new is that communities or, more accurately, those outside of political society have become increasingly skeptical of the liberation-era claim that emancipation and redistribution can be achieved through the instrumentalities of political power. This is reflected in the view (forcefully expressed in focus groups) that what defines civics is their nonpartisanship and that civics should not, accordingly, play a role in electoral politics.<sup>30</sup> One might, then, cautiously point to the emergence of an *autonomous politics of civil society*, characterized by a rejection in practice (if not yet in officially stated positions) of ANC hegemony and the assertion of the necessity of more participatory forms of democracy.

Concretely, the "spaces" that such a politics has created are reflected in two strong empirical trends. The first is the pluralization of civil society. The weakening of the ANC's ideological hegemony coupled with accelerated socioeconomic differentiation has given rise to new interests, identities, and demands and spawned the creation of a range of new associations, including special interest groups, concerned resident associations, and non-SANCO civics. SANCO's once facile claim to representing "the community" is now hotly contested. Not a single respondent claimed that SANCO should have exclusive representation in development fora or exclusive bargaining powers for the community. Most readily endorsed the principle of multiple-stakeholder representation and we were provided with multiple examples of SANCO's branches working closely with other local associations. A regional official even remarked that "Popcorn civics are right to criticise SANCO for its lack of autonomy. . . . In the East Rand having opposition is healthy. It has kept SANCO on its toes."

The second development has been an increasing rift between the ANC and SANCO at the branch level. In some cases the rift has been occasioned by little more than power struggles, with local faction leaders using SANCO branches to leverage their position with the ANC. These are clearly cases in which communities are pawns in a struggle for political power. Predictably, this trend accelerated during the run up to the local government elections. In most cases, the tension arises from the frustration related to the state's disengagement and the ANC's failure to take up local grievances. In the informal settlement of Winnie Mandela Park, SANCO officials have documented corruption by local ANC branch officials who have been taking

bribes for allocating serviced plots. When repeated demands to the Provincial ANC office and government officials for an investigation were ignored, the civic organized protests and even investigated the possibility of obtaining a court order to stop the development project. In the informal settlement of Ruth First, the local SANCO branch has challenged the dominant and exclusionary role of a private developer and the local ward councillor in supporting a housing project for the community. In both cases, the civics effectively expanded the democratic space by challenging the ANC's gatekeeping and the top-down logic. In almost every branch we have investigated, including Alexandra, which is the most pro-ANC branch in Johannesburg, the ANC's hegemony is being openly challenged.

Even when SANCO is politically inseparable from the ANC, the sheer centrifugal pull of local grievances and dissatisfaction with the performance of local government have created new sources of contention and new opportunities for autonomous action. Civics that are well organized and have community support are doing much more than providing stop-gap services. By facilitating citizen participation and deliberation they are constituting a *civic community*—that is, a shared imaginary of the *virtuous* community nurtured through horizontal forms of association and communication (Chipkin, 2000).

Our focus groups revealed the persistence of a powerful civic imaginary and, specifically, a manifest desire to identify and address common interests against a backdrop of increasing social disintegration and political fragmentation. Respondents spontaneously equated the "civic" with the "community" and indeed repeatedly noted that civics were an active force "in uniting the community." This is reminiscent of liberation politics, with a key difference.<sup>31</sup> Whereas in the past being a member of the community automatically meant being a member of the civic (at least in the later stages of the struggle) and given that the binary categories of "us" and "them" implied a necessary and inescapable political affiliation, there is no such conflation today. Though none of our focus group respondents was a SANCO member, almost all expressed support for "the civic" and emphasized that assistance from the civic did not require membership. The civic is valued because it is "a home to all" and residents hold very strong opinions about insulating civic affairs from political interests.

Much of the popular support for civics and much of the commitment of its activists flow from moral outrage at the wrenching effects the market economy is having on the urban poor. Civics resist the transformation of citizens into clients and consumers by providing a modicum of protection

to socially and economically vulnerable categories—pensioners, the unemployed, those without land rights—who are exposed to the vicissitudes of the market. Bargaining for those who cannot pay their bonds, arguing for fair tariffs, demanding housing for the needy, and providing assistance to a family in crisis are all elements of defending a public moral economy. As communities have found themselves increasingly excluded from formal politics and authoritative decision making and increasingly subject to state predations in the form of cost-recovery measures, forced displacements, and rent seeking, the locus of political activity has shifted from representative structures to direct democracy. Of course, in the absence of more robust and inclusionary institutions of state-society engagement, these forms of public politics are difficult to scale-up and generally have little impact on public policy. But this should not blind us to the important role that participatory spaces can have in empowering residents *as citizens* and mending (through community-embedded mediation) relations *between* residents.

This is reflected in the fact that residents are more likely to attend civic meetings than ANC meetings. Residents point out that ANC branch meetings address only “party matters” and that executive members “don’t want to address community issues because they might have to criticise the local ANC council.” In contrast, SANCO meetings serve two dominant purposes. First, branch officials provide a wide range of information to residents, including both general information about government policies and specific feedback on SANCO activities. Second, the meetings serve as sounding boards and rallying points for popular grievances. At a meeting we attended in Winnie Mandela Park, every zone was given an opportunity to report. What followed was a litany of complaints, including accusations of bribe taking by community liaison officers, broken water pipes, the blockage of sewage systems, and confusion about the allocation of toilets. Various SANCO officials were then mandated to take up these issues.

The conflict mediation role of SANCO also fills a critical gap in this respect. Given the crowded conditions in townships and informal settlements, the unevenness of property rights, the continuous in-flow of new residents, and the pressures on common and public resources, petty conflict (not to mention criminality) is endemic. Few, if any, states have the capacity to effectively regulate or manage such fluid conditions. Community-based mechanisms of mediation thus remain critical and represent an important countervailing force to atomized or clientelized modes of intermediation. Much the same is true of SANCO’s brokerage functions. They are a direct response to state failures and strengthen the collective rights of residents.

As long as civics are subject to community-based accountability, do not enjoy state-sanctioned advantages in representing community claims, and do not resort to extrademocratic means in competing with other associations for support, they clearly enhance democratic associational life. The intermediation functions of civics, moreover, have two specific democracy-enhancing effects.

First, by mediating conflicts within the community and serving as public spaces for the assertion of community values, civics contribute to producing what Chipkin (2000:14) calls a *virtuous* community. Communities are reclaiming for themselves a vision of the good society that challenges the crime and conflict within their midst and their transformation into atomized clients and consumers. The referent of “the civic” is critical; it invokes the legitimating principle of modern citizenship, rather than traditional or charismatic authority.

Second, civic activity is an alternative to clientelization. State disengagement from civil society provides powerful intermediaries with opportunities for securing client access to government or scarce resources in exchange for political loyalty (Bratton, 1994). Within South Africa, continued support for chiefs in rural areas and shacklords in informal urban areas is a perfect example. Such vertically organized forms of brokerage compromise associational autonomy and undermine civic life (Fox, 1994). In this respect, the fact that the brokerage and mediation services that civics provide are available to all residents, irrespective of political affiliations, and are as such public goods, takes on new meaning. To the extent that civics provide these services without demanding political or organizational loyalty in exchange, they are creating an alternative to clientelism and expanding the scope of associational life.

#### TOWARD A NEW POLITICS?

More than ever the ANC subscribes to a hegemonic view of civil society. Governance, not democracy, is the challenge, and the role of civil society organizations is to provide support to the government’s transformation project. Delivery, not deliberation, is the order of the day. As former Soweto civic activist and now mayor of Johannesburg Amos Masondo explains:

The watchdog idea is still very strong in the civic movement. But it does not work. You can criticise from the sidelines, but in the end the community will judge you on the strength of what you have delivered. Of course there is also a role for civics in promoting democracy, but what matters is what is practical.<sup>32</sup>

Politically the ANC's hegemonizing impulse is reflected in its equation of state power with people's power and its strategy of subordinating independent arenas of popular action to political control. A key ANC Gauteng official recently deplored the "dichotomy between political and civic matters" that is implicit in the very existence of SANCO and called for ANC branch committees to supplant SANCO by engaging directly in civic activities (Makura, 1999:17). A 1999 ANC Gauteng document is even more explicit in its colonizing logic: "There are regions and specific localities in our country in which, for instance, the ANC does not enjoy hegemony. In cases like this, politically non-aligned civics might be appropriate organisational forums alongside of our branch structures . . . [But] unless we convert ANC branches into [a] more civic type function . . . we will have produced a generation of 'cadres' whose experience and understanding of 'politics' will be very alien to our Congress tradition" (ANC, 1999:10).

Many ANC leaders have repudiated this position, but if the list nomination process that preceded the December 2000 local government elections is any indication, vanguardism is alive and well in the party. In principle, ward councillors were to be nominated at branch level meetings. Though the distribution of delegates heavily favored the ANC, alliance partners were given representation (10% for SANCO, SACP, and COSATU each). Given that many ANC members are also SANCO members, there was a real possibility that SANCO could muster majorities. In many branches throughout Gauteng this was indeed what happened. Yet in the end, SANCO nominations were rarely accepted. In some cases, ward conferences were hijacked by the ANC through procedural manipulation. In most cases, the decision was simply made at a higher level. Most analyses of the criteria ultimately used range from outright nepotism and favoritism to a systematic process of selecting only councillors with the appropriate credentials and capacities.<sup>33</sup> Local popularity was not an important consideration, a point that even a key ANC Provincial official subsequently acknowledged and deplored.

Civic leaders in Johannesburg are quite bitter about their treatment by the ANC. A standard refrain is that "at the local level, there is no alliance." Many branch leaders in Gauteng were so indignant about the autocratic manner in which the ANC nominated candidates that they openly challenged SANCO's National Executive Committee call for supporting ANC candidates.<sup>34</sup> The Johannesburg regional leadership however remained steadfast in its support for the ANC. In contrast, the East Rand region complained publicly to the Provincial list committee and demanded an

investigation into blatant irregularities. The chair of the East Rand region explained that if SANCO were to campaign for ward nominees that do "not have the support of the community" it would lose its credibility. "A lot of dead horses have been nominated. I am not going to campaign meetings to support dead horses."

The cement of SANCO's close relationship with the ANC has always been interpersonal networks. The credibility of a hegemonic front and the strategic rationale for the politics of incorporation were secured through the deployment of SANCO's leadership into ANC and government positions. In many areas there have been concrete personal and political payoffs for working closely with the ANC.<sup>35</sup> These network ties, though, can no longer support the contradictions of the partnership. The most obvious problem is that the internal labor market has reached a point of saturation. The reduction in the number of councillors with the redrawing of local government boundaries only aggravated an already precarious situation. One solution to this problem has been to sponsor independent candidates, as the Eastern Cape did in the December 2000 elections. Even in an election marked by a decline in support for the ANC, machine politics still guaranteed the defeat of all candidates challenging for the African vote. Not a single SANCO-supported candidate in the Eastern Cape was elected.

A second response has been to propose that SANCO withdraw entirely from competing for political positions. The rewards of ANC loyalty are increasingly viewed as incompatible with accountability to SANCO. The idea that SANCO deployees can effectively represent the organization's goals within government—the "two hats" position—is now widely disparaged: "how can you bite the hand that feeds you?" is the common refrain. This has occasioned the emergence of what might be called an "autonomy" faction within the Gauteng leadership.

The Gauteng leadership first took a public stance when it endorsed a document drafted by SANCO's president. Entitled a "Strategy Discussion Document to Radically Re-Shape the Vision and Role of SANCO," the document (which SANCO's national executive committee had tried to suppress) rejects a politics of incorporation and argues that movements should "not have aspirations to be in power." Although movements and the state can complement each other, "more importantly, the power of the people and the power of the state must also contradict each other, so that the balance of forces is tilted towards the people" (SANCO, 2000b:15). The document cautiously argues that the ANC does not have a monopoly over the

National Democratic Revolution and that social movements must have an independent political role: "The lack of appropriate opposition to the ANC is a clear indication that the real political opposition can be found in the grassroots mass movements of South Africa" (SANCO, 2000b:15).

The Gauteng commission applauded the document for being the first "written by SANCO" and not the usual documents "released by the alliance, which proffers (sic) to offer advice to SANCO." At the urging of the commission, the Gauteng Provincial Conference in March 2000 passed resolutions calling for constitutional changes that would bar SANCO officials from holding government and ANC positions. (The position was fully endorsed at SANCO's April 2001 national conference, though the actual constitutional amendments are still pending.) With hindsight, the civics movements' decision to embrace the ANC's hegemonic view of transformation is now being openly questioned. As one of the most prominent leaders of the Alexandra Civic, and current chairperson of SANCO's Gauteng Province candidly explained,

When we came to power we ignored social movements because we assumed that state would deliver. The state had a lot of legitimacy, so there was no need for social movements . . . [But] it was a mistake to disband local civics. People were attached to names—TRA, ACO, etc. . . .—and disbanding them created a lot of confusion. By creating SANCO we opened a vacuum for people to set up their own structures. We were too hasty. We should have gone with a federal, not unitary structure.<sup>36</sup>

As a movement, SANCO is clearly caught between significant but uncoordinated assertions of autonomy and a legacy of engagement with the ANC. Defining a more autonomous position would mean a significant rupture of networks ties and ideological affinities and require articulating a clear and focused alternative to the politics of incorporation. This is precisely what SANCO's principal competitor, NARCO, has done. SANCO, however, remains far too entangled, politically and ideologically, with ANC structures for such a clean break to occur.

If we take movements seriously, the importance of such strategic shifts in direction must not be given too much weight. To Lenin's question of "What is to be done?" the answer is (to borrow from Ferguson, 1994) that it is already being done. As we have seen, because of the degree to which they remain deeply embedded in communities, and in many cases have nurtured community self-representation and action, civics are already carving out autonomous political spaces.

## CONCLUSION

The history and current state of the civics movement in Johannesburg are testaments to how rapidly powerful urban social movements can be demobilized in the aftermath of negotiated transitions to democracy. Despite the fact that the transition was the first in history in which negotiations started at the level of local government (Swilling and Boya, 1997), the popular sectors, and most notably civics, have subsequently been excluded from Johannesburg's transformation process. One must not confuse what has transpired in political society with the state of civil society, however. Civics in and around Johannesburg still enjoy a high degree of legitimacy, both as an incarnation of popular aspirations for a *virtuous* community and as a structure of democratic participation.

Because Johannesburg is the standard bearer in the ANC's modernist aspirations of global competitiveness and designated would-be "world class city," the impulse to implement a top-down technocratic transformation insulated from politics has been especially acute. The resulting efforts to exert political control over autonomous civil society organizations and the collapse of institutions of state-society engagement have threatened the very existence of civics. That they have survived underscores three points. First, given the unevenness of local government capacity and the considerable difficulties that ordinary citizens have in engaging democratic authorities, civics still have a critical role to play as brokers and interlocutors. Second, the existence of large numbers of hard working and committed activists is a testament to the fact that though the political context has changed dramatically, the voluntarism and sense of political engagement born of the years of struggle remain important motive forces. Third, the very idea of the civic is powerful in the popular imagination as an expression of solidarity and self-help under trying and desolidarizing circumstances. It remains powerful because it resonates with popular aspirations for an inclusionary and participatory democracy.

## NOTES

1. For an extended discussion with reference to the Indian case see Heller (2000).
2. Tarrow defines the political opportunity structure as the "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 1994:85).
3. Cherry *et al.* arrive at a similar conclusion. On the strength of surveys conducted in an Eastern Cape and Western Cape township, they conclude that though the level of mass mobilization has predictably declined, "there continue to be high levels of popular engagement with self-governing civic structures at the local level" (Cherry *et al.*, 2000:1). Working in a Soweto community, Beall (2000) also found high levels of support for the civic.
4. The research on which this chapter is based was conducted for the Centre for Policy Studies and was carried out with the indispensable assistance of Libhongo Ntlokonkulu. We conducted inter-

- views with national and provincial level South African National Civic Organizations (SANCO) officials, government officials who have interacted with SANCO, and international donors. We examined three Johannesburg branches in depth and conducted interviews with officials from six other branches, including two non-SANCO civics. We also attended SANCO meetings at every level of the Gauteng organization—provincial, regional, and branch—including executive meetings and public meetings. For a full report, see Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001).
5. Interview with Amos Masondo, July 24, 2000.
  6. The strength of the civic movement is most dramatically reflected in the wide-based support for rent and service boycotts. In Soweto, for example, 80% of formal rent-paying households withheld payments for four years (Swilling and Boya, 1997:181).
  7. For the most extended treatments see Seekings (1997) and Zuern (2000). For one of the most insightful case studies written by a civic activist, see Mayekiso (1996).
  8. The circumstances of SANCO's formation were highly contested. Many local civics were concerned that subordinating themselves to a national organization and a single constitution would compromise their autonomy. Some civics, especially those with long histories and strong bases of support, were specifically concerned that SANCO's ties to the ANC would compromise the civic and specifically nonpartisan character of the movement. The Alexandra Civic Organisation in fact moved that SANCO should be a federal structure and that individual civics be allowed to keep their own constitutions and raise their own funds (Mayekiso, 1996).
  9. The RDP promised that "Social Movements and Community-Based Organisations are a major asset in the effort to democratise and develop our society. Attention must be given to enhancing the capacity of such formations to adapt to practically changed roles. Attention must also be given to extending social-movement and CBO structures into areas and sectors where they are weak or non-existent" (quoted in Bond, 2000:95).
  10. SANCO Gauteng Chair Richard Mdakane estimates that 75% of elected ANC councillors in 1995 had civic backgrounds (Interview). In her exhaustive study, Zuern (2000) puts the figure at 80%.
  11. For a detailed account, see Bond (2000:Chapter 4).
  12. Foweraker, as cited in Lanegran (1996).
  13. Personal communication, October 24, 2000.
  14. Interview with Hassen Mohamed, April 18, 2000.
  15. Interview with Laurence Boya, October 30, 2000.
  16. Mayekiso was expelled in part for publicly criticizing SANCO's decision to endorse Mbeki as President even before the ANC had officially nominated him (Zuern, 2000:223) and Tlane was expelled when he sided with the Tembisa Residents Association (TRA) against the ANC council in supporting a flat rate for tariffs.
  17. The Johannesburg branches in which we attended meetings were Alexandra, Mdeni (Soweto), Winnie Mandela Park, Ruth First, and Finetown.
  18. Each group consisted of nine to twelve same-sex participants, ages 25–40, and all met in November 2000. All participants were Johannesburg residents (predominantly from Soweto) who were selected on two criteria: they knew of a SANCO branch in their community and they were not SANCO members. Two of the focus groups were drawn from informal settlements (shack dwellers) and two from townships (house dwellers).
  19. In their survey research, Cherry *et al.* (2000) also found high levels of support for civics despite lack of formal membership. In the Cape Town township of Guguletu only 14% of residents said they were members, but twice as many had attended branch meetings recently and 58% had attended street committee meetings.
  20. R. Fine quoted in Friedman and Reitzes (1995:6).
  21. As interpreted by Lanegran (1996:114).
  22. The threat was withdrawn under pressure from Nelson Mandela. A call by the SACP in late 2000 for protests against the failure of banks to extend housing credit to low-income families was endorsed by SANCO, but participation was limited to a few Provincial officials.
  23. When we asked a Diepkloof branch official what support the regional structure provided he gave a fairly typical response, "Don't make me laugh. We don't get any support. We don't even get correspondence from the region."
  24. SANCO's current president has articulated an important critique of current tendencies toward political centralization and technocratic domination, but these views have not been diffused to the media, and have not been communicated successfully to lower structures.
  25. Interview with Siphewe Tusi, October 23, 2000.
  26. For an extended discussion see Heller (2001). As applied specifically to Johannesburg, see Friedman (2000).

27. As Zuern has pointed out, the people's courts of the 1980s were established by civics in response to the vigilante courts set up by gangs and kangaroo courts set up by councillors. The state tried to demonize people's courts, but all the evidence shows that violent, summary justice came from vigilantes and councillors, not from the civics (Zuern, 2000:110).
28. In the Joe Modise area of Alexandra conflict resolution meetings are held weekly and attended by seventy to eighty persons. Similar weekly meetings in Wattville attract fifty to sixty people. Most of the other branches we visited tend to hear cases during regular open SANCO meetings. Among the cases we heard was an elderly man complaining about the drug abuse of a nephew and his threatening behavior; a young, married couple who were fighting over the fact that he had moved into his sister's household; and a family of sisters who were disputing their deceased mother's inheritance amid accusations of witchcraft.
29. Zuern (2000) makes a similar point.
30. SANCO's leadership, having long espoused the politics of inclusion, has predictably taken much longer to come around to this view. Many branch leaders we interviewed insisted that they would not provide active support to ANC candidates who did not have community support. Nonetheless, most of the SANCO leadership continues to espouse the contradictory view that SANCO can be a "home to all" and at the same time provide electoral support to the ANC.
31. I owe this observation to Ivor Chipkin.
32. Interview with Amos Masondo, October 16, 2000.
33. The ANC has defended this position on the grounds of needing to improve the caliber and performance of councillors. That it also serves as a means of exerting more centralized control over the party and shutting out challengers with independent bases of support need hardly be emphasized. When a very popular SANCO leader from an informal settlement was rejected as the ward nominee by the provincial list committee, a SANCO official explained that the "ANC doesn't like populists who can stand up and challenge the leadership. They did not like this guy because he is too consultative—he takes everything back to meetings."
34. Information based on attendance at Gauteng General Council meeting, September 17, 2000.
35. In the Pretoria region for example, a factional split within the ANC created a vacuum that has been filled by SANCO. Among other gains, this gave SANCO the power to call for and secure a Credit Control Summit in which local government's credit control measures were significantly renegotiated. In the December 2000 local government elections SANCO more or less took charge of the nomination process, and a large number of elected councillors are from SANCO.
36. Interview with Richard Mdakane, October 3, 2000.

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# 10

## HIV/AIDS

### IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE, HOUSING, AND THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES<sup>1</sup>

ELIZABETH THOMAS

South Africa was once notorious for apartheid. Today, it is the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. In 2000, President Thabo Mbeki made international headlines with his claim that AIDS was not caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and his reluctance to implement the health responses that were unanimously adopted by the worldwide medical community. Over 4.7 million South Africans are living with HIV and AIDS-related deaths are estimated to make up to 31% of all deaths, increasing the mortality rate by 45%.<sup>2</sup> By 2010, when such deaths are projected to peak and to comprise 67% of all deaths, mortality will increase by 205%.

HIV/AIDS is a serious impediment to the development problems that challenge the country and its cities. Johannesburg is estimated to have over 287,000 people living with HIV, making up 10.4% of the population. As the city attempts to solve its HIV/AIDS health crisis, it finds that the crisis is not easily confined by public health measures.<sup>3</sup> HIV/AIDS has specific repercussions for housing, the delivery of public services, employment, and social services. Johannesburg is a city struggling with government reorganization, political integration, increasing economic inequalities, lingering racism, poverty, and economic restructuring. On top of this, the AIDS epidemic weighs heavily.

Not surprisingly, local authorities have experienced increasing demand for health and welfare services arising from the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS. However, aside from the health sector, there has been a very limited response by local authorities largely due to a lack of awareness of the



*Lucy Davis*

# Emerging Johannesburg

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE POSTAPARTHEID CITY

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