

ARTICLE

Haunted by the Rebellion of the Poor: Civil Society and the Racialized Problem of the (Non-)economic Subject*

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ABSTRACT: Intrigued by the so-called “rebellion of the poor,” this paper traces back the current South African concern with popular protest to its reconfiguration during the last years of the apartheid order. Focusing on the discourse around grassroots resistance in the mid- to late-1980s, I begin by showing how, in juxtaposition to an ideal notion of civil society, popular mobilization had been largely delegitimized and the emancipatory politics of ungovernability recast as antidemocratic by the first few years of the post-apartheid regime. In deploying particular notions of violence and culture, this discursive shift, I suggest, fed into reconstructing the ungovernable subject as the racial other of the new South Africa’s citizenry. The second part of the paper mobilizes Foucault’s genealogy of liberalism to draw parallels between this process and the liberal effort to resolve the potentially conflicting principles of governing the economic subject and the subject of rights within the realm of civil society. Finally, via the postcolonial critique of liberal notions of civility and their rootedness in racial thinking, I suggest that civil society secures the governability of the population through rendering the potentially disruptive freedom of the people as the excess freedom of the racialized other.

Keywords: ungovernability; popular protest; civil society; racial othering; political contingency

Introduction

“The Western Cape Government says the so-called ‘poo protests’ are part of the ANC’s campaign to make the province ungovernable.”¹ Certainly, when shack-dwellers decided to

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¹ “Poo Protest Backs up Cape Town Highway,” *ENCA* (August 7, 2013). Available online at:

<http://www.enca.com/south-africa/poo-protest-backs-cape-town-highway>. The Western Cape is the only province that, since the 2009 general elections, has been led by the Democratic Alliance (DA). The other eight provinces are governed by the nationally ruling African National Congress (ANC).

demonstrate their outrage over the living conditions in Cape Town's partly informal townships by emptying the content of the City's infamous portable flush toilets in prominent places such as the Western Cape Legislature or the international airport, they have caused quite some public controversy. Arguably, they also triggered the culmination of the post-apartheid reinterpretation of ungovernability. Detached from the liberation struggle's once lauded success in paralyzing the apartheid government of the 1980s, the notion of ungovernability today carries predominantly negative connotations. As a prominent trope in the provincial government's discourse, it refers to instances of popular dissent that noticeably disrupt the routine flow of a country still characterized by an extremely segmented social and infrastructural landscape.² Such disruptions doubtless occur, most demonstrations staged by poor black people, however, remain on the urban periphery or preset routes in less frequented areas of the center. As such, they stay off most middle- and upper class urbanites' radar. Regardless of their actual purpose, in brief news reports they acquire the generic label of "service delivery protests" and dissolve in the normalcy of present-day South Africa.

Just how normal protest action has become over the last decade might best be illustrated by a vibrant statistical sub-industry that seeks to secure the operation of local governments by arithmetically taming the unknown.³ Indeed, drawing on the results of this very effort of measurement and the fact that the number of so-called crowd management incidents averaged above two per day since the mid-2000s,⁴ many analysts have dubbed the country as the "protest capital of the world."⁵ In turn, so as to counter the sanitizing effect of the service delivery protest category and highlight the political weight and sociological significance of the vast extent of collective dissent, numerous commentators suggested that the past decade has seen the emergence of the "rebellion of the poor."⁶ However, the notion of rebellion tends to invoke scenes of disorder and violence, and thus, when channeled back into the mediatized discourse of ungovernability, it ends up reinforcing the threatening imagery of popular resistance.

² See e.g. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, "Unbundled Security Services and Urban Fragmentation in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg," *Geoforum, Placing Splintering Urbanism*, vol. 39, no. 6 (November, 2008), 1933–50; Till F. Paasche, "'The Softer Side of Security': The Role of Social Development in Cape Town's Policing Network," *Geoforum, Risky Natures, Natures of Risk*, vol. 45 (March, 2013), 259–65; Tlou Ramoroka, "Gated-Communities in South Africa's Urban Areas 20 Years into Democracy: Old Wine in Newly Designed Bottles?," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 15 (July 3, 2014), 106.

³ See e.g. the activity of [Municipal IQ](#), "a unique web-based data and intelligence service" that operates a so-called "Hotspots Monitor" "detailing municipal service delivery protests."

⁴ Peter Alexander, "A Massive Rebellion of the Poor," *The M&G Online* (April 13, 2012). Available online at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-13-a-massive-rebellion-of-the-poor/>.

⁵ See e.g. Trevor Ngwane, "Things Have to Change," *ZNet* (2009). Available online at: <http://www.zcommunications.org/things-have-to-change-by-trevor-ngwane.html>; Peter Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – A Preliminary Analysis," *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 37, no. 123 (2010), 25–40.

⁶ Peter Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor"; Richard Pithouse, "Burning Message to the State in the Fire of Poor's Rebellion," *Business Day Live* (August 6, 2012). Available online at: <http://www.bdlive.co.za/articles/2009/07/23/burning-message-to-the-state-in-the-fire-of-poor-s-rebellion>; Unemployed People's Movement, "South Africa: The Rebellion of the Poor Comes to Grahamstown," *The Struggle for the City* (February 14, 2011). Available online at: <http://housingstruggles.wordpress.com/2011/02/14/the-rebellion-of-the-poorcomes-to-grahamstown/>.

Thereby, despite these authors' intentions otherwise, it adds another layer to the thickening specter of a mass uprising that is feared to be casting its shadow over the supposedly reconciled "rainbow nation."⁷

That the specter of the rising poor is a staple of any political and politico-philosophical effort to establish and maintain a particular order of rule has long been proven in engagements whose depth I cannot hope to match here.⁸ Yet, in the spirit of those engagements, I suggest that the reconstruction of that specter in the post-apartheid public discourse is a crucial diagnostic of what the *political* stands for and who the political subject is supposed to be in the current South African order. What is more, as this article shows, it offers insight to the reformation and operation of the idea of civil society beyond contemporary South Africa. Mobilizing both Michel Foucault's rendering of civil society in his studies of (neo)liberal governmental rationalities⁹ and the postcolonial reading of these studies, in what follows, I argue that civil society works to eliminate the contingency of the political by constructing the *homo oeconomicus* in juxtaposition to its racialized other. In other words, I suggest that civil society is a domain within which the freedom of the economic subject, as the ultimate instrument of liberal modes of rule, appears in contradistinction to the threat of the racialized ungovernable subject and its freedom. On the flipside of the freedom of the *homo oeconomicus*, a freedom that is defined primarily in terms of self-interest, we thus find the traces of a freedom that exceeds governmentality. To contain this excess, in turn, the threat of ungovernability emerges through the co-constitution of the incivility of the colonized and the urban poor who therefore can be subjected to illiberal technologies of power. Pushing further previous inquiries into the construction of unfreedom that enables such liberal despotism,¹⁰ at the center of this paper, then, is the question as to what the place of racial difference is in liberal rationalities of government and their deployment of civil society. How does racial difference figure in civil socie-

⁷ Consider the first sentence of a thesis on the topic: "A rebellion has swept through South Africa, the economic and political powerhouse of the African continent" (Peter Pfafe, "A Protest Event Analysis of South Africa's Rebellion of the Poor" (MA Thesis, Berlin School of Economics and Law and University of Kassel, 2011), 1). For an instance of the notion's media appropriation, see Siphon Khumalo, "Rebellion of the Poor," *The Mercury* (September 27, 2012). The phrase "rainbow nation" was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and taken up by the late Nelson Mandela as a metaphor of the diversity of the post-apartheid South African nation "at peace with itself" (Nelson Mandela, "Statement of Nelson Mandela at His Inauguration as President" (May 10, 1994). Available online at: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3132>).

⁸ Cf. e.g. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). See specifically Rancière's discussion of the politico-philosophical role of Plato's metaphor of the "large and powerful animal," that is, the people.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁰ Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007); Barry Hindess, "The Liberal Government of Unfreedom," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2001), 93-111; Mariana Valverde, "'Despotism' and Ethical Liberal Governance," *Economy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1996), 357-72.

ty's work to create and nurture the site and subjectivity of freedom that is amenable to "the internal rule of maximum economy"?¹¹

In responding to that question, the first section below looks at how the idea of civil society played into repositioning ungovernability in South Africa around the time of the democratic transition and during the past decade. In this larger part of the paper, I trace the delegitimization of popular mobilization in the scholarly and political discourse on the civic movement's resistant practice, and show how the juxtaposition of protest and development and/or transition contributed to the racialized reconstruction of the ungovernable subject. Following a brief account of Foucault's idea of civil society, I turn to its postcolonial adaptation, so as to show that racial difference is inherent to the work of civil society and its effort to delimit the practice of freedom. By way of Mark Duffield's notion of excess freedom, I finally arrive at suggesting that the specter of the rebellion of the poor echoes liberal governmentality's construction of "the people" as the potentially ungovernable racial other whose freedom escapes liberal power's grasp.¹²

From ungovernability to civil society and back

Offering an almost too illustrative example of how the notion of civil society was put to work in the South African academic and policy discourse of the early 1990s, in a paper entitled "From anomie to civil society in South Africa," Sholto Cross cites Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) to support his views on what the role of civil society should be in the new South Africa and what sort of organizations are best able to fulfill that.¹³ As opposed to social and religious movements, Cross argues, the civic organizations ("the civics," as they are commonly referred to) that were at the center of massive campaigns of popular resistance in the mid- to late 1980s, hinder rather than help delivering development, as due to their "predominant concern with the political," they fail to grasp the subtle dynamics operating in poor segments of the society.¹⁴ Although they might "now offer their services as development intermediaries," the civics are not suitable for instilling "a common sense of nationality, and internalized sense of civic order."¹⁵

The reasons for pinpointing this particular passage are numerous. Many of them can be found in the very context from which I have excerpted it: an article by Mzwanele Mayekiso, one of the civic movement's organizing officers at the time in Alexandra, a densely populated but relatively small township northeast of Johannesburg.¹⁶ The quoted piece is one in a series of Mayekiso's engagements with the academic criticism of the civic movement and their ungovernability campaign. These articles, together with his 1996 *Township Politics*, offer an inval-

¹¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.

¹² Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*.

¹³ Quoted in Mzwanele Mayekiso, "Institutions that Themselves Need to Be Watched Over," *Urban Forum*, vol. 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1993), 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

¹⁶ Alexandra was at the forefront of the rent and consumer boycotts launched in defiance of the government imposed Black Local Authorities. For a detailed study of the iconic Alexandra Rebellion (1986), see Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

uable documentation of the scholarly and political elite's encounter with one of the most pressing questions of the political transition.¹⁷ That is, how to "reconcile the history of popular politics and mass mobilization with the institutions of liberal democracy."¹⁸ As someone who had been actively involved in the civics' struggle, Mayekiso felt expressly obliged to provide the insider's perspective and carefully account for the ways in which the movement's role was received and reevaluated in circles that, as he rightly observes, had fundamental influence on the idea and design of socio-economic reforms that were to be undertaken ahead of, and after, democratization.¹⁹ In the context of land and urban policy, such influence was deployed most tangibly through organizations like the Urban Foundation and the state funded Independent Development Trust (IDP). Therefore, it is certainly not without significance that these organizations' experts were thoroughly invested in shaping the academic discourse on the civic movement.²⁰

Indeed, Cross' figure—as an Oxford-trained scholar and the director of the IDP's health and rural development portfolio—is characteristic of the direct linkage between the realms of scholarly analysis and policymaking. This linkage, in turn, allows for a rather clear tracking of how, amplifying a trend that had emerged in South Africa already in the seventies, neoliberal governmental rationality prevailed over the socio-political vision of the liberation struggle through, among other ideas, a particular rendering of civil society.²¹ Without attempting to perform that tracking and fully reconstruct the debate contextualized above, in the first part of this section I focus the discussion on two major moves through which scholarly and policy discourses ultimately had juxtaposed the popular mobilization of the mid- to late-1980s to an ideal civil society. On the one hand, they largely delegitimized public protest and other forms of mass resistance. On the other hand, and of course relatedly, parallel to increasing efforts to

¹⁷ Mzwanele Mayekiso, "The Legacy of Ungovernability," *Southern African Review of Books*, vol. 5, no. 28 (November/December 1993), 23–26; Mzwanele Mayekiso, "Bell Curve, South Africa Style: Re-Writing the Civics Movement," *Southern Africa Report*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1995), 29–33; Mzwanele Mayekiso, *Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Krista Johnson, "State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa: Redefining the Rules of the Game," in *Thabo Mbeki's World: The Politics and Ideology of the South African President* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 221.

¹⁹ Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, e.g. 86, 96.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of how the neoliberal vision of the Urban Foundation dominated the late-apartheid housing policy of the National Party and then the National Housing Forum (1992) which provided the bases for the post-apartheid approach, see Marie Huchzermeyer, *Unlawful Occupation: Informal Settlements and Urban Policy in South Africa and Brazil* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004). Cf. Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), *South Africa: Business as Usual? Housing Rights and Slum Eradication in Durban* (Geneva and Accra: Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, September 2008). Available online at: http://www.cohre.org/sites/default/files/south_africa_-_business_as_usual_-_housing_rights_and_slum_eradication_in_durban_sept_2008_.pdf; Richard Pithouse, "A Progressive Policy without Progressive Politics: Lessons from the Failure to Implement 'Breaking New Ground,'" *Town Planning Journal*, vol. 54 (May 2009), 1–14.

²¹ Or, "an explicitly *civilized* society," as Mayekiso comments on Cross' endorsement of Ferguson's *Essay* (Mayekiso, "Institutions that Themselves Need to Be Watched Over," 35; original emphasis).

mold the *homo oeconomicus* in and of the township, we can witness the gradual (re-)construction of politicized poor black people as the ungovernable subject.

The masses dismissed

Let me begin with outlining the depreciation of popular protest action via Mayekiso's challenge to a suggestive conceptual binary elaborated in a 1992 paper by Lawrence Schlemmer of the Urban Foundation.²² In line with Cross' previously cited claim that their political concerns prevent the civics from successfully partaking in community development, Schlemmer distinguishes the politics of protest, which he refers to as "social action," from "the politics of development."²³ Attributing the former to a culture of poverty that gives rise to poor people's "unrealistic expectations" and thereby constitutes a major barrier to development, he then establishes the relationship between protest and development as contradictory.²⁴ As Mayekiso recalls, such a juxtaposition was immediately called into question by a civic activist at the workshop where it was originally presented. Instead of "a sense of futility and frustration" that, according to Schlemmer, ensues from what he calls social action, for those engaged in resistance, the relationship between protest and the improvement of their lives seemed productive: "Many people feel that the changes of the past two years have come about because of these pressures. They feel they have achieved something through mass mobilization."²⁵ Along similar lines, Mayekiso challenges the claim that the civics' resistance had evolved into a politics of development only after the 1990 unbanning of the ANC, and argues that the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) was "profoundly *developmental*" in nature.²⁶ In his own narrative of the AAC's successful defiance of the government-imposed local council in mid-1986, protest action indeed appears as indivisible from people's power, that is, the autonomous government

²² Lawrence Schlemmer, "Organizing Communities: The International Experience," in Helen Zille *et al.* (eds.), *Strategic Planning for Civics: A Workshop Hosted by the Civic Association of Johannesburg and the Urban Foundation, Magaliesberg, August 1992* (Johannesburg: Development Strategy and Policy Unit, 1992).

²³ In light of this binary's effects explored below, it is significant that in her 1992 discussion of the then raging intellectual fad with the notions of transformation and transition, Mala Singh writes: "The politics of transformation is argued to have superseded the politics of protest." Further down she notes: "In addition to frequent usage of 'transition' by political analysts, journalists and others, there is a notable increase in book titles employing the notion. Note, for example, the title *Transitions to Democracy*, edited by Robin Lee and Lawrence Schlemmer (1991) which takes its cue from the belief that President de Klerk's February 2 speech [that declared the unbanning of opposition parties including the ANC and announced negotiated transition] 'marked the 1990's as a decade of transition for South Africa'" (Mala Singh, "Transformation Time!," *Transformation*, no. 17 (1992)). Consider also then president Thabo Mbeki's statement from a decade later: "The people waged a difficult, costly, protracted and successful struggle to end and negate their role as a protest movement and to transform themselves into a united reconstruction and development brigade" (Thabo Mbeki, "The Masses Are Not Blind – Letter from the President," *ANC Today*, vol. 2, no. 40 (October 4, 2002). Available online at: <http://www.anc.org.za/docs/anctoday/2002/at40.htm>). For a discussion of this statement as part of governmental efforts to discipline dissent, see Carl Death, "Counter-Conducts in South Africa: Power, Government and Dissent at the World Summit," *Globalizations*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2011), 425–38.

²⁴ Schlemmer, "Organizing Communities," 20.

²⁵ An unnamed "Civic Associations of Johannesburg comrade" quoted in Mayekiso, "'Institutions That Themselves Need to Be Watched Over,'" 32.

²⁶ Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, 81; original emphasis.

of all areas of township-life through ascending levels of democratic committees.²⁷ Within the openings created by the intermeshing dynamism of these forms of resistance, “people began to ask for, and consider, alternative ways of living their lives.”²⁸

Against Schlemmer’s binary and its various iterations, the notion of the indivisibility of mass mobilization and the thought *and practice* of local and national emancipation seems to be crucial for recognizing the liberal reduction of politics in the delegitimation of protest. Much in line with Michael Neocosmos’ sustained analysis of the discourse of transition and its function in depoliticizing the struggle for national liberation, the preeminence of a particular (neo)liberal vision of post-apartheid South Africa seems to have hinged upon the persistent intellectual effacement of the ways in which protest politics was, in fact, constructive of spaces of freedom beyond the reach of the regime of racial oppression.²⁹ The urge to locate either a process of evolution from protest to development/transition, or a disjuncture between the two needs to be read, then, as one to erase, first, the radical demands of change put forth by the liberation movement and, second, the political redundancy of development. Two examples from contemporary accounts of the mid- to late-1980s’ massive collective resistance will elucidate these two gestures of erasure respectively.

In their introduction to a 1987 issue of the *Review of African Political Economy* on the continuing dynamics of democratic struggles and state oppression in Southern Africa, William Cobbett, Barry Munlow, and Morris Szeftel assess the governmental crisis that the state of emergency—then in its 20th month—both embodied and exacerbated.³⁰ Arguing that the emergency reflected a crisis of capitalism as much as “a complete rejection of the apartheid state,” they link the unprecedented expansion of the liberation movement to the symbiosis of racism and capitalism that was driving the current order.³¹ For these authors, it was due to the strengthening refusal of this symbiotic relationship that mass resistance had gained universality at the time.³² While mainly due to the increased mobilization of independent unions workers had come to occupy the forefront of the struggle, what they were battling against was the racist management of capital by the apartheid apparatus. With this vast assemblage at its tar-

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, e.g. 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 85. Here I cannot pursue the intriguing fact that Schlemmer and Mayekiso seem to share the discourse of development despite their differing views on the popular commitment to it.

²⁹ See e.g. Michael Neocosmos, “Transition, Human Rights and Violence: Rethinking a Liberal Political Relationship in the African Neo-Colony,” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2011), 359–99; Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Toward a Theory of Emancipatory Politics*, (Wits University Press, forthcoming in 2016).

³⁰ A mere three months after the lifting of the 1985 state of emergency, the one announced on 12 June 1986 applied to the whole of the country and lasted until 8 June 1990. It introduced draconian measures constricting political activism and resulted in a notoriously high number of detentions. Cf. South African History Online (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/state-emergency-south-africa-1960-and-1980s>)

³¹ William Cobbett, Barry Munslow, and Morris Szeftel, “Editorial: Democratic Struggles and Apartheid Barbarism,” *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 14, no. 40 (1987), 2.

³² Cf. Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, 97, where he discusses the role of the same symbiosis: “The potentially revolutionary situation during this earlier period [of the 1980s] was based on a popular association of apartheid with capitalism, not simply the lack of civil rights.”

get, their resistance linked up with that of the regime's other victims, thus amplifying "a popular and national struggle."³³

It is against the backdrop of this very phenomenon of expansion and amplification of resistance that Cobbett, Morris, and Szeftel pinpoint a key moment in the process that eventually articulated negotiated transition as a possibility on the horizon of the apartheid government. So intensive and extensive was popular opposition at the time, that "[e]ven capital has begun to doubt that apartheid is the best guarantor of its profits" —and it is exactly at this juncture that, we should notice, the rapid ascension of the idea of reform as political transition had begun.³⁴ Launching a largely informal survey into "what an alternative, democratic arrangement might demand of it," representatives of big business began negotiations with the ANC in exile.³⁵ Yet, it was not only within the corporate realm that the notion of reform caught on:

The state itself offers negotiations on condition that the struggle is first abandoned. Intellectuals write about ways to sponsor reforms. The regime's functionaries talk about the inevitable ending of apartheid and tinker on its margins. Western states and interests which underwrite apartheid are increasingly impatient for reforms.³⁶

What I want to highlight through this narrative is that the discourse of reform, transition, and development emerged exactly at the time when the force of the liberation movement, embodied above all in the concept of ungovernability, was becoming irreducible to protest understood as localized and destructive, and/or instigated by outside agitators. Of course, for those who enthusiastically took up the reform-discourse, at stake was the ability to define the scope of change that now seemed inevitable, and to do so in the face of an apparent vacuum created by the swiftly eroding legitimacy of apartheid as the custodian of racial capitalism.

As for the redundancy of development that the protest versus reform opposition was supposed to mask, let us turn to an account of the liberation movement by the United Democratic Front (UDF), as given in a 1987 speech by their Acting Publicity Secretary, Murphy Morobe.³⁷ In his elaboration of what it means that the UDF is engaged in a national democratic struggle, the larger part of the text focuses on the democratic element, arguing that, although such a clear distinction can hardly be made, democracy is both the aim and the means of the struggle. Thus, while the ultimate goal of the movement is a democratic South Africa—"This can be summed up in the principal slogan of the Freedom Charter: 'The People Shall Govern'"—Morobe argues that indeed democracy is already being practiced through and within

³³ Cobbett, Munslow, and Szeftel, "Editorial: Democratic Struggles and Apartheid Barbarism," 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Murphy Morobe, "Towards a People's Democracy: The UDF View," *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 40 (December 1987), 81–87. The speech was delivered on Morobe's behalf as he was detained by the time the event of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA), for which it was written, took place. The UDF emerged in 1983 to unite the local campaigns of the civic associations. Cf. the South African History Archive's section commemorating UDF's 30th anniversary (Available online at: <http://www.saha.org.za/udf/origins.html>).

the existing organizations of resistance.³⁸ Accordingly, the prospect of parliamentary models that were being put forward at the time (generally without considering “existing organizations, practices and traditions of political struggle in this country”) offered a much narrower idea of democracy in their view.³⁹ For the UDF, democracy meant mass participation; the opportunity for people to gain control “over every aspect of [their] lives.”⁴⁰ In line, then, with the original idea of ungovernability as “a political weapon in the hands of people with no access to political power,” the significance of the organs of people’s power that had emerged by the mid-1980s was their potential to begin and remedy decades (and centuries) of exploitation and oppression through allowing everyone to actively shape their lives.⁴¹ For the UDF, parliamentary democracy in itself could not guarantee the continuation of that process.⁴²

Beyond an emphasis on mass participation, the UDF’s account of ungovernability as a vehicle of the liberation movement *and* as already existing popular democracy equally undermines the temporality of the protest-development binary under scrutiny here. If self-government (in the Freedom Charter’s sense) had already been at work in, among others, street committees, student representative councils and parent-teacher-student associations contemporaneously with or, in fact, through, the defiant campaign of ungovernability, then the evolutionary narrative progressing from protest to transition does not hold. Hence, no temporal gap can be posited between the ungovernable subject of protest and the partner of transition, and thus, there is no room for molding the self-governing citizen-to-be. If “there are tens of thousands of South Africans who are learning and practicing democracy today, despite the confines of an undemocratic society,” then the developmental commitment of transition to teach the masses how to be properly free becomes redundant.⁴³

It is no wonder, then, that the first of several highly influential scenario-planning exercises makes no mention of the democratic structures of people’s power.⁴⁴ Considering that according to Patrick Bond these exercises had provided the empirical basis of macroeconomic policymaking by the early 1990s and, expanding their impact well beyond the economic realm, had evolved “from corporate survival strategy to social contract parable,” such silences seem

³⁸ Ibid., 82. The Freedom Charter is a document that was adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown in June 1955 (Available online at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/freedom-charter-campaign>). It is based on the collection of the individual demands of thousands of people expressing their vision of a free South Africa. Many of its demands were included in the Constitution promulgated in 1996.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Morobe, “Towards a People’s Democracy.”

⁴¹ Ibid., 83.

⁴² “Millions of South Africans have for decades not only been denied political representation, but have also been oppressed and exploited. Our democratic aim therefore is control over every aspect of our lives, and not just the right (important as it is) to vote for a central government every four to five years” (Ibid., 82).

⁴³ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁴ Bob Tucker and Bruce R. Scott, *South Africa: Prospects for Successful Transition* (Juta, 1992). Cf. Mayekiso, “Bell Curve, South Africa Style: Re-Writing the Civics Movement.” (Nedcor, together with its holding company Old Mutual, were the largest financial corporation in South Africa at the time. Although Nedcor was renamed Nedbank in 2005, they still are; see Old Mutual’s Company History. Available online at: <http://www.oldmutual.co.za/about-us/about-old-mutual.aspx>)

to be significant indeed.⁴⁵ Certainly, they helped to reinforce a conception of the legitimacy of mass action as transitory itself; a conception that, as Krista Johnson shows, was shared by many in the ANC's leadership at the time.⁴⁶ Accordingly, and underlining the previous point about the temporality of the protest-development binary, once in government, these silences allowed the party to articulate an approach to popular participation that, while emphasizing their commitment to the proclamation that "The People Shall Govern," posited "the process of the people becoming their own governors" as a goal to be attained in the future.⁴⁷

Ungovernable is uncivil

As the discussion of the reductive understanding of protest already suggested, the striking disjuncture between the liberation struggle's and the new government's vision of democracy can mostly be attributed to the predominance of notions of violence and destruction in the prevailing interpretations of popular mobilization; in particular, the ungovernability campaign and its aftermath. In a telling example, Nedcor's cited scenario-planning exercise has only one, rather deprecating, reference to township organizing: "The power struggle conducted between the government and its security forces on the one hand and the black community on the other during the 1970s and 1980s eroded the relationships, institutions, standards, and discipline on which any successful community depends."⁴⁸ Once again, the hiatus marked by the missing account of the thought and practice of people's power, and thus of a radically different idea of a successful community is reproduced in the ANC's approach in the early and mid-1990s. According to the governing party, mass action entails "a process of tearing down rather than building up" and almost inevitably leads to "ungovernability and instability."⁴⁹

Reaffirming this sentiment, most of the scholarly work that Mayekiso reviewed and sought to refute at the time offers an account of the ungovernability campaign that emphasizes its destructive logic.⁵⁰ As the following examples suggest, the academic criticism of the civics movement significantly contributed to the (re-)construction of the ungovernable subject. On the primary level, of course, critics put forth the very concern with township violence, both in the period of boycotts and during the early 1990s. In fact, they establish a linear relationship between the two, as the carnage of the 1990s is often explained by the ungovernability campaign of the 1980s.⁵¹ Accordingly, the civics' activism is interpreted as driven by "communal

⁴⁵ Patrick Bond, *The Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 56. See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the role of scenario planning exercises in shaping the post-1990 neoliberal redirection of South African economic policy.

⁴⁶ Johnson, "State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa."

⁴⁷ African National Congress (ANC), "The State and Social Transformation" (November 1, 1996) §4.11.1.1. Available online at: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=306>; Cf. Johnson, "State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa," 228–233.

⁴⁸ Tucker and Scott, *South Africa*, 114.

⁴⁹ Johnson, "State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa," 232.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Charles Carter quoted in Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, 87.

⁵¹ To be sure, the fact of violent clashes between conflicting groups such as supporters of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) or shack-dwellers and hostel dwellers, demanding cc. 14 000 lives just between 1990-1994, is not called into question here (or by Mayekiso). What interests me in this exchange, rather, is the work of the scholarly discourse on violence; its effect to "denude the civics of their militancy" (Ibid.). For a

outrage" and dependent on a "milieu of violence."⁵² Secondly, such considerations are linked to assumptions about the thought, or indeed the thoughtlessness, of mass mobilization. Many authors find the civics lacking in a coherent ideology or an adequate theory of the state.⁵³ Others treat its effects and achievements as unintended consequences of the apartheid state's desperate attempts to regain control in townships. For Jeremy Seekings, among others, "[t]he phenomenon of 'people's power' was largely the result of the collapse of the local state."⁵⁴ What is more, even the more sympathetic interpretations obliterate the civics' contribution to conceptualizing liberation when they endorse the ANC's narrative of the party's leading role within the struggle and attribute the authorship of ungovernability to the ANC: "As part of the ANC's strategy of making townships ungovernable, the civics became instruments of revolt targeted against the illegitimacy of black local authorities."⁵⁵

In public discourse, such interpretations of the civics' resistance easily match up with a notion of the "culture of violence," thus bringing together the concern with the primacy of violence and doubts about the political agency of mass mobilization. Since the early 1990s, this concept has been widely deployed in South Africa to explain persisting poverty and crime in the urban periphery as well as the state's inability to decrease thereof.⁵⁶ In turn, a "culture of poverty" is cited with comparable frequency to explain the ubiquity of violence in these spaces. If we recall here Schlemmer's reasoning that protest politics is driven by a culture of pov-

contemporary study of phenomenon, see Graeme Simpson and Janine Rauch, "Political Violence," *South African Human Rights Yearbook*, vol. 3 (1992), 212–239.

⁵² Mayekiso, *Township Politics*.

⁵³ Cf. Mayekiso's review of Charles Carter, Karen Jachelson, Mike Morris and Vishnu Padayachee (Ibid., 86–96).

⁵⁴ Quoted in Ibid., 91. According to Mayekiso "exactly the opposite is true; the collapse of the BLAs [Black Local Authorities] was the result of radical civic activism, inspired by the theory of people's power" (Ibid.).

⁵⁵ Patrick Heller and Libhongo Ntlokonkulu, *A Civic Movement or a Movement of Civics? The South African National Civic Organization (SANCO) in the Post-Apartheid Period* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, June 2001, Social Policy Series), 13. As opposed to this account, Mayekiso refers to the ANC's call as drawing on the character of the ongoing mass mobilization: "'Make South Africa Ungovernable' was a call that fit in very well with the thinking of the oppressed. It accurately reflected the mood, and the activities, already underway in the townships [...] by the time the ANC National Executive Committee had made the call for ungovernability in early 1985, the frustrations of the people were more than evident" (Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, 67; original emphasis); Cf. African National Congress, "From Ungovernability to Peoples Power – ANC Call to the People" (1986). Available online at: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4511>. I thank Patricia Hayes for directing my attention to Mayekiso's account.

⁵⁶ Janine Rauch, "The Police and the Violence in South Africa" *Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology* (San Francisco, 1991), <http://www.csvr.org.za/index.php/publications/1477-the-police-and-the-violence-in-south-africa.html>. Clearly, as Rauch notes, the notion immediately racializes poverty and crime: "[T]his concept is limited by its frequent association with racial and ethnic labels, and its anthropological origins in applicability to small or localized communities. [...] In 1992, after a renewed spate of massacres on suburban commuter trains, a spokesman for the Minister of Law and Order said that it was impossible for the police to prevent train massacres because it was 'too dangerous' to police the trains. The police justify such admissions by reference to broad socio-economic conditions which ameliorate violence, and to a 'culture of violence' over which the police can exert no control. This abrogation of responsibility is congruent with a world-view which understands the violence as something particular to black people, which does not involve the police or the state" (Ibid.).

erty, we can clearly recognize in it the discursive mechanism that overwrites ungovernability as a political project.⁵⁷

Crucially, by way of introducing the notion of culture into a realm that is made legible primarily through the problem of poverty, contemporary scholarly and policy discourse performs the mutually reinforcing moves of depoliticization and racialization in one step.⁵⁸ Again, for locating these moves, Mayekiso's interrogation of this literature is informative. In the Nedcor scenario-planning report he traces how the adaptation of consultant Bruce Scott's analysis of the social dynamics of desegregation in the United States led researchers to the discovery of an underclass in politicized townships and thereby to the construction of "a method for dealing with political demands which treats them as cultural weaknesses."⁵⁹ Through this reading, Mayekiso discloses the racialization of what, I suggest, is being articulated as the depoliticized ungovernable subject. As in Scott's original work that analyzes migrant minority communities' supposed failure to adjust to capitalist modernity in the American metropolis, Nedcor researchers too diagnosed a "culture of entitlement" or "dependency" among the underclass inhabiting the townships (referred to as "the community of careless").⁶⁰ Linking these attitudes to the culture of boycott presumably instilled by the civic movement, in turn, they position the practice of the supposed underclass as inimical to democracy.

For it defines the realm where civil society organizations should operate, let us finally consider the problem of aspirations that has always been a crucial aspect of thinking the ungovernable as uncivil. Adding an eclectic panoply of propositions to the imaginary of transition, the challenge of allocating the politicized masses within the new order produces the underclass as ungovernable not only due to their violent behavior, but also for lacking the right kind of aspirations. Labeled as "economism," what Schlemmer condemned as unrealistic expectations seem to re-appear in the ANC's views on state-society relations as posing a significant threat to democracy.⁶¹ Here, such expectations are said to emanate from ordinary workers' instincts towards a subjective approach to socio-economic development that runs counter not only to "the scientific approach of the democratic movement towards such development," but also the "genuine interests of the people as a whole," thereby risking a "counterrevolutionary defeat of the democratic revolution."⁶² Fighting the same spirit of so-called macroeco-

⁵⁷ Schlemmer, "Organizing Communities."

⁵⁸ On the post-apartheid re-emergence of the "native subject" in another context — that of the "rural township," where many former political prisoners were "dumped" and thus relegated into a spatiotemporality that excluded them from the lived experience of liberation — see Helena Pohlandt-McCormick and Gary Minkley, "The Graves of Dimbaza – Re: working Peripheries and Empire" presented at the *Re-figuring the South African Empire Conference, Basel, Switzerland* (September 11, 2013).

⁵⁹ Mayekiso, "'Institutions that Themselves Need to Be Watched Over,'" 33-34.

⁶⁰ Tucker and Scott, *South Africa*, 117, 109. Cf. Bond, *The Elite Transition*.

⁶¹ African National Congress, "The State and Social Transformation." Johnson argues that although it was no secret that the document was drafted by then deputy president Thabo Mbeki in an effort to convince other, more left-leaning, members of the tripartite alliance (the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)) about the government's neoliberal economic program, it was adopted by the ANC leadership and "its authorship is no longer ascribed to Mbeki" (Johnson, "State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa," 226).

⁶² African National Congress, "The State and Social Transformation," §4.7, §6.10-6.11

conomic populism, albeit not in the same language of revolution, Sanlam's scenario-planners distinguished between the employed and the jobless underclass ("the downtrodden, starving 'down and outers'"), and rejected supposedly high risk policy measures such as addressing unemployment on the grounds that the underclass tends to have depressed aspirations and is therefore unlikely to start a revolt.⁶³ In other words, they suggest that even though revolutionary sentiments are to be found in both groups, the government might reasonably ignore the plight of the underclass. Similarly gesturing towards the risks of popular aspirations, Schlemmer offers a classical description civil society's role: "It is a mistake for any organization merely to arouse people's demands and expectations. It is important to ensure that people develop the skills and abilities to achieve some of their goals."⁶⁴

Unsurprisingly in light of the party's acquired aversion of mass mobilization outlined above, an amalgamation of these approaches seems to have been adopted by the ANC-government for setting the terms of state-society relations. Worded with particular clarity in their discussion document on the subject, the party's aim was to secure its macroeconomic strategy by firmly fixing the place of popular participation:

Where the people are no longer the enemy of the state, the question arises as to what role the people play with regard to state matters. The issue turns on the combination of the expertise and professionalism concentrated in the democratic state and the capacity for popular mobilization which resides within the trade unions and the genuinely representative non-governmental popular organizations.⁶⁵

As this section has shown thus far, the limits of such legitimate popular mobilization were drawn by a reconfiguration of the ungovernable subject as being held captive by a culture of poverty and violence, which, in turn, inevitably gives rise to its misguided aspirations. In parallel to this reconfiguration that comprises the double move of dismissing collective resistance and substituting its protagonists with a racialized underclass, various state and private agencies took on the mission of instilling the right kind of aspirations in this subject, and joined efforts to bring into being the township *homo oeconomicus*.

The relationship between these parallel projects is made evident, among other technologies, in the supposed role of homeownership. Following the 1986 uprising in Alexandra, Steve Burger, the township's newly appointed administrator launched the Alexandra Urban Renewal Proposal with a budget of ZAR 140 million.⁶⁶ Integrated into a larger campaign of "winning hearts and minds" (WHAM), the proposal was built on the concept of cost-recovery where, with the assistance of employers, building societies and financial institutions, newly built houses would be privatized, thereby financing further development.⁶⁷ As the plan ex-

⁶³ Insurance company Sanlam's *Platform for Investment* quoted in Bond, *The Elite Transition*, 64.

⁶⁴ Schlemmer, "Organizing Communities," 21.

⁶⁵ African National Congress, "The State and Social Transformation," §4.11.1.3-4.11.1.5

⁶⁶ Cc. USD 54 000 at the time. Luke Sinwell, "Participation as Popular Agency: The Limitations and Possibilities for Transforming Development in the Alexandra Renewal Project" (PhD Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2009).

⁶⁷ Mayekiso, *Township Politics*. Offering an almost chilling detail of the Alexandra City Council's WHAM campaign, Mayekiso mentions a council newsletter with "cartoon characters called Comrade Rat and Alex,

pressed, its ultimate aim was to establish a partnership with the community to develop self-discipline: "[O]wners can assist local authorities in creating order, promoting cleanliness, limiting crime and preventing squatting."⁶⁸ Unsurprisingly, the same logic was driving capital investment in the area. According to its president, "The Sandton Chamber of Commerce is interested in creating a capitalist attitude in Alexandra and spreading the entrepreneurial spirit which does not exist there."⁶⁹ Making explicit the added value of doing so through the institution of private property, former director of Anglo American and then leader of the Progressive Federal Party concurs with the apartheid city council: "When people are housed, more especially when they are home-owners, they are not only less likely to be troublesome. They are also likely to feel they have a stake in the society and an interest in stability."⁷⁰

It is rather easy to recognize in this quote the obvious function of the language of stakes and interests to exclude any other motive or aim that could have possibly driven township-dwellers when they rebelled against the order of racial exploitation. Yet, there are two further notes to be made here. First, as Steven Robins shows in his study of spatial governmentality in Cape Town during the early 2000s, the discourse of order-through-ownership was, and is, still in place, well beyond the demise of apartheid administration. The city's 2001 strategy to replace Council owned rental housing with individual homeownership in Manenberg, one of the city's most crime-ridden areas in recent decades, shared the goals of its predecessor from 1986: "to break down 'social pathologies' and a 'culture of poverty'" and "to re-establish governance and create law abiding citizens."⁷¹ On the second note, the fact that the strategy failed and none of these goals were met to this day is not, I suggest, an anomaly.⁷²

who were meant to demonstrate how Alexandra's citizens should live their lives" (Ibid., 103). Describing the sentiment of the same period of "urban renewal," Adam Hochschild writes: "In Alexandra and elsewhere, these improvements are passed out with paternalistic cheer. The government publishes a *Newsletter to the People of Alexandra* filled with uplifting thoughts like: 'Through development we reach the sky!' Roadblocks, the *Newsletter* explains, are 'to keep all trouble-makers out.' A redevelopment official is praised as having an 'insatiable desire to work for the community.' A comic strip, *Alex and Friends*, also helps to promote the new era. 'Alex' [a black boy] is an enthusiastic, well-behaved citizen who always wins arguments with 'Comrade Rat,' a disheveled type who always carps at everything" (Adam Hochschild, *The Mirror at Midnight: A South African Journey* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), 200); Cf. Aletta J. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (London: Verso, 1996), where she cites the same comic strip as an example of the government's attempt to draw a negative picture of "comrades" and, in turn, integrate the "good black citizen" and "worker," thereby seeking to disaggregate "a set of equivalences between workers, trade unionists, the people, local-community based organizations," etc. that the early-1980s' resistance discourse successfully constructed.

⁶⁸ Mayekiso, *Township Politics*, 104.

⁶⁹ Warren Dale quoted in Ibid., 104–105.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 105. Anglo American was (and is) the largest mining corporation operating in South Africa, with headquarters in Johannesburg and London. It established the Urban Foundation in 1976 (immediately after the Soweto Uprising as Bond notes in *The Elite Transition*) and financed it until its closure in 1995. On the continuing imprint of Anglo American on the cityscape of metropolitan Durban, see Mark Butler and Richard Pithouse, *Lessons from eThekweni: Pariahs Hold Their Ground Against a State That Is Both Criminal and Democratic* (Pietermaritzburg: Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA)). Accessed August 11, 2014, available online at: <http://abahlali.org/node/984/>.

⁷¹ Steven Robins, "At the Limits of Spatial Governmentality: A Message from the Tip of Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2002), 681. The former township of Manenberg was established in the Cape Flats for

Just like in the case of the government's "Operation *Masakhane*" that was launched in 1995 to address the "culture of non-payment" supposedly left behind by the civics' rates boycotts,⁷³ or Johannesburg Water's "Operation *Gcin'amanzi*" introduced in 2003 to install prepaid water meters in Soweto with the same stated purpose of cost-recovery,⁷⁴ "failure" is encoded in these projects of liberal governmentality. As Mayekiso exposes, the budget of the Alexandra Urban Renewal Plan was only ever enough to cover a township of 92 000 people, less than half of Alexandra's population in 1986, while pricing the newly built houses at ZAR 50 000 immediately shattered the prospect of homeownership for more than 90 percent of the area's inhabitants.⁷⁵ Likewise, the harsh cut-off policies adjoining the cited cost-recovery campaigns, together with the practical impossibility of acquiring indigent status and thereby eligibility for subsidies that could prevent being cut off are telling of a rationale different from improving the lives of the poor through turning them into diligent *homines aeconomici*.⁷⁶ Rather, explicitly justifying recourse to illiberal measures,⁷⁷ and implicitly giving grounds for the abandonment of the surplus population,⁷⁸ the rationality here seems to be to construct them as the other of the self-interested economic subject. As the final bit of this section shows, mapping onto persisting patterns of spatial segmentation, this technology of othering has been carried over to the present-day discourse around urban struggles too. Thus, the specter of the poor's rebellion remains tangible.

low-income "colored" people by the apartheid government at the height of the forced removal programs in 1966. While the broader aims of the two programs are the same, the post-apartheid one does not expressly aim to facilitate the integration of its so-called colored inhabitants with the pre-dominantly "African" population of neighboring Gugulethu. Furthermore, instead of political activism, ungovernability today is mostly attributed to Manenberg's infamous gangs, and social pathologies are linked to the unquestionably increased unemployment rate. Cf. Julian A. Jacobs, "Manenberg: Then and Now: Activism in Manenberg, 1980 to 2010" (MA Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2011).

⁷² To indicate the extent of this "failure": In recent months, the City renewed its proposal to deploy the army in Manenberg. Cf. SABC, "Zille Urges Manenberg Community to Fight Crime," *SABC News* (April 19, 2014). Available online at: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/87ba1c8043b1c8c5bafafa239b19c088/Zille-urges-Manenberg-community-to-fight-crime-20141904>.

⁷³ David A. McDonald and John Pape, *Cost Recovery and the Crisis of Service Delivery in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2002). *Masakhane* means 'let us build one another together' in Nguni languages.

⁷⁴ Antina von Schnitzler, "Citizenship Prepaid: Water, Calculability, and Techno-Politics in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2008), 899–917. *Gcin'amanzi* is isiZulu for 'save water.'

⁷⁵ Mayekiso, *Township Politics*. ZAR 50 000 was cc. USD 19 250 in 1986.

⁷⁶ David A. McDonald, "The Theory and Practice of Cost Recovery in South Africa," in David A. McDonald and John Pape (eds.), *Cost Recovery and the Crisis of Service Delivery in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2002), 17–37. The same point can be made about the shift in South African cities' approach to street trade and the responsibilities of "small business people" that ultimately led to removing the majority of traders from prime areas. Cf. Blessing Karumbidza, *Criminalizing the Livelihoods of the Poor: The Impact of Formalizing Informal Trade for Female and Migrant Traders in Durban* (Johannesburg: Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), February 2011).

⁷⁷ von Schnitzler, "Citizenship Prepaid."

⁷⁸ Selmeczi, "We Are the People Who Do Not Count'."

The return of the ungovernable

It is not necessary here to fully elaborate the extent and modes in which, due to its renewed intensity, popular protest has been criminalized and depoliticized in South African public discourse over the past decade.⁷⁹ To indicate how the ideal notion of civil society and its ungovernable other work to maintain the politico-aesthetic order of the segmentary city, the following example will suffice.⁸⁰ In line with the previous discussion, it narrates the reinforcement of an instrumental division between the supposedly ungovernable masses and those civil society organizations that operate within the realm of popular participation assigned to them during the years of transition. The substance of the case consists of a heated exchange between various Cape Town-based organizations about a series of protest events that were staged in October 2010.⁸¹ The “Week of Informal Settlements’ Strike” was called by the Western Cape organization of *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, a shack-dwellers’ movement whose membership exceeded 10 000 people since its 2005 formation, making it one of the largest social movements in post-apartheid South Africa.⁸² The stated purpose of the nationwide week of action was to take to the street and protest against the appalling living conditions of informal settlements.⁸³ Although according to the decision of participating settlements and groups from around Cape Town the strike was supposed to take place during the last week of October, it erupted in several areas of Khayelitsha already throughout the period of mobilization early into the month.⁸⁴ Adapting to this course of events, Abahlali of the Western Cape announced the extension of the strike to the whole of October.⁸⁵

During the second week of the protest series that took shape mainly in blockading major roads with burning tires and debris, a group of civil society organizations led by the Treatment Action Campaign published a joint statement entitled “Reject Abahlali base-

⁷⁹ Cf. Death, “Counter-Conducts in South Africa”; Neocosmos, “Transition, Human Rights and Violence.”

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of how the “rebellious poor” are rendered improper political subjects, and how they reject that subjectivity, see Anna Selmeczi, “Dis/placing Political Illiteracy: The Politics of Intellectual Equality in a South African Shack-Dwellers’ Movement,” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, vol. 6, no. 1 (May 2014), 230–65.

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.* for a detailed discussion of this case in the context of “public violence” and its depoliticizing function.

⁸² *Abahlali baseMjondolo* is isiZulu for ‘shack-dwellers.’ Abahlali of the Western Cape operate with a significant autonomy from the national organization that has an office in Durban, where the movement originates. The bases of Abahlali are local branches of particular informal settlements in urban and semi-rural areas of the KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape provinces. For a well-documented and perceptive analysis of the movement’s formation and first public protests, see e.g. Richard Pithouse, “*Our Struggle Is Thought on the Ground, Running*”: *The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Durban: Centre for Civil Society, CCS Research Reports, 2006).

⁸³ Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape, “A Call for a Week of Informal Settlements’ Strike,” *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (September 10, 2010). Available online at: <http://abahlali.org/node/7302>.

⁸⁴ Khayelitsha is the largest of Cape Town’s (former) townships comprised of areas with formal housing and shack settlements. Groups and settlements participating in the strike extended beyond those affiliated with Abahlali.

⁸⁵ Anna Majavu and Unathi Obose, “Shack Dwellers Strike Set to Last One Month,” *Sowetan Live* (October 10, 2010). Available online at: <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2010/10/04/shack-dwellers-strike-set-to-last-one-month>.

Mjondolo's call for violence and chaos!"⁸⁶ In light of the discussion above, the mobilization of the rhetoric of violence to construct Abahlali's action as destructive and thoughtless is hardly surprising.⁸⁷ As Abahlali state in their public response, this is indeed the default move of governmental power: "We have long experience of the state calling protests in which no person is harmed violent. We did not expect a social movement to do so."⁸⁸ More curiously perhaps, the statement suggests that TAC and its fellow organizations operate within the same binary logic that I have tracked in the reconfiguration of ungovernability above.⁸⁹ Drawing up the boundaries of authentic civil society, the familiar opposition is re-created when they urge "progressive people in churches, clinics, schools, universities, homes, and local organizations (in Khayelitsha and elsewhere) to distance themselves from mindless violence and calls for chaos."⁹⁰ In turn, their self-characterization reinforces this division:

COSATU Khayelitsha, the Treatment Action Campaign, the Social Justice Coalition and Equal Education have for years worked seriously in Khayelitsha and elsewhere. We have never advocated stone-throwing or promoted violence. Our members work patiently, educate themselves and build local leadership to change the system of inequality.⁹¹

The significance of this passage lies in the smooth reproduction of the developmental paradigm and its temporality wherein poor black people's freedom and equality is always to be attained in the future. What is more, with the same stroke of pen, the signatories efface the militant legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle: "We know that mindless violence and chaos have never brought freedom, decent jobs and a better life. Freedom and equality comes

⁸⁶ Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) *et al.*, "Reject Abahlali baseMjondolo's Call for Violence and Chaos!" (October 12, 2010). Available online at: <http://www.tac.org.za/community/node/2952>. Treatment Action Campaign is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was founded in Cape Town in 1998 and campaigns for equal access to comprehensive health care, particularly HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment, for all who need it (see http://www.tac.org.za/about_us). Other signatories to the statement were COSATU Khayelitsha, Equal Education, and the Social Justice Coalition (SJC) (Cf. Neocosmos, "Transition, Human Rights and Violence").

⁸⁷ It has to be noted that many actions that the statement attributes to Abahlali and people joining them in the strike were in fact claimed by the ANC's Youth League (ANCYL). Cf. Leila Samodien, "Rioters Stone Children's Bus," *Weekend Argus* (November 13, 2010). Available online at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/rioters-stone-children-s-bus-1.746906>.

⁸⁸ Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape, "Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape Replies to the Treatment Action Campaign," *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (October 13, 2010). Available online at: <http://abahlali.org/node/7364>.

⁸⁹ The same logic motivates the local SACP's press statement published the day after TAC *et al.*'s (Benson kaNgqentsu, "Abahlali BaseMjondolo's Tactics Reactionary – SACP," *Politicsweb* (October 15, 2010). Available online at:

<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=204883&sn=Detail&pid=71616> 6). For a similar reasoning in relation to a more recent series of protests, see Vuyiseka Dubula, "Service Delivery Failures: We Need Leadership Not Opportunists," *GroundUp* (August 8, 2012). Available online at: <http://www.groundup.org.za/content/service-delivery-failures-we-need-leadership-not-opportunists>.

⁹⁰ Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) *et al.*, "Reject Abahlali baseMjondolo's Call for Violence and Chaos!"

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

through patient organization, education, and sustained struggle.”⁹² Incidentally rounding the section off, this remark leads us back to where we started: to the juxtaposition of protest and development.

Civil society and the governmental rationality of racism

In continuing to unpack the curious bind between civil society and the specter of the rebellious poor, let us recall the ANC’s dilemma regarding the role of the people once they are no longer the state’s enemy. This problem, which was articulated at the difficult moment when the party had to defend its neoliberal macroeconomic program two years into government,⁹³ seems to be a crucial juncture in the context of our discussion. Arguably, it echoes the very problem that brought the realm of civil society into being. Together with the attempted resolution that expressly defines and limits the scope of popular participation, it demonstrates that instead of an independent oppositional force made up of “not-for-profit organizations and groups and formations of people operating in the space between family and the government” so as to protect citizens from the state’s infringements of their rights,⁹⁴ civil society is indeed an instrument of government.⁹⁵ For they tell the story of how this affinity originally emerged, let us now turn to Foucault’s studies of liberal political reason. Taking us one step further in the present argument, they retrace the appearance of civil society to the imperative of governing in relation to the economy,⁹⁶ and prove that the problematic of ungovernability is inherent to liberal rationalities of rule.

According to Foucault’s genealogy, the *économiste* critique of mercantilism and the interventionism of the police state fundamentally transformed the reason of state in the 18th century. Superimposing the internal limitations of quasi-natural economic laws upon juridical norms and laws that had previously set the limits of rule, sovereign power was then faced with a curious duplication of its subjects.⁹⁷ Accompanying the subject of rights that the sovereign was not supposed to violate, as a correlate to political economy’s naturalistic concept of the market and the consequent principle of the self-limitation of governmental reason, the subject of interest, that is, the *homo œconomicus* appeared. “[T]he art of government must be exercised in a space of sovereignty [...] but the trouble, misfortune, or problem is that this space

⁹² Ibid. Consider too a sentence at the beginning of the statement: “In 1994 African and Colored poor and working-class townships and rural areas celebrated freedom from White rule.” Arguably, not only is the militancy of ungovernability, but any kind of agency of the black people in the liberation struggle is denied here.

⁹³ African National Congress, “The State and Social Transformation.” Traditionally the more pronounced shift towards neoliberalism is located in the adaptation of the Growth, Employment and Economic Redistribution (GEAR) Program, and thus the subversion of the ANC’s previous, more redistributive, Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). Cf. Bond, *The Elite Transition*.

⁹⁴ Phiroshaw Camay and Anne J. Gordon, *Race, Repression and Resistance: A Brief History of South African Civil Society to 1994* (Johannesburg: CORE, 2007), 3.

⁹⁵ I deploy “government” in the expanded sense Foucault attributes to it; as the “conduct of conduct,” that is, the action upon others’ actions. Cf. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Lecture of 7 March 1979.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.

turns out to be inhabited by economic subjects."⁹⁸ The trouble, Foucault elaborates, lies in the fact that the subject of rights and the economic subject "are not governed by the same logic."⁹⁹ While ruling over the subject of right is enabled by her agreement to relinquish (some of) her natural rights, "the subject of interest is never called upon to relinquish his interest." Indeed, as discussed further below, letting the *homo œconomicus* follow his interest is the very mechanism that, according to liberal governmental reason, secures the general good. It was precisely in response to this problem of governability, posed by the duplicity of subjects, that a new domain emerged, one that would envelop the governed "both as subjects of rights and as economic actors" and would be referred to as "civil society."¹⁰⁰

Thus it is that civil society had come to be the correlate of liberal governmentality, that is, the rationality and practice of rule that seeks to secure the prosperity of the state and its population by governing through freedom; by "letting things follow their course" and letting individuals follow their interests.¹⁰¹ Civil society's function, to put it somewhat simplistically, is to enable the self-limitation of government by harmonizing the freedom of the economic subject with her rights as a juridical subject; to operate as the realm within which citizens' conduct is conducted by appealing to their voluntary decision to act in their own interest and thereby, albeit involuntarily, act in the interest of the whole of society. In other words, civil society is a "transactional reality [...] born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them"; a field of transactions that allows for the government of the population.¹⁰²

If, however, the emergence of this interface solved the problem of governability on the epistemic level of rule, as Foucault's definition of transactional reality already indicates, it could not eliminate the problem of the inevitable uncertainty that governing society in relation to, alongside, or with, economics entails.¹⁰³ On the one hand, the said self-limitation of governmental reason is essential for the natural processes of the economy and market to strive and produce the happiness of all. Once governmental rationality is defined with respect to the economy, the ignorance of sovereign power in the face of the often-unpredictable outcomes of its "physics" warrants nothing but self-limitation on his part.¹⁰⁴ Crucially, however, the same attitude characterizes the ideal governmental subject too, for what makes the *homo œconomicus* "eminently governable," what makes him the "partner" of liberal governmentality is that s/he equally endorses the unknowability of economic dynamics. What is more, s/he "accepts reality" and adjusts her behavior to its random events. She responds to these in a rational that is

⁹⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 294.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 294–95. Foucault uses the terms "governability or governmentability" in relation to the new ensemble of civil society.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 48. Thus it is, too, that according to Foucault, liberalism is to be studied as "the general framework of biopolitics," that is, in his rendering, the modern modality of rule that operates through nurturing the life of the population and defending it from forms of life that are inimical to it (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 277–86.

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 47.

calculable manner, through consistently following her interests.¹⁰⁵ Hence, the freedom of the economic subject is bound by self-limitation to a rationalistic behavior corresponding to a “realistic” outlook. In turn, attributing this outlook to the economic subject allows for the self-limitation of governmental power.

Civil society, to underscore, emerges as the intermediary domain to ensure that the individual freedom of the governed overlaps with their respective interests, so that, relayed through a world of uncertainty, they synthesize into the interest of the whole population. “[C]ivil society is the concrete ensemble in which these ideal points, economic men, must be placed, so that they can appropriately be managed”;¹⁰⁶ so that “every individual functions well as a member, as an element of the thing we want to manage in the best possible way, namely the population.”¹⁰⁷ There is, nevertheless, no ultimate guarantee for the stability of these equivalences, as the governed might not always match up with the ideal of the *homo aeconomicus*. That is precisely why the specter of the ungovernable subject is just as much the correlate of liberal governmentality as the economic wo/man. Indeed, as Foucault shows through his reading of 18th century physiocratic thinker Louis-Paul Abeille, right at the juncture where the concept of *laissez faire* emerges as the adequate response to the uncertainties of the physics of economy, “a very curious distinction” appears as well.¹⁰⁸ Where the population is articulated as the collective subject of liberal governmentality and its apparatus of security that cancels out a general economic disaster by letting it play out on particular sites, the people (*le peuple*) will be the name of those who refuse to let the market work through them, obstruct the apparatus, and might even revolt: “the people are those who, refusing to be the population, disrupt the system.”¹⁰⁹

Bringing this narrative to bear on the post-apartheid problematization of (un)governmentability, the very question of how to render the people into the population seems to be at stake in the ANC’s previously cited concern about what the role of the people will be once they are no longer the enemy of the state. As such, it alludes to the ways in which the “new South Africa” rehearses the liberal encounter with, and formation through, the contingency of the political on the one hand, and the discrepancies between capitalism and its conception of freedom on the other. We do not have to fully agree with Theo Goldberg’s characterization that the neoliberalization of race diffuses the sovereign power over life into the economic realm. Rather, I would suggest that there is an insidious interplay between the ways these two domains deploy race. However, he seems to be right to argue that “South Africa is unique [...] in demonstrating in a historical blink the self-conscious shift [...] between ‘all is

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 269–71.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 43.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 44. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Galilard, 2004), 45. Elsewhere I use Foucault’s discussion of this distinction to conceptualize the epistemological conditions of biopolitical abandonment: Anna Selmeczi, “‘... We Are Being Left to Burn Because We Do Not Count’: Biopolitics, Abandonment, and Resistance,” *Global Society*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2009), 519–38; Cf. Lara Montesinos Coleman, “The Making of Docile Dissent: Neoliberalization and Resistance in Colombia and Beyond,” *International Political Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 1, 2013), 170–87.

race' and racelessness, explicit racial emphasis as state architecture and neoliberal privatization as individualized relation"—a relation that nevertheless evidently carries the imprint of the previous architecture of state racism.¹¹⁰ As I would like to show below, both the ease with which race continues to determine the economic and political value of life and the role played by civil society's battle with the specter of ungovernability in that assaying of life bare the marks of the prehistory of neoliberalism. Hence, "the rebellion of the poor" and its emergence through the transitory reconstruction of the ungovernable have a lot to teach us about the "civility" of liberalism and what it fears.

To recall, the first part of the paper discussed how a particular idea of civil society emerged in South Africa during the late phase of the apartheid regime to effectively circumscribe the vision of post-apartheid freedom by delegitimizing popular mobilization and reconstructing the emancipatory ungovernability of the black subject as inimical to the democratic order. In connecting that narrative to the genealogy of liberal political reason outlined above, the remainder of this section sketches how the imperative of the racialized circumscription of freedom is inherent to civil society as a technique of governmentality. Of course, a vast body of postcolonial literature proves that the imperial deployment of civil society—the civilizing mission of the West—has always been about the construction of difference and the consequent oppression of the colonized.¹¹¹ Yet, in the present context of liberalism as governmental reason (and as the general framework of biopolitics), it is Ann Laura Stoler's reading of Foucault's work that seems especially pertinent.¹¹² Stoler sets out to "correct" the argument in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* by revisiting the function of the government of sexuality in the construction of colonial power according to Foucault's own "*The Society Must be Defended*" lecture series, and demonstrates that the imagery of racial otherness was essential not only to the justification of colonial despotism and exploitation, but also to the constitution of modern metropolitan order.¹¹³ To be sure, Barry Hindess and Mariana Valverde, among others, have likewise interrogated the place of racial othering within liberal governmentality, and showed that the liberal rule of freedom is indeed compatible with the despotic colonial government of those deemed incapable of practicing their autonomy. Stoler, however, seems to attribute greater significance to race within liberal modernity when she argues that Western notions of citizenship, civility, nationalism, etc. were not simply deployed ready-made on the racial oth-

¹¹⁰ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 321.

¹¹¹ For works that also reflect upon the post-Cold War resurgence of "civil society" and its continuities with colonial rule, see e.g. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Columbia University Press, 2004); John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹¹² Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

er, but were themselves the product of colonialism.¹¹⁴ “Racial thinking was not subsequent to the bourgeois order but constitutive of it.”¹¹⁵ The urge to condemn and cure “native instinct” and “unproductive sexuality,” for instance, was thus essential for making the self-disciplined, civilized, European self. As such, these malleable categories of colonizer and colonized had come to define the ideal subject of liberal governmentality.

Arguably, then, civility and civil society emerged through the “native question” not only on the colony, as Mahmood Mamdani famously argues, but in its Western iteration too.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the colonial dilemma as to “how can a tiny and foreign minority rule over an indigenous majority?” was funneled into the problem of the liberal government of freedom.¹¹⁷ Via that problem, in turn, it reappeared in the construction of the ungovernable subject of urbanized capitalism as the racialized other of the eminently governable *homo aeconomicus*.¹¹⁸ Consequently, we might say that a small minority’s rule over the majority, the “precarious practical accomplishment” of the latter’s submission,¹¹⁹ hinges upon shifting racial distinctions in the context of liberal governmentality too. No wonder that the modern project of development that was originally meant to contain the surplus population of industrialization, took on the civilizing mission in the wake of decolonization and continues to operate both in the postcolony and the “developed” West.¹²⁰ Through myriad agents of civil society, in both realms it aims precisely to secure the playing field of a particular practice of freedom that enables the self-limitation of governmental reason. As Mark Duffield argues, development’s task today is to contain the “excess freedom” of the surplus population, globally.¹²¹

Naming the fundamental problem of political contingency, it is exactly the excess freedom of the surplus people—who currently make up the vast majority of the world’s population—that exposes “the classical fear of popular rule”¹²² and the liberal tendency to circumscribe freedom along racial lines. Reversing that point, it appears that the uncivil, ungovernable, racialized collective against whom the *homo aeconomicus* is defined is, in fact, the people. This is where the late-apartheid and contemporary juxtaposition of protest and development falls into place, and the depoliticizing and racialized reconfiguration of ungovernability more than two decades after the demise of white minority rule seems to replay the ancient tune of liberal political reason. Posed against conceptions of the ideal civil society and the responsible township-dweller, racializing notions such as the culture of poverty, violence, and non-payment foster an attempt at stabilizing the meaning of freedom and finding a corresponding-

¹¹⁴ Hindess, “The Liberal Government of Unfreedom”; Valverde, “‘Despotism’ and Ethical Liberal Governance.”

¹¹⁵ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 144.

¹¹⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Helen Bosanquet’s “industrial residuum” – the “hopeless” group of urban poor who presumably lack foresight and the capacity for self-interest – is a case in point (Helen Dendy Bosanquet, *The Standard of Life and Other Reprinted Essays* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1906)).

¹¹⁹ Bary Hindess, “Politics and Governmentality,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1997), 261.

¹²⁰ Michael Cowen and Robert W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

¹²¹ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*.

¹²² Hindess, “Politics and Governmentality,” 264.

ly secure place for the liberated masses. As it embodies the threat that this attempt fails, the re-emergence of the specter of the rebellious poor is then all but surprising.

Conclusion

Taking its point of departure at the concern with the so-called “rebellion of the poor,” this paper traced back the current South African concern with popular protest to its reconfiguration through the last years of the apartheid order and the period after the democratic transition. Through the lens of the protest-development binary that emerged in the scholarly and political discourse on the civic movement’s grassroots resistance within the liberation struggle in the mid- to late-1980s, I argued that in juxtaposition to an ideal notion of civil society, popular mobilization has been delegitimized and, losing its emancipatory legacy, ungovernability has been reconfigured as inimical to democracy. Pointing to the prominence of notions such as the culture of poverty and culture of violence I suggested that the ungovernable subject has consequently been reconstructed as the racial other throughout the post-apartheid government’s effort to find a new role for “the people” within the democratic order. So as to show that this effort resonates with the liberal problematization of the economic subject’s incompatibility with the sovereign subject of rights, through a brief reconstruction of Foucault’s notion of civil society as a technique of liberal governmentality, I drew out the significance of the population-people distinction that Foucault locates in early liberal thought. Finally, turning to the post-colonial critique of liberal notions of civility and their rootedness in racial thinking, I suggested that, as a realm for the liberal circumscription of the practice of freedom, civil society secures the governability of the population through rendering the potentially disruptive freedom of the people as the excess freedom of the racialized other both in the (post-)colony and “at home.” Because the self-limitation of governmental reason exposes the liberal state to political contingency, that is, the risk that the arbitrariness of the order be disclosed, the people (as opposed to the population) seem to remain its enemy.

Sadly, through the notion of excess freedom, here I could merely to locate the epicenter of the liberal fear of the majority. It is at this point that another inquiry could engage what remains unnamed in discourses on civility and self-government; ideas and practices of freedom that are irreducible to interest and potentially give rise to visions of community and justice that certainly appear nonsensical in light of the liberal myth of market competition and the harmonious dynamics of utilitarian actions. To signal the importance of such an inquiry for instance in the post-apartheid context: in the face of the “rebellion of the poor” on the one hand, and events such as the 2012 police killing of 34 striking unarmed miners in Marikana on the other, it is not enough to lament that the socio-economic vision of the liberation struggle has been hijacked by a neoliberal governmentality prescribed by multinational corporations and international financial institutions. As true as that might be, so as to see the paralyzing effects of the liberal conception of freedom and civility on life and what is supposed to be common, perhaps we have to ask what sort of sensibilities become racialized on account of exceeding those conceptions. For they occasionally happen to displace the biopolitical concern with mere survival, whether voiced in Cape Town or Baltimore, assertions of equality and demands of justice that are routinely recoded as rebellious and riotous might be a good place to start.

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