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Strikes and eventful identities

South Africa's public sector strikes, 2007 and 2010

Claire Ceruti

Completed in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of PhD

Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Professor Bridget Kenny

Declaration

I, CLAIRE HELEN MARY CERUTI (Student number: 8550828) am a student registered for the degree of PhD in sociology in the academic year 2022.

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Signature:  Date: 5 June 2023

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I received funding from the National Research Foundation towards this degree.

Dedicated to

Mary Jean Margaret (Kennedy) Ceruti

We often blame our mothers, and this is most definitely all your fault.

Ben Ceruti

Who never batted an eyelid.

Ludwe Ndibaza and Zakes Ngubeni

Overqualified in the university of life.

Abstract

This is a study of rupture and its deflection in public striker identities over two politically charged strikes in 2007 and 2010. The thesis reconstructs each strike as a series of possibilities, taking a dynamic and temporal view attuned to the development of contradictions in a way sensitive to what else might *realistically* have developed out of these given 'moments' or conjunctures of forces. The data was gathered longitudinally in each strike and across the two strikes, which were three years apart, via interviews, observation and analysis of toyi-toyis and particularly photos, which were used to track slogans and their development.

The thesis uncovers *eventful identities* beneath the rehabilitation or reconstitution, twice, of the strained Tripartite Alliance amongst the ruling party, the ANC, the main trade union federation (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party; it also uncovers peculiarly relational classed imagery suggestive of exploitation even in simple strike-ready identities, entwining and subtly altering people's more common everyday consumption-based models of class.

The thesis traces strikers' identities against the histories of each strike to find identities in punctuated dialogue with larger forces, thereby restoring the role of this kind of contradiction in processes of identity destabilisation as well as in eventfulness. The thesis finds that strikers' identities were deformed in relation to the alliance by successive shocks over the course of the two strikes. The strikes did not rupture, but did puncture, the practice of the alliance. Despite a variety of deflections, faint re-interpellations percolated through these experiences.

In the first strike, in 2007, the shock to identification with government, experienced by the strikers as well as the union officials, intensified as the strike continued and drove one aspect of a 'power flip' which I noted in the development of strikers' discourse over the strike in a shift from entreating government, to asserting mutual dependence, to reversing the dependency - wanting to turn on its head the actually existing practice of the alliance by demanding a government that listens to workers – and at the same time conceiving the centrality of the strikers' own work in relation to these powers.

At the end of the first strike, the shock to identities with government was truncated by pragmatism and diverted and to the political kingdom, in the person of Zuma. But that deflection built up expectation for the restored alliance, and the second strike burst

forth from disappointed expectations (a second shock to identities with government) to put Zuma to the test. This strike expressed mainly the political dimension of the power flip. The end of the strike incurred a third shock: a divergence in the strategic views of union officials from those of strikers, which occurred partly because the union leaders who had re-established loyalties and, they believed, influence within the alliance (partly because of the first strike).

The de-identifications towards the end of this strike were deflected in more complicated ways. Although it appeared from a distance that the alliance had worked again to let off steam and iron over damage, that view overlooked how strikers' identifications had taken damage in the double test of the ANC; at least some were in a liminal state I call identity damage, not having re-identified themselves but forced to imagine life outside the ANC.

So the thesis overall illustrates the development of these *eventful identities*, which may survive the failure of an event to develop (a near event).

The thesis thus, first, returns *contradiction* (and *agency*) to the study of eventfulness (rupture), as well as, through a finer view of deflection, examining why eventfulness often fails to develop; second, it foregrounds subjectivity in contradictory circumstances to stretch studies of classed identities and identity processes into an under-examined arena (strikes); and thereby, third, it adds an under-examined dimension - strikers' subjectivities - to study of the cohesion/disintegration of the alliance and the unravelling of ANC hegemony to show that the alliance's mechanisms of maintenance were also 'storing up' contradiction and damage to its future integrity. The concepts of misidentification and identity damage were developed to present identity processes in contradictory situations as *punctuated* and to refine understanding of rupture at the subjective level.

(658 words)

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
Cosas	Congress of South African Students
Cosatu	Congress of South African Trade Unions
Denosa	Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa
Fedusa	Federation of Unions of South Africa
#FMF	Fees Must Fall
Hospersa	Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa
ILC	Independent Labour Caucus
MK	Mkhonto we Sizwe (ANC's armed wing)
Nactu	National Council of Trade Unions
Naptosa	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
Nehawu	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
Numsa	National Union of Metalworkers
#OMF	Outsourcing Must Fall
Pawusa	Public and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
Popcru	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union
PSA	Public Servants' Association
SACP	South African Communist Party
Sasco	South African Students' Congress
Sadtu	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
Samwu	South African Municipal Workers' Union
Satawu	South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union

** Note that I have followed the convention of using all capitals for acronyms that must be spelled out letter by letter and any which are three letters or fewer; for those that can be pronounced as a word, I have used initial capitals.*

Select glossary: mis-, de- and re-identification and more

Key conceptual contributions are defined again here for the reader's convenience.

Misidentification: the belief that persons or groups are more (or less) like you than they are, or a belief which can be shown to be mistaken by reference to what actually transpires, that persons or groups have other, broader interests in common with you because they are like you in a few particular ways (such as metalworkers, for example, identifying with Zuma's masculinity).

De-identification: breaking an identification with persons or groups you had identified with.

Re-identification*:* assigning a new identity to persons or groups, and/or assuming a new identity with persons or groups.

Identity damage: a state where de-identification processes are underway (old identities and identifications have been called into question) without necessarily having a replacement identity (re-identification) readily to hand, thus opening a window of uncertainty.

Power flip: a reversal in perceptions of who is dependent on who in the relationship of strikers with government/the employer.

Near event: an intermediate state of diverse potential, in which routines/system maintenance have broken down already but which has not (yet) matured into an Event. Near events may or may not mature into an Event.

Identity event: an enduring change in how someone models, theorises and understands their social world or their own place in it or what may be imagined.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> There comes a moment when tenacity becomes morbid perseverance. Hope is then no longer an open door to the future but the illogical maintenance of a subjective attitude in organised contradiction with reality. (Fanon 1956 , Letter of Resignation)

> The materialist doctrine that [humans] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed [humans] are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is [humans] that change circumstances.... (Marx 1845; my amendments in [square brackets])

> The active politician is a creator, an initiator; but [she] neither creates from nothing nor does [she] move in the turbid void of [her] own desires and dreams. [She] bases [herself] on effective reality, but what is this effective reality? Is it something static and immobile, or is it not rather a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium? If one applies one's will to the creation of a new equilibrium among the forces which really exist and are operative basing oneself on the particular force which one believes to be progressive and strengthening it to help it to victory—[one] still moves on the terrain of effective reality, but does so in order to dominate and transcend it (or to contribute to this). What 'ought to be' is therefore concrete; indeed it is the only realistic and historicist interpretation of reality, it alone is history in the making and philosophy in the making, it alone is politics. (Gramsci 1978, 172; my amendments in [square brackets])

> The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny. (Trotsky 1932, preface)

Parts of this thesis were written in the shadow and harsh light of Marikana, the first large massacre of workers in South Africa since apartheid, which precipitated the first

real rupture in the alliance of the main trade unions with the ruling party and its SACP ally. Rupture (how it happens and indeed how to encourage it) is the central concern of this thesis, which – for reasons which will be elaborated in Chapter 3 – set out to explore how striking might change the expression of class(ed) identities; the aim was to complicate and stretch their study by considering them in a setting unlike the static, individualised and atomised, day-to-day getting-and-spending frame of so many contemporary studies of class. In the pair of public sector strikes I stumbled upon – the first towards the end of Mbeki's presidency in 2007, and the second under his successor, Zuma, in 2008 – strike identities and classed imagery were refracted through specific political identities, which were shaping and being shaped by the strains in the cross-class alliance among Cosatu, the ANC and the SACP. This setting focussed the question of how class(ed) identities change in a strike on whether the strikes constituted a rupture – in the alliance itself, and in the identities of strikers within and around the alliance.

The subsequent events in the mine belt and Fees/Outsourcing Must Fall (#FMF/#OMF) are patently far more significant than a pair of strikes some years before which were unusual for their time, but had meekly reverted to timid collective bargaining by 2012. The strike wave which followed Marikana also vastly eclipsed the first strike in my study, until then reported to be the largest 'industrial' strike (that is, not a political stay-away), in person days lost, in South African history. The Marikana events encapsulated the explosive growth of substantial minorities of the workers' movement who were, in one way or another, breaking from the unions which maintained their alliance with the ruling party. It was a movement which not only strained the seams of the collective bargaining framework[1] for a time, but also precipitated the 'Numsa moment' (Numsa is the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa), setting in motion a series of happenings which coalesced most notably in the formation, by unions formerly affiliated to Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions), of an alternative, left-leaning federation independent of government, SAFTU (the South African Federation of Trade Unions). The key public sector unions were not amongst them. The machinery of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu), one of the bigger unions from the 2007 and 2010 public

[1] Commonly based on three year agreements reached the bargaining councils comprised of the recognized unions and employer organizations within the sector, with the right to strike guaranteed by the LRA but hemmed in by a series of procedures which tend to dampen striking.

sector strikes, responded reprehensibly to the massacre in the platinum belt, commending the police. In 2021, the public sector unions failed to materialise a threatened strike (Mahlaka 2021b) despite a wage freeze and government reneging on the 2018-2020 collective bargaining agreement (Mahlaka 2021a).

What then is left to learn about rupture from a study of these public sector strikes which – if we squint hard enough, looking back – appear at best to be firecrackers that failed to go off?

The heart of this thesis uncovers an obscured continuity between the ruptures after Marikana and the damp squib of the public sector strikes. I argue that these strikes were a soft rip in an alliance fabric worn threadbare. I do this by exploring a largely hidden element over the course of the two strikes: the thesis shows that the public sector strikers' identifications with the ruling party, and indeed with their own leaders' complicity in the alliance, also underwent a series of shocks and destabilisations, years before Marikana. Noting these does not merely enrich our picture of the strikes; it changes how they must be analysed, shifting our gaze from yet another example of how the alliance managed discontent to ask how it repaired itself (and what could not be repaired this time), noting actual damage to alliance identifications and paying careful attention to the process of reconstitution, rather than simply finding expected confirmation of its maintenance.

I frame the thesis in the concept of 'Eventfulness' (happenings which lead to an irreversible change in structure – Chapter 2 will explain further). I develop the concepts 'near event', 'eventfulness' and 'identity event' to interrogate how Eventfulness (rupture) was deflected in these strikes, with the bulk of the thesis having first established that there were indeed eventful properties in the development of strikers' identifications and class imagery, which also challenge static conceptions of class identity. The subsection following sketches the roots of these concerns.

1.1. A moment of silence

At the time of the public sector strikes – just six years before Marikana – the dominant analyses of the working class in the alliance saw no need for such fanciful questions, despite an uptick in strikes. By 2005 it was becoming clear that the number of strike days in South Africa had inched up from 2003, the lowest point since 1994, tracking the 'popcorn protests' ahead of the local elections. In 2006, there were long, bitter

strikes of precarious workers (security guards and cleaners). By halfway through 2007, before the public sector strike, strike days were higher than 1987, the most strike-prone year until then. This was also the period over which Zuma grew into Mbeki's contender.

But, as I wrote elsewhere, 'Many academics and activists missed or dismissed the rising number of strike days because left scholars had been busy *de*romanticising unions in post-apartheid South Africa' because '[t]he social movement unionism of the 1980s, where unions were embedded in a broad movement concerned with issues beyond the workplace, was overtaken by a kind of social policy unionism' (Ceruti 2012, 104; See also, for example, Baskin 1991; Marais 2001) Therefore in social movements, it was argued in 2005 that:

> What is clear from the recent strikes is that it would take a free imagination (free from reality) to interpret them as the beginning of a revival. What we have seen are procedural strikes, and they have not intersected with a combative mood within the unionised working class - a key condition for a revival. (Lehulere 2005, 19)

No such revival was expected to flourish from Cosatu, according to this quintessential example of the argument, as long as it was 'imprisoned in the Alliance' with the ANC (African National Congress), playing the role of 'conflict manager, of facilitating accommodation to the interests of the dominant class in South Africa today' (Lehulere 2005, 33). Trevor Ngwane (2012) details these arguments in the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in 2003 and after. The rising strikes were therefore dismissed in advance as run-of-the-mill, bureaucratic wage strikes which would not challenge the dominance of the alliance or change anything. Similarly, from the academy, Pillay concluded in 2006 that "a working class revival" was "highly unlikely at this stage" either within or outside the alliance: "Instead, the centre as always will hold" (Pillay 2006, 190).

These analyses and many like them tended to treat Cosatu monolithically, but in truth there was little formal evidence to the contrary. Southall and Wood (1999, 114) reported that the 1998 Cosatu Worker Survey, a time-series study of shop stewards, showed that more than 70 per cent of respondents 'said that the Alliance represents the most effective mechanism for safeguarding worker interests in parliament. In contrast, only 13 per cent felt that Cosatu should not be politically aligned'. On the eve of the first public sector strike, this had changed only a little: Buhlungu and Pillay, using updated data in the time series, reported that belief in the alliance as 'the best way of serving worker interests in parliament' had dropped from 82 percent in 1994 to 66

percent ten years later (Pillay 2006, 179; Habib and Valodia 2006, 246). This downward trend nevertheless left '..almost two thirds of Cosatu membership … still in favour of the Alliance. This then lends credence to the leadership's view that the alliance can only be abandoned at great cost to the unity of the federation itself' (Habib and Valodia 2006, 246)[2]. (Remember these baseline attitudes later when we come to some shop stewards' attitudes to government, the ruling party and the alliance).

1.1.1. Surprise!

The problem for these analyses was not purely a lack of granular data but that they made no room for surprises and out-of-the-ordinary circumstances, and that they misplaced contradiction as a motor of out-of-the-ordinary circumstances (more about the latter in Chapter 2). The time-series survey of shop stewards was helpful for thinking about workers' voting behaviour and maybe their congress behaviour, but could not capture the swoops, swerves, dives and spasmodic accelerations of strikers' moods and ideas when they found themselves part of a stressed collective exploring its own (and, unwittingly, the state's) power in a high-stakes setting.

The dominant analyses in left-leaning academia and social movements were good at explaining how the alliance diffused militancy and maintained itself, but they made only narrow allowance for its failure and were therefore insensate to how the very mechanisms of maintenance generated wear and tear inside the alliance over time.

Let me illustrate by taking you back to a few seconds late in the first (2007) public sector strike, captured in Appendix A. It is Day 20 of the strike, 20 June 2007 (a long strike for the post-apartheid collective bargaining framework which had indeed worked to suppress strikes until recently. The hall of the Careers Centre in Soweto, just over the road from Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital, is packed for a general meeting of the National Education, Health and Allied workers' union, Nehawu. The strike is by now far from solid in the health sector – essential workers are forbidden to strike and early in the strike the department issued some dismissal letters to health workers.

[2] Lehulere further attributes Cosatu's relative conservatism to changes in its membership, drawing on academics' data: 'The average COSATU member is growing older, and is in his or her middle age. Secondly, the COSATU member of the militant 1980s was a blue-collar worker. According to Buhlungu and Webster in 1994 60% of COSATU members were unskilled and semi-skilled. Today the majority (60%) is made up of skilled, supervisory and clerical workers. These members are permanent and now have higher educational qualifications. The present day COSATU member, who is white collar, is also upwardly mobile' (Lehulere 2005, 12).

The employer – government, still under Mbeki – is determined to sit out the strike, and the union officials have come to this meeting to sell 8% as a 'fallback' position. They do not believe they will get the 10% which was the fallback position for the original demand, 12%, which (as we will see in Chapter 6) had been a powerful symbol for workers on marches leading up to the strike. The audience is spirited but a little tense. Twenty days ago, these strikers did the mental maths on what they could pay off with 12% more, and embarked on an action which they knew from the start would be risky, but whose outcome is becoming less certain each day. They respond heartily when the people on the platform [local union officials conducting the meeting]: salute a string of trade unions and other organisations: Viva Cosatu viva! (Viva!), Viva Naptosa [National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa] viva! (Viva!), Viva Nehawu viva! (Viva!), Viva South African Communist Party [SACP] viva! (Viva!).

But when the person comes to the hitherto obligatory, 'Viva ANC!', everybody hesitates for just a breath. Into that silence, a lone, likely drunken, voice interjects 'Down with shit!' There is a scattering of other insults and that is that for the ANC's 'viva' as the meeting scurries onward (via the platform hastily denunciating the ruling party to both project an identity with the crowd's response and to excuse or explain it away: 'Platform: We are angry. We elected this government. floor interjects 'if they do shit we remove them!' [Platform continues] The working class must benefit.' This didn't make their next task any easier: 'Platform puts forward '8%' as our 'fallback' position. Howls from the floor' (from my notes in the meeting, captured in Appendix A).

Today this is unremarkable, even run of the mill. Nowadays, significant sections of mineworkers have decisively abandoned saluting the ruling party, it was openly contested in the 2015 and 2016 student and worker movements where many offered insults instead, and people who were once within the ANC have transferred their injunctions for a long life to the EFF. At the time, however, those few seconds were quietly momentous: this was not an ordinary event in a meeting of any of the ANC's partners. 'You could hear the audience thinking, "*Do* we still support the ANC?"' said Trevor Ngwane, then a Soweto activist who was also at the strike meeting.

It is only from a distance, then, that the conclusion of the public sector strikes can be imagined as the smooth extrusion of an unproblematic ideological bond to the Alliance. This thesis contends that the strikes were indeed both procedural and, at first, driven primarily from above; but at the same time they were thoroughly immersed in an explosive political period amidst maturing contradictions in a cross-class alliance.

In this context, procedural strikes produced unprocedural possibilities in the heads of the strikers, particularly where the nature and behaviour of the employer (government) constantly raised questions of power and loyalty just as strikers were noting the value of their own labour.

This thesis primarily consists of a contextually embedded exploration of strike identities and class imagery in strike identities and alliance identities in the strike, as they go through a series of shocks. I explore collective identities and individual identities and their interaction with the external. I further contend that 'normal' identity dynamics are destabilised in the suspended reality of the strike. I show in this thesis that attitudes to government grew increasingly ambiguous over the course of the first strike. Moreover, the initial identification with the alliance began to work as a pivot for identity damage, which underwent what I have called a 'power flip', under the influence of a relational aspect that crept into strikers class imagery via centring the value of their work. In the power flip, strikers mentally inverted the actually existing practice of the alliance, although in neither strike was there wide retheorising of the alliance. This examination also adds to studies of class identity as it illustrates other modes of formation and, importantly, *deformation* of class(ed) identities distinct from those in studies of quotidian class.

1.1.2. Things could have been different. What made them turn out this way?

The difficulty that remains is that, even if events in the strike do not fit a smooth maintenance model, nevertheless the outcome appears to be exactly what these predict– that the alliance allowed the strikers to let off steam and then closed ranks again. What happened to that moment of silence for the ANC? The remainder of that Nehawu strike meeting in 2007, for example, was nothing if not combative, as captured in the rough transcript in Appendix A where one striker after another spoke out against adopting a fall-back position of 8%, four percent down on the original 12%. How, then, was the strike wrapped up just nine days later at 7.5%, with a very ordinary compromise? If the audience was indeed interrogating its own support for the ANC, two years later, Zuma's ascendancy had seemingly restored the Viva to the ANC. These strikes transformed the face of government in that they contributed to challenging the president at the time, Thabo Mbeki, and his policies, but they were not

transformative in the sense of fundamentally reshaping power, government policy or, indeed, the material position of the strikers.

The thesis also explores other possibilities that were foreshadowed in the strikes through its detailed explanation of what did happen. It explores how identity eventfulness was deflected: at the end of the first strike, under the influence of a dead end in strategy and actual power, partly through deferring the demands to the political kingdom via a promised *reconstitution* (not mere reproduction) of the alliance, which allowed many (but not all) strikers to adapt to the end of the strike and shelve their eventful identities. But I show that this in turn stored up contradiction for later (amongst shop stewards as well and perhaps more sharply), which caused the second strike despite the union bureaucracy's reconciliation with the alliance. However the unsatisfactory settlement of that second strike, undemocratically deflected to a restoration of social policy unionism, left more deeply conflicted feelings but less hope and a sense of defeat, pinching off the near-eventful arc of the two strikes.

The concerns discussed so far are summarised in a series of questions in the next subsection.

1.1.3. The research questions in summary

My central question was: **Did the public sector strikes express peculiar possibilities for change or rupture in political and classed identities via strike identities (that is, for eventful identities)?** I got at this question through two broad categories of component questions:

a. **What strike identities developed and how did they change over the course of the strikes?** What was the role of classed identifications in the strikes and in strike identities, and how did these change, if at all, over the course of the strikes? What imagery, and what classed imagery, did strikers use in identifying themselves, the strikes and other actors during the strikes? How, if at all, was that shaped by the specific form of collective action (withdrawing labour power)? How did this imagery respond to or shape the course of the strike? To what extent, and in what ways, were strikers' identities destabilised or restabilised over the course of the strike? What happened to disrupted identities after the strikes?

b. **What happens to eventful identities when they do not lead to an Event?** Were the strikers' identities eventful? What distinguishes eventful identities from ordinarily fluid identities? If the strikers' identities were eventful, how were they crammed back into the box? If they were not eventful, how were such conflictual identities diffused? Did the strikes affect the political/industrial relations landscape?

1.2. Structure of the thesis

The thesis moves through four (asymmetrical) components: theoretical framing, strike one, strike two, and the overall arc of both strikes taken together.

In the first part, this **introduction** has outlined my questions and explains where they came from.

Chapter 2, Theorising the unpredictable in collective agency, establishes an overall theoretical framework for a study of *potentials,* in which I reinstate the role of contradiction. Through a close exposition and critique of William's Sewell's conceptualisation of the Event, I stretch the concepts to introduce 'near Events' and events in subjectivity which, I will argue, may 'store up' contradiction.

Chapter 3, Eventful identities, explores those concepts in relation to three overlapping literatures: class identity studies, collective mobilisation literature, and studies of strikes. The chapter establishes the need for dynamic understandings of class and then formulates a way of approaching the interplay amongst class identities and people's environment, experiences and actions (in a nutshell, class formation in structure-agency). From there, it discusses identity formation in a strike collective, teasing out some questions around what is peculiar about strikes in identity formation and how conflict-collectives shape identity formation and reformation. I conclude the chapter by introducing the concept of identity *damage*, which is an underappreciated element in studies of processes of class identity.

Chapter 4, Methodology, Improvising opportunist research establishes my approach for comparing the two strikes: holistic comparison over time, which involved comparing individuals with their earlier selves and also comparing the strikes as segments of an arc over time. The chapter also describes the evolution of my question and adaption of the research. The chapter also considers the use of quasi-journalistic

techniques in a fast-moving research setting, as well as providing the usual details about sampling and the sample.

The next three chapters deal with the first strike in 2007.

Chapter 5, 'We put you where we are and look how you treat us', sets the scene of the political and economic context directly before the strike. It also lays out a conceptualisation of teachers and nurses as workers.

Chapter 6, An analytical timeline of strike one, is a 'long view', an outsider's view if you like, of how the strike unfolded in a situation where going through the usual motions failed to produce the expected results. The chapter describes the collective identity projected by the strike and the identities attributed to the strike by government. In this first strike, union officials' frustrations mesh with the frustrations of the members, facilitating destabilisation of identifications with the ruling party and imagery for a rebalancing of the alliance, which evolves into the power flip. This chapter prepares for the discussion of individuals' interpretations in the following chapter by helping us to understand how the specific conjuncture at various times in the strikes gave shape to these interpretations and identifications.

Chapter 7: Convergent and divergent identities in strike one zooms in on strikers' interpretations of the strike and classed imagery, deepening and adding to the themes in the previous chapter. Here I show that strike identities were both precursors of class identities and 'punctured' alliance identities. Closer inspection of the power flip shows that the strike produced experiences of the alliance and of government-the-employer which intensified *ambiguities* towards government, rather than shattering the relationship outright. Such ambiguity is an essence of near-eventful identities whose liminality make them simultaneously a doorway to repair or rupture. The chapter also briefly deals with strikers attitudes to other workers, which was an important theme in strikers' explanations of the power of the strike and then details three different forms of accommodation to the end of the strike.

The third component, **Chapter 8: Caught between the comrades and the comrades**, deals with the second strike, in 2010, which grows out of heightened expectations - the 'storing up' of contradiction as a result of the deflection of the previous strike. This chapter is also structured into a long view timeline of the strike, followed by a closer view of strikers' interpretations. In this strike, the union bureaucracy and the members have diverged. The renewed identity destabilisations of the first strike harden and congeal in this strike but were unprepared for the shock

of damage to their identifications with union leaders as the strike was sewn up from above.

The last component of the thesis brings the two strikes into comparison and situates them in the same arc of historical motion. **Chapter 9: four strikers across two strikes**, first summarises the cohort-movements of identities across the two strikes, showing a process of strained misidentification maturing into dis-identity in the first strike, being deflected ('re-misidentified') at the end of the strike, betrayed again in the lead up to the second strike, and culminating in severe identity damage by the end of the second strike, but without a clear new identity. The remainder of the chapter traces four individuals, two of whom are shop stewards, throughout both strikes. This detailed examination asks whether the broad movements in cohort-identities manifest on an individual level. This examination confirms eventfulness in individual subjectivities but also highlights how the eventfulness tends to 'look both ways', thereby opening a door which could lead out of the identification but which can also lead back to it. Nevertheless I show that the experiences of the strike have congealed a subtle shift in the desiderata concerning the alliance.

Chapter 10 concludes. The conclusion states and draws together the main theoretical insights that arose from tracing the arc of strike identities through both strikes, stretching several literatures (on the event, on class identities, on collective and mobilisation identities, and on the alliance). The thesis showed that strikers were confronted by a series of identity shocks which led many to re-interpellate themselves in relation to the alliance, bringing some to the brink of re-identifying the alliance despite its double restoration. The conclusion notes that the thesis unearthed peculiarly relational class imagery from the strike context, sharply visible in the 'power flips', which enlarge our view of processes of class formation and which illustrate one of the ways that eventful identities in the strike responded to the contradictions at the heart of the alliance, which eventually created a disjuncture between the intended and the actual. The alliance was thus not only a means of control but also a mechanism that stored up contradiction and damage, whose traces were found in the overlooked area of subjectivities in and about the alliance. By considering the strikes as *near events* rather than non-events, the thesis was able to consider why an event failed to mature. Here, the eventfulness of the strikes was limited and deflected by, most importantly, limits to the strikers' power and the consequent restoration of resigned pragmatism. Collective identity processes were produced from the strikes, not in

advance of them, and also proved to be not only *formative* processes: there were also processes of identity *destruction* (deforming processes). Crucially, by the end of the strike, some strikers were in a liminal identity between misidentification and re-interpellation which I have named identity damage - whose liminality also made it a state of potential, of importance to activist theorising, understanding identity formation and to capturing a theory of rupture.

Chapter 2. Theorising the unpredictable in collective agency

This thesis is based on a real-life application of a general Marxist theory to a very particular and historically peculiar series of events. Its core is a conjunctural analysis[3] developed during the collective actions in question, focussed primarily on the immediate possibilities for the proletarian[4] movement implied by changing subjectivities. It employed a specific mode of theorising, and while the thesis does not stop at the initial conjunctural analysis, neither can it escape that beginning. I will therefore begin by briefly describing this mode and developing the concept of rupture implied by it, partly by picking over Sewell's concept of the event and adding the 'near-event', via which I come to conceptualising identity as a particular form of subjectivised experience (elaborated in chapter 3 where I also conceptualise subjectivity in strikes and what is distinctive about strikes in subjectivity).

2.1. By way of introduction: Reader, meet Rupture.

In their natural state, conjunctural analyses such as mine are most interested in what could and should be done to influence the outcome of fast-changing circumstances, whether in very small ways or bigger ones. This element of urgency presses for rough-and-ready, particularistic, sometimes very partial and often transient theorising which relies heavily on experiential and experimental elements. The last two elements imply

[3] I use conjunctural in its most basic sense here, to mean a specific combination or coming together of forces and factors that, while perhaps expressing general dynamics, is peculiar to that context at that time, or, as I later found Stuart Hall had put it, "a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape" (Hall and Massey 2010, 57). However Hall adds an additional element, crisis, which makes his concept of the conjuncture yet more relevant to my study. As Massey put it, "One of the reasons for needing to understand the structural character of the current conjuncture is that, as you say, it's not predetermined what the outcome will be, or what will happen. And this kind of analysis *gives us some purchase on understanding the range of potential outcomes*" (Hall and Massey 2010, 58; My emphasis). More about this question of potentials shortly.

[4] Elsewhere (Ceruti 2010b) I use proletarian to describe that 'community of fate' (a phrase I borrowed from Silver (2003) who borrowed it from Levi and Olson (2000)) which binds the majority of working and unemployed people as well as many self-employed.

a science which, if it is done properly, shades into art in a way that sits uncomfortably with much academic convention, and not only because it reduces knowledge production to the handmaid of actualising a partisan imagination. In the moment, interventionist Marxism[5] employs semi-intuitive modes of theorising that, from the outside, may look like jumping to journalistic conclusions and whose accuracy relies heavily on developing a feeling for public feeling. After the fact, it considers not only why things happened the way they did but frequently considers whether and how things could have been different, an exercise in counter-factuals that necessarily includes elements of speculative imagination. Social scientists are forced to sympathise with interventionist Marxism's character as the science of a giant, uncontrolled experiment taking place in messy laboratory. The best of them share its consequent necessary disrespect for disciplinary boundaries. But many would still raise an eyebrow at the scientist claiming membership of a horde of bacteria bent on influencing the results of the experiment.

This thesis speaks to questions raised in that realm of theorising. The questions outlined in the introduction did not emerge from gaps in the literature but from searching for the gaps *for* the movement presented by a particular situation. And the thesis addresses these questions from that theoretical mode, although it is omnivorous in its particular methods.

However in pursuing its own agenda, this particular instance of contingent theorising spoke to certain gaps in the academic literature theorising social change. It also spoke to gaps regarding identity, class and collectivity, which I will come to in the next chapter.

Moreover it speaks to these gaps in a way to which many forms of academic enquiry remain blind because of their suspicion of the 'what if...?' . Jumping to *accurate* conclusions in the heat of the moment about what *could* be is seldom possible only from a close eye for detail. Interventionist Marxism is, of necessity, rooted in a body of theory which develops general propositions to frame on-the-fly theorising, which can in turn be tested and refined through it[6]. Examples are the proposition that strikes hold

[5] That is, forms of Marxism developed around and through attempting to affect the future.

[6] Interventionist *dogma* can simulate success for a very long time, but interventionist Marxism must take seriously the principle that its theory must always adapt to reality when the former and the latter conflict. However its practical theoretical advances are sometimes invisible because they may be made incrementally and in a localised way, encapsulated as movement rules of thumb rather than theories, or sometimes arrived at in a flash of insight (frequently confused with sheer lunacy) whose building blocks may be individually unmemorable.

special potential for changing subjectivities, or that the way workers are situated in production gives them access to a peculiar power for transformative action. Foundational aspects of this body of general theory were developed through rigorous investigation of a sort more familiar to academia (for example *Capital* (Marx 1976) and *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Trotsky 1932) are meticulously detailed). Despite their more conventional techniques, these studies rely methodologically on a special form of abstraction, a form which is geared towards the potential for *rupture* as a prelude to transformation: for the decisively new to erupt from the same-old. This is after all the raison d'etre of interventionist Marxism, and the object of the research at hand. This specialised mode of abstraction need not be unique to interventionist Marxism. For example in Chapter 4, I will touch on similarities in Michael Burawoy's treatment of temporality (Cock 2009). But it is uniquely *essential* to interventionist theory, Marxist or otherwise, in a way that it is not to the pure academic (who could conceivably build a lifetime career without it and suffer no worse damage than publishing a new paper accounting for a previous paper's inability to explain more recent, unexpected developments).

Let me sketch this form of abstraction before elaborating a concept of rupture.

2.1.1. A theory of potentials[7]

Rather obviously, theorising change of any sort implies considering the way things move, unfold and develop over time. Human agency and the structures it (re)produces must be conceived of as constantly in motion, even when they are conserving inertia. (I have deliberately borrowed this word from physics because inertia is the property of

[7] This section and the one before is a summary of my own theoretical practice developed over some 25 years as an active Marxist. I have referenced those concepts whose provenance I could recall or trace but I must acknowledge that my thinking here is deeply indebted to scores of Marxist, Marxian and other thinkers - some of whom have never recorded their thoughts on paper - whose contribution has become so deeply ingrained in my thinking that I experience and use it – not inauthentically – as my own. This is seldom an issue for interventionist marxism, which is suspicious of intellectual property if not of acknowledging origins, and where all human innovation is in any case assumed to be based on an accumulation of knowledge, and where the point of knowledge is accurate and effective *imagination* rather than originality per se. In this practice, a key consequence of accurate analysis is winning individuals, movements and organisations to agree on elements of it in order to act in unison. In this context, coming across someone putting forward one of my ideas as if it were all their own would be experienced as success: it would suggest that the idea is useful enough for modelling the world that it appears implicit immediately it is grasped; or that someone else reached the same conclusion independently, thus strengthening the validity of my idea; or at least that I have argued it persuasively. Academia is different, partly because the ideal that we should be advancing knowledge on taxpayers' money imposes the requirement of originality and, therefore, degrees, publications and careers depend on who wrote it down first. The reader should assume that this section is my own peculiar exposition of a deeply collective effort. I trust that other sections will fill the requirement of academic originality in more conventional ways.

resisting diversion from a particular course of motion, not necessarily a lack of motion.) However temporality alone is insufficient for a science in which 'the world is '... to be comprehended ... as a complex of *processes*' (Engels 1946; accessed online) for the reason that:

> ...in looking at any class's place in history, we have to consider it, not in terms of its actual state at a given moment in time, but in terms of its potential for development (Birchall 1982, 28).

Colin Barker makes this point in a way which is useful for thinking about my case study, with regard to assessing social movements: 'To what degree and in what form can we perceive, within the existing practices ... the *immanence* of alternative principles of social organisation?' (Barker 2008, 2). '[Dialectical thinking] is driven to inquire what potentialities lie within given forms of ... activity, what as yet undeveloped paths of transformation might be actualised through practice' (Barker 2008, 10).

Rupture – a break in what already exists - cannot be satisfactorily theorised by simply distilling the already-existing patterns of motion in, for example, repeated instances of collective action, or the reproduction of the existing order, unless we look through the patterns for their *motor*[8]. A theory of possibilities is only really possible if we insist that ruptures develop (most often) within the already-existing equilibriums of human activity, albeit by severely punctuating their motion[9]. If the motors of change were outside the 'machine' we ourselves comprise, then ruptures could only be comprehended after the fact, never anticipated.

Marxism understands this internal motor to be, at its most abstracted, contradiction. As Callinicos puts it, from the context of social philosophy

> ...conceptualising society as a contradictory totality involves a constant movement away from the actual in two directions – downwards to identify the underlying mechanisms that at once produce but are liable to subvert the actual, forwards to track the effects of the tendencies that threaten to beak the actual up.

Of course, as Birchall writes:

> … to identify contradiction as the dynamic of change is only the beginning of the problem. Marx went on to spend the remaining thirty-eight years of

[8] Here I have developed a train of thought originally set in motion some decades ago by Ian Birchall (1982) in his outline of a Marxist dialectic, but also covered very well by John Rees (1998)

[9] There are rare instances, such as Captain Cook's encounter with a previously isolated group of humans as described by Sewell (2005, 200ff), when rupture might be usefully modelled on a chronologically localised scale as having come from 'outside'.

> his life studying the specific contradictions of capitalist society ... '. (Birchall 1982, 29).

Subsequent chapters in this thesis pick up many kinds of contradiction which come into play in my case study, key amongst them the sometimes latent contradictions inherent in a cross-class alliance, and the contradiction inherent in the structure of the trade unions. My particular focus is to refine an understanding for Marxism of how human subjectivity responds to contradiction: of how we play out the contradictions we face and how we then understand what has happened, and how that shapes our consequent activity.

After all, if we accept social structure to be the product of human activity (though a product greater than the mere sum of human activities) then contradictions in social structure cannot play themselves out to the point of rupture except via *some form* of human subjectivity, even if the humans in question misperceive their role - I am thinking here of stockmarket crashes as examples, where the stockbrokers' actions turn contradiction into active crises behind the backs of their subjective intentions in 'playing the market'. In this sense their deliberate actions operate in a way that resembles enzymes in a bio-feedback loop, rather than conscious intention. Collective action such as that in my case study implies a different order of *awareness* in responding to contradiction, although we should not assume that collective actors are necessarily perceiving their role in 'rolling out' contradiction more accurately than the stock-brokers[10]. My particular focus is to understand the extent to which, and when, such structural contradiction may rupture people's existing *models* of the world, how these may lead to or result from rupture in *movement practices*, and how these are consequently diverted from or directed at conscious rupture of existing structure.

To summarise, this form of abstraction is especially suited to theorising the *possibility* of rupture in that it takes a dynamic and temporal view attuned to the development of contradictions. Let me stress that when I say possibility here, I do not mean prediction: this is not the pseudo-science of a crystal ball but the science of becoming sensitive to what might *realistically* develop out of a given 'moment' or conjuncture of forces. Certainly it is not the pseudo-science of predicting this or that inevitable outcome from this or that contradiction. The way contradictions play out –

[10] Nor necessarily automatically more progressive. However this thesis helps to show that the positive transformative *potential* of collective action by people positioned in certain ways in capitalism is inherently greater than the stockbrokers herd.

to be precise, the way humans play them out - remains 'irreducibly contingent', to borrow a phrase from Alex Callinicos[11].

The preceding discussion suggests that contradiction and rupture are closely related, but not the same. As Alex Callinicos writes,

> The relationship between contradiction and transformation must... be specified carefully. The existence of a contradictory social relationship will not of itself inevitably lead to the transformation of this relationship... Organic crises don't predetermine outcomes but pose alternatives (in the broadest terms collapse or transformation, but other options may exist as well, for example stagnation). (Callinicos 2006a, 206)

I use the concept rupture quite literally, to mean bursting apart or breaking open, implying a build-up of contained pressure. Rupture is one possible result of social contradiction but contradictions in the human organisation of society may also remain in self-regulating dynamic equilibria for a very long time, for many reasons. People may experience all the effects of contradiction (such as the inability of capitalism to match the labour market to the number of hands) but remain blinded to their origin, not through stupidity but because, as I will elaborate later, the relation is obscured by the structure of the labour market which individualises 'success' (See Ceruti 2010b). Ruling classes may actively manage contradiction and sometimes thus delay their rupture.

By saying 'it all depends', I am not proposing the determinism of historical accident. It all depends finally on how human agents - people - respond to a given configuration of circumstance (which is sculpted too by the positionality of actors and their relations to other actors. I will come back to this later). Interventionist Marxism's conceptualisation of change is founded on human agency. It therefore requires a feeling for how human subjectivities develop in dialogue with experience during collective action, for which it posits unique transformative potential. I contribute to this through my study of the contingent constitutions, dissolutions and reconstitutions of a collective subject during a period of erupting crises.

I was drawn to William Sewell's *Logics of History* (2005) for his rich conceptualisation of 'The Event', which resembled in many respects the thinking about rupture sketched above, and spoke to my sense during the strikes that my question was really about how the ordinary flips into the extraordinary (or fails to). This thesis is

[11] From my personal notes from the audience of a conference.

going to argue that the strikes were embedded in a process which has produced a localised 'Event', in Sewell's sense, in the practices of the alliance, of government, and of protest in South Africa. In the following part of the chapter I will define Sewell's concept of the event at some length, then refine his account of how 'the ordinary operations of structures can generate transformation' (Sewell 2005, 140) to show how we may go beyond a 'possible theory of history' to the theorisation of possibilities. This thesis will show that the process of these particular strikes precipitated a cascade of less-visible near-events and micro-events at the level of subjectivity, which implied the diverted, or perhaps delayed, possibility of further-reaching events in the future. The idea of the near-event is intended to help us to think about when and why events *do not* happen[12] in order to think more clearly about when and how they might be precipitated.

2.1.2. The Event in Sewell

'[W]hen historians argue for the importance of events, they have in mind occurrences that have momentous consequences, that "change the course of history",' writes William Sewell in *Logics of History* (2005, 116). These seem to resist theorisation because they are 'by definition, unique and contingent happenings and are subject to the vagaries of human will' (Sewell 2005, 197); they are 'turbulent and chaotic', the very opposite of structure when structure is understood as a stable, patterned and predictable underlying order of things[13]. 'After all,' Sewell continues, 'it is the powerfully recurrent or structured character of social existence, the strong tendency of social relations to be reproduced, that makes the event an interesting and problematic category in the first place.' (Sewell 2005, 199). Yet Sewell insists on relating the two, not only because '[e]vents can be distinguished from uneventful happenings only to the extent that they violate the expectations generated by cultural structures' (Sewell 2005, 198); but also because events are the form of motion which gives the 'normal texture of historical temporality' its characteristic 'lumpiness' (Sewell 2005, 139). He writes (in a chapter discussing Sahlins' ideas of eventfulness):

[12] I will clarify later that this is not quite the same as explaining non-eventfulness, the normal maintenance or reproduction of existing structure. Rather this is a concept intended to apply to circumstances which have many of the characteristics of events yet apparently dissipate without lasting effect.

[13] Alain Badiou's Event (See Badiou 2006) shares certain similarities with this version of the Event, but is not very useful for my purposes: not only is it an extremely abstract conceptualization, but it also removes context and history, as pointed out by Bensaid (2004, 45). See also Callinicos (2006a, 83 ff)

> ... Sahlins recasts the meaning of the contrast, attempting to transform the unequal and radical *opposition* between structure and event, which makes the two categories hostile and mutually incomprehensible, into a more balanced *relation,* in which each category implies the other... Events, in Sahlin's reformulation, are **transformations of structure, and structure is the cumulative outcome of past events.** (Italics in the original, bold emphasis mine). (Sewell 2005, 199)

In the following passage, Sewell stresses that events are not instants but processes; further, events appear in this passage as the magnification, through their reticulation, of otherwise quite usual processes of rupture:

> ...events should be conceived of as sequences of occurrences that result in transformations of structures. Such sequences begin with a rupture of some kind – that is, a surprising break with routine practice. Such breaks actually occur every day – as a consequence of exogenous causes, of contradictions between structures, of sheer human inventiveness or perversity, or of simple mistakes in enacting routines. But most ruptures are neutralised and reabsorbed into the pre-existing structures in one way or another – they may, for example, be forcibly repressed, pointedly ignored, or explained away as exceptions. But whatever the nature of the initial rupture, an occurrence only becomes a historical event, in the sense in which I use the term, when it touches off a chain of occurrences that durably transforms previous structures and practices. (Sewell 2005, 227 ff).

Later, I will discuss a gap in the preceding description of the causes of rupture. For now, we should note that Sewell thus seeks to root the event in the everyday, while distinguishing it from more normal evolutionary change of the sort that accumulates in any dynamic system. Although events

> ...are sometimes the culmination of processes long under way, I would claim that events typically do more than carry out a rearrangement of practices made necessary by gradual and cumulative social change. Historical events tend to transform social relations in ways that could not be fully predicted from the gradual change that may have made them possible.... [events] reshape history, imparting an unforeseen direction to social development (Sewell 2005, 227).

Events then are punctuations of the ordinary motion of society marked by *qualitative* and lasting changes in structure, which Sewell (Sewell 2005, 248 ff) also describes as the 'dislocation and transformative re-articulation' of structures.

The structural disruption intrinsic to eventfulness implies moreover that eventful periods are characterised by 'bursts of collective cultural creativity' (Sewell 2005, 229), and this is where Sewell becomes of great interest to my study. I suggest that events are often subjectively experienced as happening to us, but I maintain that it is also true

at the same time that events are always made by us, or at least by the (differently empowered) activities of *some* humans. Intrinsically, structural transformations have consequences for what people think and do, but equally intrinsically, human activity transforms social structure. In Sewell's description, eventful periods are characterised by experimental social practice, sometimes taking the form of reinvention of old rituals. Sewell's description thereby implies, almost in passing, that *eventful periods are periods in which people may be confronted with a profound rethink of who we are* as well as how we do what we do. He explains that events tend to be both emotionally volatile and creative because,

> ... events are never instantaneous happenings: they always have a duration, a period that elapses between the initial rupture and the subsequent structural transformation. During this period, the usual articulations between different structures become profoundly dislocated. Actors, consequently, are beset with insecurity: they are unsure about how to get on with life. This insecurity may produce varying results, sometimes in the same person: anxiety, fear or exhilaration...but it almost certainly raises the emotional intensity of life. (Sewell 2005, 239)

During the interregnum, '...ordinary routines of social life are open to doubt, the sanctions of existing power relations are uncertain or suspended, and new possibilities are thinkable' (Sewell 2005, 250). We shall see that a similar state existed, at least with respect to the alliance and the ruling party, at the time of the 2007 strike. Another such state emerged in 2010.

In Sewell's chapter on the French Revolution, eventful processes are not merely social and structural but also spatial and emotive. Dislocation tends to be accompanied by 'collective effervescence', which refers to the intensification of emotional volatility when people 'interact intensively' in a relatively confined space, or act more or less in concert – that is, when people form crowds. Collective effervescence 'makes the event markedly unstable. Joy and rage blend into one another, making possible acts of either generosity or savagery' (Sewell 2005, 249).

By now it should be evident that, here, Sewell's theorising leans heavily towards a particular collective actor which was emerging during the French Revolution from what George Rude called 'the crowd' (Rude 2005). Sewell is, after all, telling us in this chapter how the concept of 'the people' forces its way into the lexicon of sovereignty in Europe, thus legitimizing the emerging forms of collective agency, which he describes sensitively in interaction with other kinds of collective agents like the state and the monarchy. For Sewell, part of the eventfulness of this episode was exactly

that it cemented the place of this actor in the contemporary repertoire. (Not all events would be characterised by this sort of collective actor: I imagine that an event-process such as the discovery and spread of firemaking, which Sewell (2005) characterises as an event of substantial duration, would also have depended on collectivity and agency, but in forms very much more dispersed in space and time, such as inherited technology and social networks.)

Sewell's slant here not only fits well with my study, but also reflects the centrality of human agency in his model. His ability to conceive of events as developing within the womb of the hitherto uneventful rests crucially on conceiving structure as 'the continually evolving outcome and matrix of a process of social interaction ... [T]o invoke structures as I have defined them here is to call for a critical analysis of the dialectical interactions through which humans shape their history' (Sewell 2005, 151). As this last phrase suggests, Sewell's concept of structure rests 'on a particular concept of agency – one that sees agency not as opposed to, **but as constituent of**, structure. To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree (Sewell 2005, 143).

So far, so good. Sewell's instinct in grounding structure in human activity is soundly Marxian, to use his description of himself. But his subsequent conception of what kind of structure is constituted by human agency is less sound and, as I will argue later in the next section, hobbles his theorisation of events. I will approach this question via the 'near-event'.

2.1.3. The near-event: looking forward where Sewell looks back

When applied, Sewell's theorisation of the Event produces the following problem. If you ask whether my case study constitutes an Event, the answer would be an unequivocal maybe. I have already said that the strikes were part of the process of a localised event in the practice of the alliance, but we will see that it has also been for many of the strikers a rather temporary 'event' if our measure is the structures of their working lives, which had framed many strike demands. It remains to be seen whether any of these will be implicated in irrevocably changing the structure of national politics. Certainly it has not yet produced a fundamental restructuring of, for example, wealth distribution in the country, although it may have helped to usher in a new style of state

management of capitalism. All this remained to be seen at the time of writing. These episodes, already overshadowed by Marikana, are not remembered as the opening movements of a longer, larger process; in just a decade the whole episode has faded into the fabric of the maintenance of society. Strictly speaking, the episode may turn out never to have been any kind of event at all, following the definition above. Yet – and this is where the problem arises - my case study exhibits many qualities associated with eventfulness, such as a sense of dislocation, questioning of authority, and revived imaginations. In other words certain characteristics which Sewell associates with eventfulness are present in these episodes before it can even be determined whether they will constitute an event.

My uncertainty about the eventfulness of these episodes is only partly a question of scale, such as highlighted by both Sewell (2005) and Franzosi (1995). Franzosi considers whether Italy's 'Hot Autumn', a strike wave on the cusp of 1970, was an event. Unfortunately, he applies historic scale as a telescope turned backwards, through which the Hot Autumn eventually recedes until it appears as a speck of flotsam on economic long waves which blindly manifest themselves from time to time in strike patterns (Franzosi 1995, 370 ff). Franzosi is thus able to remain agnostic on whether the Hot Autumn was an event or not, but at the cost of a greatly minimised appreciation of agency, which moreover undermines his own point about the distinct subjective qualities of striking at one time rather than another.

Sewell has the telescope of historic scale the right way around, oriented to discern detail in the distant. He uses it to understand why, looking back at accepted events, certain moments come to symbolise the whole event-process for the participants, and subsequently enter history as the encapsulation of the entire event-process although it was, at best, only the culmination of a series of strategically more important processes – Sewell describes the storming of the Bastille by way of example (Sewell 2005, 225 ff). A milder local equivalent could be the way 'Polokwane' (the location of the conference at which Zuma displaced Mbeki) came to symbolise an apparent shift in the ANC (and in some of its quarters, the immanent demobilisation of 'the people').

But when I say that my case study's status as an event is uncertain, I am saying more than that the importance of these episodes in history is not yet clear, or that their cultural symbolism is still in formation. I am saying that these processes may still be developing at the time of writing: this particular conjuncture contains simultaneously

several possible ways to play out, some more predictable than others, most of them likely to contain at least a grain of the unexpected, and a handful posing profound structural implications. As they play out, such conjunctures prefigure *both* eventful and non-eventful outcomes *at the same time*. The science of the near-event lies thus in assessing which outcomes are most likely, the art of the near-event in assessing possibilities for tipping a balance in favour of certain further-reaching outcome.

It is perhaps more difficult for historians than for contemporarists to reach this insight. Those conjunctures which collapse eventually into non-events must by definition become examples of maintenance of existing structure, through their failure to effect lasting structural change. But I contend that peculiar forms of maintenance – or rather restoration – are associated with *deflection* of events, and I will lay out some examples in the body of the thesis. For now, I want to point out that, even if future historians fail to spot them, such near-events do not retroactively transform into more ordinary, non-eventful mechanisms of maintenance (such as those described by Sewell in his chapter on the durability of dockers' organisation in Marseille (Sewell 2005, 271 ff)). The near-event remains obscured in history not only because it is shouldered aside by established events, but also because established events and non-events appear effectively cut and dried when looking back, even to the sensitivities of a non-determinist historian like Sewell. This is largely because, retrospectively, their structural effects are *actually* cut and dried. Therefore even when unpacked as a series of turning points, a particular chain of events has *already happened* (Steinmetz 2008, 537) and it is this chain rather than a chain that did *not* happen that appears in need of the historians' explanations. The very many things that *did not happen* at each of those points may be considered explained merely by the fact of their displacement by whatever did happen. It is difficult for the historian or any human to visualise the former existence of those turning points as indeterminate states containing a range of (conjuncturally circumscribed) possibilities, even though we easily and instinctively visualise the present in this way in every bar-room discussion weighing up whether to buy an e-tag or change jobs. (By conjuncturally circumscribed, I refer to my earlier point that a variety of prefigured alternatives, not just *anything,* is possible in an eventful conjuncture.) We cannot do without such visualisation if we want to use a backward-looking theorisation of events to help us glimpse what is possible a few steps in the future, particularly if the aim is to more effectively precipitate certain kinds of events from eventfulness.

The term ‘near-event’ is inelegant but conceptually important to this visualisation, to denote those states of indeterminate possibility which exist fleetingly on the wave-front of history (that is, the present), and which are the special quarry of interventionist Marxism. The near-event is not yet an event and may never become one, but neither is it simply routine. The concept of the near-event states baldly that events emerge most often from eventfulness, while eventfulness does not always culminate in actual events. This is subtly different from Sewell’s theoretical exposition in the passage above on page 20. We are reminded that he has already explained that events most often do *not* develop. Here Sewell attributes eventful potential to ruptures in routine life, caused either from the outside (‘...as a consequence of exogenous causes, of contradictions between structures...’) or by errors in the iterations that normally constitute social stability (‘... sheer human inventiveness or perversity, or ... simple mistakes in enacting routines’) (Sewell 2005, 227)[14]. In this exposition events seem to erupt *directly* from the routine rupturing of the routine.

I propose that it is important to recognise an intermediate state. Sewell’s ethnography of the French Revolution clearly portrays and explicitly mentions, but does not further theorise, this state which I have called near-event, although it could less specifically be called a *crisis state* or a possible turning point.[15] Structural breakdown and a sense of social dislocation *precede* the series of episodes which eventfully ‘rearticulate’ structure in Sewell’s description. I define near-events as states of *diverse potential*, eventful insofar as they call into existence experimental subjectivities and experimental exercise of powers (and testing the limits of powers). What is special about these states is that routines have broken down *already* - Sewell describes this - but it is not yet clear what will replace them, nor who should do the replacing. It is this property which allows ‘near events’ to summon such unusual powers from the realm of agency, which is normally given to reproducing or accommodating the way things are. In Sewell’s portrayal, the initial state merges seamlessly into the event itself, and this is descriptively accurate enough when considering consummated events. But we are then at risk of missing a basic fact: the

[14] This last resembles Judith Butler’s (1997) discussion of performativity.

[15] Stuart Hall again: ‘…history moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis, when the contradictions that are always at play in any historical moment are condensed, or, as Althusser said, “fuse in a ruptural unity”. Crises are moments of potential change, but the nature of their resolution is not given’ (Hall and Massey 2010, 57).

difference between near-events and Events is what people do next – how they assess and respond to social dislocation. To complete a quotation begun earlier:

> Organic crises don't predetermine outcomes but *pose alternatives* (in the broadest terms, collapse or transformation, but other options may exist as well, for example stagnation): the nature of the actual outcome will depend on the subjective responses of the human actors affected by the crisis.(Callinicos 2006a, 206) My emphasis.

These subjective responses involve strategic (though not necessarily coldly scientific) calculation based on a more or less *incomplete* understanding of everything which is possible as a result of their actions in a given conjuncture. People modify those calculations and future actions according to the results of earlier actions. Colin Barker puts it with regard to movements, 'Nothing is learned all at once. Trotsky remarks that mass movements learn "by the method of successive approximation". They try out different solutions and test out various allies and spokespeople. In the process, they themselves change' (Barker 2011). I will come back to Trotsky in concluding this section.

The main consequence of recognising the near-event state is to foreground the fact that history, and the future, is a series of conjunctural alternatives rather than the unfolding of inevitabilities, which in turn foregrounds human activities. But it also emphasises social structure, both at the root of the near event and in shaping the alternatives available: the powers made available and the imaginations made possible.

Until now, I have only elaborated on a concept that is implicit in Sewell. To conclude this section, I want to elaborate a subtly different theorisation of the near-event. It closely resembles Sewell's Event-with-an-intermediate-state but I will point out key divergences regarding the causes of events and the nature of social structure.

Let me begin by restating and elaborating some key points from the immediately preceding discussion. I have quietly equated the near-event with organic crisis. I am proposing that, for purposes of contemporary study, *internally contradictory* social systems produce eventfulness (near-events) when their usual modes of self-regulation reach a limit (routines break down), thus producing heightened potential for subjective crises (nobody is sure what to do about it). They also, I would add, heighten the possibility of events insofar as they alter the structural powers and limits of differently positioned agents (The near-event heightens the potential for events insofar as it calls into being experimental subjectivities and experimental actions), that is the real powers and limits conferred in a particular conjuncture on people in particular positionalities.

(For example, contract cleaners' embarked on a surprisingly long – three month – strike in 2006. Their power to create an Event was circumscribed by their very low wages and the difficulties of picketing dispersed, fragmented work, but on the other hand their strike came amidst news of an economic turnaround, making increases seem more realistic; their determination may have been helped by the fact that their low wages were in many households supplemental rather than breadwinning, and of enormous import where they were breadwinning; and moreover it was a first strike for many, who would therefore not know in advance how little to expect from a strike).

At this point it is necessary to refine the implication that eventfulness arises from a vacuum of structure (breakdown). Such eventful and near-event states could also arise from the implementation of partial, partisan solutions to organic crises: that is from *restructuring* rather than only from breakdown of structure (for example, the huge social dislocations that accompanied the implementation of neo-liberalism, and the considerable if fragmented resistance to it).

Sewell overlooks internal contradiction as a driver of eventfulness. To create a theory of internal change without it, he brings a kind of outside inside. The structural basis of eventfulness, for him, is the *multiplicity* of structures (combined with their polysemy, meaning people can carry the 'language' of one structure over to new structures) (Sewell 2005, 140 ff). For Sewell, rupture from the inside is due to clashing structures, pig-headedness, inventiveness or error in routine. However these last three are constant in human life even in 'regular' times, so we can only understand why these sometimes turn into events by recourse to the first explanation, multiple structures. Sewell makes the example of a bar fight turning into an event only because it reticulates with the structure of race-relations and so on. This seems to me to be describing how eventfulness is jolted from the realm of latent structural possibility into the real, rather than the basis of eventfulness. Sewell is not wrong about the reticulation of multiple structures. One of the measures of the scale of an event is surely how far into related structures the ripples of a rupture spread. But the model is more accurate if we remember that articulated structures form a differentiated, systemic *totality*, certainly in contemporary capitalism. Let me take an example relevant to my own study to demonstrate both internal contradiction and differentiated totality. The alliance is internally contradictory because its reason for existence is simultaneously the source of tension in the alliance (bringing together a range of organisations that also happen to organise a range of ultimately conflicting class

forces). It need not articulate to any other structure to generate problems. However we cannot explain the timing and shape of that contradiction's emergences, withdrawals and resurgences without thinking about at least what was going on inside each of the organisations in it, the 'challenges' governing a late ascending nationalism, the simultaneous restructuring of the workforce and the labour law, the fluctuations of the local economy, the global context of, loosely described, neo-liberalism, the patience, apathy, hopes and disappointments of the South African electorate, the demobilisation and different remobilisation of that same body under the label 'the mass base of the ANC', the limits on the black middle class after apartheid, the psychology of the rich and the white and no doubt the extra burdens placed on township households by rising unemployment and polarising job quality, to name the most obvious.

Why reticulation is inevitable becomes elementary in the following crude illustration. Sewell searches for better metaphors for social structure than the rigid framework of a building. He variously conceives it as a 'language' or a language game, a system of performed semiotics (meanings), or as 'schemas' plus flows of resources. I suggest that the debate has developed far enough (See for example (Callinicos 2006a) that we can abandon metaphors and begin by attempting to picture what social structure *actually* is (because metaphors are after all attempts to visualise). I invite you to visualise our little planet, bristling with all 7 billion of us going about doing a variety of things both essential and frivolous to our beings. We must visualise each one of us doing and being many different things in the course of every single day. Some of us will be doing things that some of us cannot even imagine have ever been done. This is of course boggling, and that's why we reach for metaphors. However it is easier to picture that most of the things we do tend to be done with (or against) other people, or these days in circumstances created partly by other people. We organise ourselves and are forcibly organised - by the requirements of survival, by our social nature, by habit, and/or around the interests of particular classes. Social structure is nothing more *nor less* than the total organisation of human activity. Sewell is well aware of this – 'Agency entails an ability to coordinate ones actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce...' (Sewell 2005, 142) – but strangely uses the insight only to insist that agency is almost always collectively embedded, rather than bringing the insight to his search for structural metaphors.

The inevitable reticulation of structures becomes crudely obvious as we visualise each human automatically enmeshed in a range of human activities, and therefore social structures – crudely, the same human is at once a parent and/or a child, a lover of gospel music, a shopper, a Black person or not, a worker or a jobseeker, a voter, and so on. You cannot, therefore, consider any of these in its specificity without remembering that it is at the same time always enmeshed with a dozen other spheres of human organisation. This is not merely because individual humans form nodes among structures. Different spheres of organisation also hang together systemically. For example we cannot explain the brief 'success' of neo-liberalism without looking at the household, which in South Africa absorbed the cost of lowering wages (Bezuidenhout and Fakier 2006; Mosoetsa 2011). We cannot properly understand the world of the consumer without also remembering that the rest of the circuit is production and accumulation.

We can agree, however, that eventfulness is greatly heightened when crises in several different structures converge and begin to interact with each other. In this sense, Sewell is not wrong about the multiplicity of structures contributing to eventfulness. But we should not lose sight that it is their combination, their totality – what Sewell calls the conjuncture of structures - that breeds eventfulness. It is the fact that they are *systemically* linked.

This is of course a visualisation of the social that must be understood to have many scales and temporalities. Such human organisation is dynamic and moves at the scale and place of daily life, the planet, and over centuries.

This concept of structure accommodates schemas – people have ideas about what it is we are doing and organising, we take meaning from our activities, and consciously or unconsciously we act into existence a social world, a culture. But schemas plus flows of resources is inadequate, because meanings and flows of resources are integrated. Human activity directly organises power, material resources, and the human resource, while simultaneously being the organisation of all other aspects of human living. It is therefore very much *materialised organisation* of resources and selves, not an agreed script which we act out using the props we find lying about the stage.

One consequence of this, which Sewell grasps, is that in contemporary study we cannot ignore that humans are positioned differently in and by this social organisation (all the while remaining humans wanting to make a life). He writes 'Personal agency

is therefore laden with collectively produced differences of power and implicated in collective struggles and resistance' (Sewell 2005, 139). This means that our schemas and our meanings, our experiences, our lives and our interests are differently positioned. Sewell tacks this on for the sake of completeness. In this study, I intend to foreground the insight. The second truism is that differential positioning includes the organisation of exploitation, which is not merely difference but the positioning of one group at the expense of others. Solutions to social crisis are therefore differently positioned. I proposed earlier that eventful periods may emerge also from restructuring, not only paralysis. When a ruling class tries to drive through unpopular solutions to a crisis, it makes the future uncertain for other classes. Class conflict is an important source of rupture, both structurally and subjectively, even if it does not always produce a subjective recognition of class. Its eventful potential is heightened during organic crises because the participants may find their options *narrowing* along the usual paths (in my study, for example, government negotiators finding their coffers empty after the world cup), thereby pushing them into conflicts they did not intend, making the consequences of their actions increasingly unpredictable. This also heightens the potential for *subjective* dissonance when, as in my study, the conflict reveals the different positionality of people who you had imagined until then to be more like yourself. I will explore this with regard to identity.

Let me return briefly to schemas and social structure. We can accept the following congruence between cultural schemas and organised human activity: our schemas can be assumed to organise, mentally and habitually, the ways we enact (or only minimally disrupt) the dominant organisation of society, as well as organising the meanings we confer and take from such activity. However that congruence does not mean that our mental or cultural schemas therefore *explain* the organisation of resources and power. That is partly because the surface form of social structures may obscure other aspects of those structures. We have to allow for what Burawoy, following Marx, calls mystification (2012, 5 ff). The classic example of mystification is the wage form in capitalism – if you are a worker, you receive a pay packet or transfer into your bank account and therefore assume that your employer is paying you. Your employer believes the same. Both parties act consistently with that schema. But the worker's labour has paid herself and also a share towards the overheads, raw

materials, running costs, advertising, shareholders payouts and corporate tax bill[16]. In this case our cultural schemas simultaneously organise *and* obscure exploitation. If we insist on a semiotic model of the social, then paying and receiving wages is the equivalent of a lie (or else exploitation is a lie). A model which allows an analytical distinction between our meanings, our cultural schemas, and the totality of human organisation allows the wage form, the exploitation it disguises, and indeed the meanings such as human dignity, self-sufficiency and self-worth which humans in modern capitalism may attach to receiving wages to all be 'true' at the same time. Sewell explicitly rejects Bourdieu's conception of the social because it removes agency, but Burawoy's critique of the Bourdieusian concept of misrecognition seems pertinent to Sewell's semiotic model if we remove the implication of 'programming':

> Both of us recognize a fundamental gap between the objective and the subjective truth of labour, but for Bourdieu this is achieved through *misrecognition* rooted in the individual's habitus whereas I claim it is achieved through *mystification* rooted in the social relations into which men and women enter – a mystification that operates on all individuals independent of their inherited dispositions. Symbolic domination through misrecognition rests on the bodily inculcation of social structure and the formation of a deep unconscious habitus. There is no need for any concept of hegemony because we are programmed to act out the social structure. Mystification, on the other hand, rests on individuals being inserted into specific social relations. It is the necessary condition for a stable hegemony, that is, for the organization of consent to domination. (Burawoy 2012, 13)

Mystification is reinforced because humans seek subtler meanings from our activities than the brute actuality of the materialised organisation of exploitation. (For example, cleaners and security guards in my original sample groped for a sense of dignity from their work despite its degradation, not only a pay packet. This may only be strengthened by glimpses of the exploitation inherent in the same social site. Mystification is further exacerbated, of course, by active class interests that cannot admit that they are classed.

Mystification is a therefore a potent source of maintenance of social structure, but the possibility of abrupt demystification introduces a potent source of rupture, especially when put together with class conflict. In wage bargaining for example, the wage is taken by the employee to be a valuation of the quality of her work and her

[16] Other examples might include the modern westernised family, which we believe to be a unit constituted around love. It most often is initiated thus and we generally act as if it is, but it is *also* a means of cheaply buffering unemployment, absorbing a section of the wage bill, and so on. The state appears neutral because it actually does rise above the competing interests of *individual* capitals. And so on.

worth as a human, as well as the route to pursue human fulfilment through consumption; to the employers it is a cost, a considerable one at that, draining the shareholders' returns, and the only cost in a world of pre-fixed prices over which it is really acceptable to bargain. For both, the reasonable demand is measured against a complex algebra of general wages in society, power in the workplace, the actual and the socially acceptable costs of maintaining a human being, the actual and socially acceptable costs of maintaining a business. The clash of meanings taking place is neither a postmodern object lesson[17] nor an indication that one or other party is stupid. It reflects a really-existing contradiction at the heart of capitalism: labour is a talking, thinking, desiring commodity (See John Rees 1998).

Amongst other things, this thesis explores whether near-events are characterised by heightened potential for previously obscured aspects of social structure to be exposed or perceived in a new light. The specific case I consider is the potential of politicised strikes to demystify work relations, state power and exploitation. By implication, I am also exploring the near-event potential of these particular strikes.

Finally, social structure is a *totality* of organised human activity, not merely its sum. In other words, organised human agency produces a level of agency which goes on 'behind our backs', so to speak - of social structure which is constantly constituted through human agency but breaks free of ordinary human control (stock markets are always a good example); structure which circumscribes certain expressions of human agency; and so on. This also means that we can do things with perfectly rational intentions only to face results that are not at all what we intended. Sewell's insistence on a semiotic model here is not wrong, only incomplete. It is indeed possible to patiently uncover the semiotic chains leading to unintended consequences rather than referring to a blind, supra-human machine for explanation. It is also necessary to retain sensibility to human meaning when we explain human actions. But Sewell tends to attribute unintended consequences to ambiguous symbolism, uncertainty about how other actors will respond to an event or piece of information, or the way the 'combined actions of all actors may frustrate the intentions of each of the individual actors' (Sewell 2005, 352). Sewell thus overlooks the implications of a point he makes elsewhere, that

[1717] I do not wish to imply that Sewell is a postmodernist – his cultural turn is most respects closer to Thompson's insistence on reintroducing agency and human meaning to history (Thompson 1966) – but his fascination with linguistic models of society certainly reflects the rise of postmodernism and textual analysis.

the meanings people give to their actions organise more than their mental models of the world: they also structure actual resources.

2.1.4. 'The mood' and events in subjectivity

I am interested in the near-event state as a state of mass dissonance – as states where, for many people, something doesn't add up between how things appeared to be and how they are turning out. I suggest that the properties of social structure sketched above greatly heighten the propensity during organic crises for people doing things as they 'always have' to get 'wrong' results. We will see, for example, how Cosatu leadership's intention to maintain the alliance pushes it ever further along the path of challenging its extant configuration at certain conjunctures. The disjuncture between the intended and the actual is an important source of eventfulness. The preceding sketch of social structure opens the possibility of events in subjectivity. By an event of subjectivity I mean an enduring change in how someone models, theorises and understands their social world or their own place in it. For Sewell's interpretivism, the very idea is a little awkward given that his social structures are already models - 'schemas'.

Events and near-events may be stitched together in a longer chain of eventfulness than Sewell's encapsulated ethnography suggests, connecting a series of near-events and missed events which influence each other, especially through the experiences and imaginations humans carry from one near-event into the next, but also through the persistence of unresolved contradiction in cases of systemic resilience, where ruptures are absorbed or deflected.

My study looks not only at subjectivities over the course of each strike but also at the residues at the level of subjectivity left by near-events which do not mature into events (that is, into definite and lasting changes in social structure). If eventfulness is understood from the point of view of subjectivity as shifting the possibilities of what may be imagined and what is learned about the mystified workings of the social world, then what actually happens to movements is important - not only their victories but also their defeats. (See Callinicos 1987, 225; Barker 2008, 6)[18].

[18] Here we should not assume that all movement victories expand the imagination unambiguously. Certain kinds of victories may prove a double-edged sword in these terms. For example the defeat of apartheid was undoubtedly a victory, but the form in which its defeat was sealed – the negotiated settlement – helped to obscure the role of mass action in defeating it, as well as to deplete or at least defer the anti-capitalist immanence of the parts of the

Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution (1932) roots that event in preceding near-events. They are linked, not in a smooth continuum, but across severe discontinuities. His third chapter establishes the 1905 uprising (See also Trotsky 1922) as a precursor to 1917, not just because strike days that year jumped to 115 times the level of the previous year[19] but because the strike movement needed, and created, a novel political form, the workers' councils. However the resurrection of that form in 1917 depended on the recovery of movements across at least two discontinuities: first the crushing defeat of 1905 and an economic crisis, which led to the 'complete disintegration' of the 'guiding layers' of the workers; and second the expansion of the workforce with layers of people with no direct experience of the earlier strike movement during the economic boom starting in 1910 and at the beginning of the war, four years later. Trotsky summarises:

> The sharp ebbs and flows of the mass struggle had left the Russian proletariat after a few years almost unrecognisable. Factories which two or three years ago would strike unanimously over some single arbitrary police action, today ... accept the most monstrous crimes of the authorities without resistance. Great defeats discourage people for a long time. The consciously revolutionary elements lose their power over the masses. Prejudices and superstitions not yet burnt out come back to life. Grey immigrants from the village during these times dilute the workers' ranks. ... But *molecular processes* in the masses are healing the psychological wounds of defeat. A new turn of events, or an underlying economic impulse, opens a new political cycle. The revolutionary elements again find their audience. The struggle reopens on a higher level. (Trotsky 1932 accessed online. My emphasis)

In this case, a new political cycle begins with workers' powers renewed by the 1910 economic boom and eventually from the consequent growth in their numbers, although it takes time for them to discover this strength. The return of the political strike movement is diverted by the beginning of the war but revives in the context of belt-tightening and increased exploitation, expressed first in explosive stirrings beyond the factories characterised by food riots and in the early days, occasionally pogroms (Trotsky 1932 accessed online).

anti-apartheid movement inside the country in the mid-1980s. Similarly a resounding victory in a wage strike could greatly increase strikers' imaginations about collective action for the future, but at the same time bolster illusions in economism. Conversely, the failure of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee to win easy victories after the cancellation of electricity debt in 2003 helped to bolster some activists' conviction that politicized illegal reconnections were legitimate. Once again a conjunctural analysis is paramount.

[19] He begins his third chapter with a table of political strikes which provides, he writes, 'a most impressive index of the political history of Russia', allowing the reader to 'put a finger on the revolutionary year;' 1905.

Contrary to first impressions of a sweeping structuralism, Trotsky's summary above presents structure as important in relation to a succession of subjective experiences of a changing collection of experimental agents – people engaged in periodic class conflict. His eye is for the 'mood' of these shifting collectivities. He considers how that mood dialogues with the economy, the machinations of the state, the crisis of the monarchy, the flux in the working class itself, and a particular collectivity which he calls the 'revolutionary element'.

Mood here implies a complex of thoughts and feelings, combined with propensities to action, and so on. My study is also, essentially, about shifting moods. Trotsky throws out, without much elaboration, three concepts which are intriguing to my case, and which additionally echo a few of my earlier points about Sewell's limits.

First, I draw our attention to the concept of molecular processes, quoted above. This conveys the notion of imperceptible changes which coalesce explosively into visible action (not unlike the transformation of water into steam), unexpected if one was observing only at the macro level. Molecular implies the possibility of these changes taking place in atomised individuals.

Second, Trotsky introduces the idea of action ahead of consciousness, in this passage sketching the revival of the movement during the war:

> Many of the old beliefs are burned up in the fires of this struggle. The Secret Service reports, "with pain," that if they should react according to the dictates of the law to "every instance of insolence and open insult to His Majesty, the number of trials under Article 103 would reach an unheard-of figure." *Nevertheless the consciousness of the masses is far behind their action.* The terrible pressure of the war and the national ruin is accelerating the process of struggle to such a degree that broad masses of the workers, right up to the very revolution, have not freed themselves from many opinions and prejudices brought with them from the village or from the petty bourgeois family circle in the town. This fact will set its stamp on the first stage of the February revolution. (Trotsky 1932 accessed online. My emphasis.)

This is not an attempt to impose an arbitrary personal yardstick of 'consciousness'. Rather it provokes consideration of the potential for collective actions in specific circumstances to produce structural possibilities beyond the initial imaginations, intentions or daily habits of their participants.

The third intriguing concept emerges from Trotsky's description of the period just before the February revolution, which displays many 'eventful' qualities:

> Comparing the situation with that in 1905, the director of the Police Department, Vassiliev, reaches a very uncomforting conclusion: “The mood of the opposition has gone very far – far beyond anything to be seen in the broad masses during the above-mentioned period of disturbance.” ... The Intelligence Department reports a revival of the slogan of the general strike ... Shliapnikov, a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee, himself a former metal worker, describes how nervous the workers were in those days: “Sometimes a whistle would be enough, or any kind of noise – the workers would take it for a signal to stop the factory.” *This detail is equally remarkable both as a political symptom and as a psychological fact: the revolution is there in the nerves before it comes out on the street.* (Trotsky 1932 accessed online. My emphasis.)

Trotsky uses the phrase ‘there in the nerves before it comes out on the street’ specifically in relation to a highly eventful situation where people are consciously anticipating events, but it evokes other aspects of human subjectivity where things are felt ‘in the nerves’ before coming out ‘on the street’ - or into the light of consciousness - such as lived experiences of class, race, gender and so on and aspects of human experience somewhat clumsily referenced in the concepts ‘identity’ and collective identity.

The three concepts provided a serendipitous working proposition for analysing the study at hand. My original specific proposition about the strikes cautioned against writing off this or that section of the proletariat on the basis of some detail of their structural ‘location’ or their salient consciousness during periods of restraint of class struggle, as much as I caution against assuming that any section of the proletariat is automatically revolutionary because it struggles. This is why analysing contradiction matters to theories of social change. People may be propelled into activity by things ‘felt in the nerves’, by interpretations and reinterpretations of lived experience which remained subterranean until their action gives it expression. Especially during times of sharp contradiction, these actions may develop beyond their intentions. Such engagements destabilise existing consciousness. In my study, which looks through the lens of identity, we will see temporary subversion of old identities, turning the tables of identifications, and new identities called into the world.

In considering the strikes and their context from the perspective of events and near-events, the thesis will consider what other possibilities were posed by the actual subjectivities emerging during the strike. It seeks to explain both what did happen and why other potentials were truncated. That allows some consideration of how the outcome might have been altered.

Chapter 3. Eventful identities

This thesis will explore the potentials immanent in the strikers' strike subjectivities through the lens of identity. This was not merely an artefact of my original research proposal about the identities of casual workers and outsourced workers on strike, which aimed to expand a body of work grappling with the reconfiguration of worker identities as new forms of work 'fragmented and reconfigured' (Kenny 2004, 1) the workforce. In contemporary South Africa, these processes were tangled up with the transition to majority vote and subsequent political developments. They were additionally complicated by complementary shifts in the demeanour and strength of the trade unions. The case study which I fortuitously ended up with brought the former to the fore, while still speaking to the reconfiguration of the workforce, although amongst different 'fragments' of the workforce. Questions around how strike subjectivities are formed, how they represented or reconfigured worker identities, and the extent to which strikes may lastingly alter identities, carried over into my observation of the public sector strikes. But the public sector strikes also imposed a different question about worker identities and identifications during strikes: the question of 'grass-roots' subjectivity about class alliances, namely the cross-class Tripartite Alliance and the still mostly fictional possibility of an intra-class alliance between the social movements and the big trade unions. Later in the study, the unique relation between full-time officials and union members emerged as an additional identity question in relation to the first two.

The backdrop to my interest in identity was the problem of class formation. Interventionist Marxism theorises a special transformative immanence for the proletariat, but '*the* proletariat' (as opposed to 'proletarians') is merely fictional – an atomised array of similarly located individuals - unless and until people similarly located come to act collectively. The trouble is that proletarian location tends to be mystified, as mentioned in the previous chapter. (This is in contrast, perhaps, with 'positioning', which encompasses an interaction between location and all the ways in which we are put in our place in our interactions with others as well as, perhaps, our

dispositions. It is therefore, I hazard, a much more 'in-your-face' phenomenon than location or at least a less obscured phenomenon than location, although equally naturalised). Proletarian location is obscured primarily because exploitation is obscured, but also because people who are similarly *located* viz a vis their general relation to labour power end up, individually, differentially *positioned* by the concrete expression of their location (for example, in the labour market. See Ceruti 2010b), and where short-term, sectional interests may crosscut or diverge from proletarian class interest. Moreover, out of the abstract, each of our individual 'locations' encapsulates a complex and individually particular convergence of multiple interlocking social structures, so that class location and class position are racialised and gendered (Aronowitz 1992), amongst other possibilities. Some theorists have argued that the juncture between class and identity has been entirely sundered in an age marked by increased emphasis on atomised consumption combined with the dispersal of workplace-residential communities[20], and the decay or defeat of trade union organisation (See, for example, Aronowitz 1992; Gerteis and Savage 1998; Devine 2005; Crompton 2008; Savage, Silva, and Warde 2010).

The transformative potential attributed to workers in particular is rooted less in their present identities than in their strategically vital role as the source of value in capitalism, and their forced aggregation, in past centuries, in production, which suggests immanent collectivity; for the proletariat as a whole, in the recurring antagonisms[21] between crisis-ridden capitalism and the proletarian's ability to fulfil their humanity. Class *action* is therefore arguably more central to this strand of Marxism (interventionist) than what proletarians think of themselves. However, (collective) action never happens without subjective reasons, whether affective (felt) or theorised (intellectuallised) in advance. More importantly, the consciousness and/or identity which an action-collective develops about itself and others before and during a particular instance of class action shapes the collectivity's strategic and tactical

[20] Although a place like Maritlwana ('Marikana') shows that examples persist of such communities, which lend themselves both to tensions and to certain solidarities amongst differently positioned proletarians, such as the women's mobilization after the Lonmin massacre. See Benya (2015).

[21] Here I use antagonism roughly in the sense Frank Wilderson uses it: meaning not only conflict but '*an irreconcilable struggle* between entities, or positionalities, *the resolution* of which is not dialectical but *entails the obliteration of one* of the positions' (Wilderson 2010). I'm not sure I agree that dialectical thinking can't admit this but my interest, in any case, is in the obliteration of *both* locations: the proletarian is, after all, not a natural category but one constituted by the existence of capitalists and through the capitalist-worker relation, which is exploitation.

approach. On the flip side, we suggest that class action, like any other human activity, may demand reactive theorisation (after-the-fact reasoning).

Therefore when it comes to the experiential – that sphere in which the structural is integrated subjectively and through activity (agentialy, so to speak) – interventionist Marxists need to be sensitive to much more than class consciousness (how we humans perceive or distort and explain shared social locations and their consequences); neither is it sufficient to grasp how people perform social positioning[22]. In particular, we are interested in, first, the range and groups of people to whom proletarians feel bound, which Levi and Olson call broad 'communities of fate' (Levi and Olson 2000, 3) based on 'shared, non-economistic interests depend[ant] on rational beliefs, i.e. well-grounded expectations, that harm to another is harm to one's self' (Levi and Olson 2000, 4); second, in the processes by which existing theorizations and pre-formations of class location may be broken down and reformed; third, in the connection between such processes and collective class conflicts, and finally, in this particular thesis, how all of these relate to class alliances.

After outlining the issue of class formation, I will briefly discuss identity in conflict and collective action, homing in on strikes. While broadly accepting a processual, constructivist approach to collective identity (Melucci 1995, 43ff) – that is, to the process by which a collective becomes a collective - I conclude that it misses two important processes of identity destabilisation, dubbed here:

- *misidentification*, which I will define as the belief that persons or groups are more (or less) like you than they are, or a belief which can be shown to be mistaken (by reference to what actually transpires) that persons or groups have other, broader interests in common with you because they are like you in a few particular ways (such as metalworkers, for example, identifying with Zuma's masculinity in Beresford (2012). Beresford does not draw out these implications);
- and its foil, *de-identification,* by which I mean breaking an identification with persons or groups you had identified with. (Disidentification is the word that comes naturally here, but that word has already been used in studies of class

[22] This refers to how we, in good faith, 'act out' the social and individual behaviour appropriate to our social positioning and others' social positioning, thereby constantly constituting these positionings. See most famously Judith Butler (1997) who concentrates particularly on the performance of gender.

subjectivities to refer to refusal of conferred identities (Skeggs 2001; See Savage, Silva, and Warde 2010)).

The thesis develops the study of each of these processes over the course of two conflicts which severely test class and political interests, loyalties and identities. The eventful possibilities regarding class alliances in strikers' identities lie in a mutual interplay of misidentification and de-identification. I will also try to explain why, in this particular instance, new processes of misidentification unfold even while de-identification matures.

3.1. Self-formation in class formation

Class formation refers broadly to the processes by which groups of people are brought into new relations with each other around new ways of organising production, a process which generally also creates disequilibrium and restructuring in interlocking areas such as distribution, reproduction, consumption and the state. In dynamic class systems such as capitalism, constant restructuring is endemic, and therefore so too is constant class *re*formation - which may involve the rearrangement of which individuals are 'members' of a class, of the conditions of existence of a class, or of its internal configuration. There is, of course, nothing passive about the processes by which groups of people are forced into exploitative relations, or fight their way into social existence in the course of asserting common interests, whether merely in unison or collectively. This implies the additional dimension of class formation where my interest lies: how, if at all, people who are similarly located in the overall organisation of exploitation come to form and understand themselves as what Callinicos calls '...a subjectivity ... a collective agency based on the shared belief of actors that they possess a common identity' (Callinicos 2006b, 3; See also Melucci 1995, 43).

The two sets of processes are mutually implicated: several authors (Bourdieu 1984; Savage 2003; Devine 2005; Skeggs 2010), amongst others, have demonstrated shifting integrities at any given moment between class location and dispositions, cultures, and moral valuations[23]. Despite this integrity (or perhaps even because of it,

[23] The Bourdieusian framework tends to conceive of such culture, dispositions and moral valuations as constitutive of class, not merely the result of class. I agree with this assertion to the extent that these constitute the fabric of what class is in daily life (how it is lived, how we apprehend class, and how it puts us in our place); and to the extent that these perpetuate class both by policing the boundaries of the ruling classes and providing 'naturalistic' justification for the negative consequences of class (such as, the working classes are disadvantaged because of

to the extent that it naturalises class) the formation of collective 'subjectivities' in particular cannot be read off of class location. Bev Skeggs (2010, 356) points out that Marx understands class not as 'a category of identity' but instead as 'a description of conditions of existence of labour under capitalism' (Skeggs 2010, 341). Marx himself devoted a large part of his practical activity to agitating for a revolutionary proletarian identity based on the recognition and negation of these conditions of existence, implying a recognition that, as Barker comments on the limits of Wright's class matrixes,

> ...however complexified the concept of a 'structural location', it cannot be used to explain how an occupant of that location does actually respond to it, in the course of a fluctuating and eventful social life... [Wright] never gets beyond the term 'interest' ... to the questions signalled by the term 'identity' (Barker 2008, 16; See also Snow 2001, 5).

Callinicos elaborates,

> ...actors who are objectively proletarians may be interpellated in an indefinite number of ways. Even if this interpellation invites them to conceive themselves as workers, it may be coded in quite distinctive ways.... [and] the subjectivity in which they are encouraged to conceive themselves as belonging may be one that makes no reference to their being working class at all, or perhaps more typically, they are interpellated simultaneously as different subjects – as workers, yes, but also male, British, Muslim .... (Callinicos 2006b, 3)

In fact, the 'old' class identities which were swept aside by new social movement studies were never as monolithic as the superficial impression inadvertently created by contrasting them with 'new identity-based' movements, nor any more essentialist[24] in their perceived heyday than identities such as 'woman' or 'black' - which emerge socially despite their appearance as biological referents (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 287–88); Aronowitz (1992), for example, shows class identities in the US constantly

their individual cultural and moral deficiencies). But it is more problematic to understand these as the 'cause' of class(es). Any notion that dispositions, cultures etc. are a magical self-reproducing perpetual motion machine should be dispelled by the observation that dispositions, cultures, etc can change dramatically over time, often together with restructuring of production and distribution, yet leave the overall configuration of classes intact, that is, leave untouched the basic form of exploitation. For example, the expansion of consumption amongst certain layers of the working class in Britain and the USA enabled new kinds of working class dispositions and identities, without greatly changing the actual composition of the ruling class nor its dominance of political, economic and cultural power over other classes on which their distinct world is maintained.

[24] Identity essentialism is the notion that my gender identity, for example, is merely an expression of the fact that I am biologically a woman. Long before we uncover the biological inaccuracies of the gender binary, we have to confront the fact that the notion of what a woman is is not innocent of a raft of social expectations and practices. I was not, therefore, born a woman but had to become one. Structural determinism is a kind of social essentialism: it accepts that categories like 'woman' or 'white' are socially constructed rather than biological, but would still posit that my gender identity is merely an expression of the fact that I am socially (structurally) a 'woman'.

filtered through race and ethnic identities. Crucially, he thus maintains the existence of class conflict where others assume that such identities imply its complete demise. Thompson (1966) prefigures Melucci by some decades with his famous assertion that the proletariat 'did not rise like the sun' at a prefixed time but 'was present at its own *making'* [my emphasis]. Hanagan's discussion of the cultural development of proletarian identities outside the workplace, with regard to marital habits (Hanagan 1994) and Aronowitz's discussion of the lack of an explicitly proletarian movement in the US (Aronowitz 1992) both, similarly, approach class identities as processes of class formation.

Earlier, I alluded to a useful conception of class structure as a set of *powers and limits* on people sharing class locations through an example about cleaners' powers and limits in a specific strike (on page 27 above). Applying this concept of class to the immanence contained in the interaction of class location with the identities, positionalities and collective subjectivities it enables is quite distinct from the 'structure leads to consciousness leads to action' model sometimes passed off as a Marxist framework for conceiving the possibilities for deliberate change. By exploring what identities are *precipitated by action*, this thesis not so much turns that false casual arrow on its head as it overturns the model completely, assuming instead that structure, subjectivity and agency are *intercausal* and that identities and subjectivities develop contingently *through the experimental and experiential actions of a person (or group) in her (their) classed social environment*. Therefore it is implausible to imagine that class(ed) identities will be homogenous or that they will run on tracks like a train (and it is unnecessary to accept that error in order to accept that these are nevertheless, contingently and sometimes very subtly, related to classed experience).

Interpellation in the Callinicos quote above refers to Therborn's variation of the term coined by Althusser, meaning the process by which we internalise social identities, voluntarily subjugating ourselves through an involuntary response in Althusser's version, or trying on social identities for size in Therborn's version. Therborn uses the example of a strike being called, where the worker may be addressed as a proletarian, a workmate, by their religion or their role as a parent, and so on. 'The kind of address accepted – "Yes, that's how I am, that's me" – has important implications for how one acts in response to the strike call' (Therborn quoted in Callinicos 1987, 156). In Therborn's version, therefore, we are interpellated multiply and ideologically: we can be more than one thing at the same time, and the variety of

ideologies[25] on offer allows us some agency beyond actively subjecting ourselves. We will see later that this ideological component is crucial to the case under study in this thesis.

Bev Skegg's work on moral valuations of class (2005; 2010; 2011) shows something of the range, contextuality, contingency and subtlety of the interpellations enabled and curtailed by proletarian experience. For example white working class women in Skeggs' British study reject the label working class in the face of media pathologisation of working class cultures built around the caricature of loud, sex-mad, unstylish women drinking their faces off. In this context the women see the label working class as both an insult to their respectability and a misrecognition of the conditions of being (their ontology) which create their need to let off steam. In a South African workplace context, Bridget Kenny (2004) observed identities of retail workers trying to organise within, and interpret, new divisions of labour in the context of a declining union in South Africa. Casual workers, permanent workers and contract workers all 'interpellate themselves' as providers, but develop an identity map (my words) of the workplace which enunciates their own claims for inclusion but mirrors and reproduces management's divisions of the workforce in their attempts to organise. Permanent workers see themselves as adults with responsibilities and dismiss casuals as schoolchildren, for example. This particular constellation of identities (which I see as a kind of class *de*formation) was no doubt facilitated by the real threat posed to permanent work by casualisation and transferred to the persons of the casual workers, coupled with the difficulties for casuals to organise and the unions' initial failure to recruit casual workers. Kenny suggests that an alternate, unifying identity could be built around the difficulties faced by all the workers in meeting their responsibilities at home.

Interpellation implies internal and external dimensions of identity, so that identity is much more than my conscious picture of myself (as well as more than society's picture of me). We not only position ourselves but are positioned socially. Identity is not merely a set of 'self-categories which define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories' (Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk 1999, 12) but also a place or position 'formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location' (Massey 1999, 6). The

[25] That is, partisan interpretations of the social.

relational nature of identity goes beyond the performance and projection of identity through personal interactions to the complex (and sometimes unarticulatable, untheorised) ways we internalise our *actual material* location, positioning and consequent experience. Class cannot determine identity but it shapes the identities which we may feasibly 'get away with' - as Young (1994) puts it, a tramp may feel like a king, but nobody will bow before him. Second, it shapes the conceptual content we assign to the identities we adopt (such as the different meanings or uses of middle class for people in different social locations in Phadi's (2010) dissertation (see also Phadi and Ceruti 2012) and the 'work' identity does for us.

The social norms and cultural practices which avail certain identities and not others to people classed in particular ways are in their turn circumscribed (or facilitated) by the brute realities of the maldistribution of resources and power associated with exploitation, and the cultural practices associated with these: crudely illustrated, Nomsa Nomaubani can emulate Tokyo Sexwale's classy choice of whiskey, but only by sacrificing her groceries for the month and giving up forever her dream of saving up for an Armani suit upon retirement[26].

In another example, automatic rifles (material power) aimed to put back in their place the Lonmin miners and their dangerous pretensions to enact a human identity for themselves by making a claim on profits. In this case we are reminded that identity is formed in a dynamic and contradictory social world. The *unintended* consequence of the Marikana massacre was to create a small Event in the minds of not only the strikers but also hundreds of thousands of people beyond the mine. The interaction of the material[27] with identity frequently corrals even resistant identities into the status-quo, but may also *condense volatile subjectivities***.** Identities therefore are not merely fluid and not merely processual, but may also be contradictory and punctuated (See previous chapter).

To summarise, interpellation implies, then, that social structure shapes and circumscribes identity without any possibility of determining it, precluding and enabling identities in an inherently interactive process of identity formation. In relation to my

[26] However, we have noted already that the *particularities* of maldistribution and its cultural consequences may vary over time and from place to place without necessarily altering the fundamental underlying relationship, and this may paradoxically facilitate processes whereby class identities diverge from class location when identities become feasible for people to whom they were not available before. For example, a dramatic increase in car ownership in South Africa allows the upper strata of the proletariat to classify themselves middle class (and forces the upper classes to specify the make, model and cost of their cars to maintain their distinction).

[27] This should not be read as meaning only resources, because I include here power.

own study, it is the way that interpellation straddles the subjective, the objective and the broadly experiential which makes it interesting for interventionist Marxism. Self-identity may interpret positioning and location in curious ways which seem to diverge substantially from positioning and location, because identity is not merely a means of pinning oneself on a given social map. For example, we confirm our own humanity in the face of being positioned inferiorly (such as the various ways middle class operates as a marker of self-worth in Phadi's study (2010). Self-identity expresses our hopes and dreams for ourselves when it operates as a claim for inclusion; and it may even refract an obnoxious world in the image of the world we wish for, when, for example, people avoid inequality by supposing we are all middle class (Gerteis and Savage 1998; Kelley and Evans 1995). However self-identity must contend with and respond to a world beyond itself in order to remain plausible even to the self-identified. Self-plausibility may remain possible only through resistant identities, that is, interpellations which avoid, deny or distort conferred identifications, or express openly antagonistic alternate identities. Interpellation emphasises that identity, which is neither merely individual nor internal, cannot be entirely innocent of social positioning and location but is, rather, how we actively insert ourselves into locations and positions and, indeed, - because a mere location is usually too narrow for our full humanity - how we overflow them.

Interpellation is therefore active and processual, and *environmentally* relational. Therefore we must assume also that interpellation is continuous, and re-interpellation is not only possible but perhaps endemic. I pointed out above that the pace of re-interpellation may not be even. This thesis contends that re-interpellation is demanded, for example, by clashes between ideology and flashes of actuality, creating a form of 'eventfulness' in the terms of the previous chapter. Most recent studies of collective or class identity accept that identity is processual, often starting from assuming changed identities which need explanation (for example, the cultural school in Britain assumes that old class identities have faded in favour of new, individualised ones). But identity processes in this literature are generally considered constructively (that is, as being built) or as a kind of cultural atmosphere, breathed in without thought. What is missing is any picture of destruction: how old identities become ill-fitting, inauthentic, are eroded or dramatically shattered within a generation.

This brings us, finally, to the role of collective class conflict in class and identity formation. Fantasia repeats Wright's warning from almost 30 years ago that ... 'there

is no necessary reason to assume' that 'the same consciousness that would be apparent in a situation of class conflict would be evident in an interview setting' (Fantasia 1995, 271). This holds true if we replace 'consciousness' with 'identity' and 'interview setting' with 'everyday culture'. It is very possible that interpellation in situations of class conflict happens differently from everyday interpellation (a contention beyond the scope of this thesis, which does not compare strike interpellations with every-day ones). It is certainly safe to assume that collective class conflict is important to the second, subjective dimension of class formation not only because the need to form a collectivity invites people to group themselves, but also insofar as the class struggle is '... amongst other things, the process through which agents seek to establish what their interests are' (Callinicos 1987, 152; See also Thompson 1966) and thereby a way of establishing some of the boundaries regarding 'who we are'[28] that constitute our communities of fate. By emphasising differing needs of the contenders in a clash, class conflict may make differences of interest strategically salient where they would otherwise have remained unremarkable even in plain sight. It therefore also puts existing inter-class loyalties to the test, in extreme cases demanding new loyalties, which in turn may offer an opening for establishing proletarian identities.

A wave of studies of collective identities used for mobilising or which cause mobilisation, such as recent English-language studies of class identity (as distinct from earlier studies of class consciousness), have neglected collective class conflict. This is most likely because they responded to circumstances where collective class conflict had been muted. Therefore an avalanche of studies about the 'new social movements' overlooked class identities, seeking to distance themselves from simplistic operationalisation of the concept 'class interests' and arguing that 'participation in such movements could not be predicted by class location' because participants were not 'seeking to … further their "interests" in conventional terms, [but] rather seeking recognition for new identities and lifestyles' (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). Meanwhile the above-mentioned studies in class identities neglected collective action, proceeding from the assumption that:

[28] We should not assume that the converse is true – that the absence of class conflict automatically implies an absence of class consciousness. My notes from an International Sociological Association conference note someone's work (I have searched up and down for her name without success) on Costa Rica which demonstrates the persistence of explicit class consciousness – not only class habitus - in the absence of class organisation, reproduced culturally through other working class institutions such as the household.

> [p]eople do not have the kind of collective class awareness that might allow one to talk of classes as … social actors. It is now necessary to invoke … a kind of forensic, detective work which involves tracing the print of class in areas where it is faintly written. (Savage 2003, 536)

Thus even Bev Skeggs, one of the few in the British 'cultural turn' who maintain a notion of class conflict as central to class identities in her abovementioned work on moral valuations of class, was forced to deal with it as an atomised, individualised relation, manifest in personal interactions or media representations rather than collective action (Skeggs 2001; 2005; 2010; 2011)[29].

I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that collective engagements in reply to conflicts of class interests[30] - even those directly related to exploitation[31] - very often proceed through collective identities that have little to do with class or which imply it only vaguely or partially, filtered through other identities (such as 'the people', trade union identities, sectoral consciousness, seeing oneself as a worker but not including unemployed in the identity, or even 'a South African not an immigrant', and so on) (Levi and Olson 2000, 4; See also Aronowitz 1992). Class conflict frequently proceeds in the absence of class identity because, as Sheila Cohen and Kim Moody write,

> Workers do not take part in resistance because of, or through, a 'discourse' which explicitly rejects capitalism in political and ideological terms ... [it] occurs as a result of the material impact - on those who, because of their

[29] South African literature, despite the privilege of plentiful collective conflict, displays a similar gap. Apartheid-era South African studies of class identity or consciousness are backgrounded by collective conflict, but tend to deal with questions specific to apartheid, such as whether migrant workers had a proletarian or a peasant identity (See for example the collection by Bozzoli and History Workshop 1987; Limb 2003). Post-apartheid studies tend to focus on race, ethnic and national identities (such as Grossberg, Struwig, and Pillay 2006 and others in that volume). with class appearing, when it does appear, as modifier of these identities rather than an object of interest itself, implicated, for example, in 'the complex ways in which race intersects with class to produce particular racialised patterns of inequality' (Erasmus 2005, 13).

[30] I am deliberately avoiding the shorthand 'class struggle' here, although I use it freely elsewhere, in order to signal the difference between a conflict caused by class and a conflict which the participants perceive to be class struggle.

[31] As distinguished from other orders of class conflict such as conflicts in the realms of social distribution, consumption (delivery protests, price hikes and so on), reproduction, oppression (sexism, gay oppression, racism, some forms of nationalism). I do not mean to imply that any of these 'orders' of conflict will be 'purely' about exploitation, distribution or so on without including all sorts of other motivations such as human dignity. Neither does the distinction imply a value hierarchy. Rather it is a measure of 'nakedness'; I could alternately express it as the number of mediations one has to go through to connect x to the organisation of exploitation. I am also aware that this analytical tool involves a very unsatisfactory fragmentation of structures that, in reality, tend to be inextricably intertwined (for example apartheid combined racism and exploitation very directly; sexism maintains certain forms of household reproduction without which production would have to be organised very differently; etc). Nor do I deny that classes other than the proletariat may struggle around many of these; here I am only noting that class struggle may also adhere to such issues.

> class position have no alternative – of the contradictions operating within capitalist production.' (Cohen and Moody 1998, 111)

In this formulation and Callinicos's above-quoted formulation about establishing interests, people enter class conflicts neither on the basis of their class identity nor by blindly acting out structural interests abstracted from human comprehension; rather, having entered into class conflict, they 'feel out' interests and formulate identities experimentally. Skeggs skilfully summarises the implications for identity of Marx's approach:

> Individuals identify as a class in so far as they have to battle against another class, *making class identity into a temporal/spatial strategic matter* formed through conflict, exploitation and unequal relations of power. ... consciousness is not about taking up an identity or making an identification with a category, but of recognising the exploitative conditions of one's existence. (Skeggs 2010, my emphasis)

This is how I will consider interpellation of class location during the strike in this thesis - as a contingent and strategic matter, developing eventfully, in this case, around all three of the nodes 'conflict, exploitation and unequal relations of power'. As the conflicts sharpen the enforcement of contradictory interests, to what extent do the sharp edges thus exposed cut old identities adrift? That is, what are the possibilities for an eventful re-interpellation regarding class alliances (subjective class formation)? And, because it is not a linear unidirectional process, how and in what are sharp edges veiled anew? I am assuming here that even when class remains obscure and unarticulated, it nevertheless features in the strategic ways strikers ideate themselves, each other, their opponents and even the character of the conflict itself, all of which goes beyond the boundary demarcation mentioned in many studies of collective identity.

The next section of this chapter overviews collective identity formation during conflict, and collective identity in strikes.

3.2. Identities in the formation of a strike collective

What is the role of identity in the formation of a strike collective, and conversely, how do collective identities develop during a strike? Do strikes present peculiar possibilities for identity events?

In this section I will discuss what is special about strikes before outlining what is known about collective identity in strikes and other instances of conflictual mobilisation. I conclude with a working definition of collective identity before laying out, in conclusion to the chapter, the gaps addressed by my study.

3.2.1. What is peculiar about strikes?

It should be no great surprise that strikes have much in common with every other form of collective mobilisation[32]. Mobilisation theorists such as Charles Tilly (1978), McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) and Sydney Tarrow (2005) most often discuss strikes very generally as elements in waves of protest involving multiple, mutually encouraging 'repertoires of contention' (forms of protest) and drawing in varied sections of the population, as illustrated by Tarrow's discussion of the French and Argentinian anti-austerity protests (Tarrow 2005, 65 ff). We will see that the strikes in my study also interact with a wave of broader protests, considered here from the vantage point of the strikes. Expansive studies such as Tilly's are often based on detailed consideration of specific instances of mobilisation, including sometimes this or that particular strike, but they seldom discuss strikes distinctively because they are looking for an overall patterns in waves of protest and drawing out commonalities across a range of repertoires. 'The shape of strikes in France' (Shorter and Tilly 1971) considers strikes specifically, but looks for patterns of duration, size and frequency of strikes from a long view, rather than looking at the micro-dynamics within strikes.

It is more surprising that strikes do not feature in the avalanche of recent English-language studies which scrutinise specific instances of actual mobilisation in order to test, refine or contest this or that concept in the field of social movement studies. This may be owing to the prejudice that strikes are part of the old class movements that were purported to be declining in favour of the new, identity-based social movements, or owing to the location of these studies. The absence is remarkable not only to the extent that strikes are, broadly speaking, just like any other form of collective action, but also to the extent that they are a form of collective action entirely *unlike* any other

[32] In later descriptive chapters, scholars of social movement studies will recognise many dynamics conceptualised in their field as political opportunity structure, repertoires of contention, leadership, framing of grievances and the role of elites. I will not develop these here as I do not aim to contest nor complement these generalities, and nor have I used them explicitly as analytical tools, except insofar as they name dynamics familiar to Marxism. I leave it to people in social movement studies to draw such insights as they may from my data regarding these concepts.

in one specific detail: any human can demonstrate, but only humans in certain positions can strike.

Tilly (1978, 159 ff) implies the specificity of strikes in his discussion of the development of new repertoires of contention and how they subsequently become routine and institutionalised. He writes:

> How and why did strikes enter the repertoire? In multiple ways, proletarianisation created the strike. By definition, proletarianization created the worker who exercised little or no discretionary control over the means of production and who was dependent for survival on the sale of his or her labour power. That proletarian and the worker threatened with becoming that proletarian have long been the chief participants in strikes. (Tilly 1978, 159).

The strike, then, rises as a peculiarly *proletarian* form of contention, more precisely a form of contention which *exploits a newly generalising form of exploitation*[33].

This is a specific version of the general insight discussed already, that social positions confer certain powers and limits on their 'occupants', or that positionality shapes the forms of contention *available* to particular people and groups of people. Alexander and Pfaffe recently conceived this as people's 'relations to the means of protest', pointing out that, in their case study of protests in Balfour, a township in South Africa, '[d]ifferent actors have different potentialities and experience regarding protest, and these mark out different social identities', linked to occupation but not equivalent to class (Alexander and Pfaffe 2011, 4)[34]. Some years previously, Francis-Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, discussing poor people's movements, showed that this relation must be situated temporally and contextually. They stress that poor people are neither short-sighted, rioting hooligans, nor merely passive, but:

> Briefly stated, the main argument ... is that protest is ... not available to all groups at all times ... The occasions when protest is possible among the

[33] But by no means the only form of proletarian contention. In South Africa, the term 'strike' may be generalized, in popular idiom, to include any form of collective withdrawal, such as a student strike or a day's 'stay-at-home' in a shack settlement. In South Africa the cross-sectoral strike persists in living memory through a number of large 'stay-aways', most sharply through those of the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, which lived on after apartheid as one-day demonstrations contesting policy.

[34] For example, they argue, the 'youth' (unemployed people in their 20s and 30s still living with their parents) had little to lose by rioting and put forward expansive social demands; the 'unemployed' – previously employed people up to their 40s who wore workers overalls and waited around the road-side hoping for occasional work – put forward a narrower demand for work and were more hesitant to protest, given the possibility of missing a chance at work; while workers – formally employed – often shared the protestors' grievances and their demands but felt they were unable to join the protest because of their responsibilities to those living on their wages. The differential gravitation of people from different classes and different strata of classes is visible in Tarrow's discussion of the Argentinian anti-austerity protests (Tarrow 2005) although he does not remark on it.

> poor, the forms that it must take, and the impact it can have are all deliminated by the social structure ... (Fox Piven and Cloward 1979, 3)

So when it comes to real people and groups of people positioned in all the complexity of real social life, our intrinsic powers and limits are intrinsically *interactive* with a social and political context. For example a cleaner transferred from university employment to a contract with an outsourced company retains the formal right to strike but faces new difficulties in wielding it. Certain positional powers and limits may recede or come to the fore as the configuration of constraints and opportunities changes.

Strikes are important to Marxism because of at least two peculiar powers conferred on people positioned to strike. First, strikes are, crucially, a counter-power in production and are therefore strategically important to any intention for a thoroughly democratic transformation of production and its other phase, distribution. Any strike is, at its heart, a contest over authority in the workplace (and sometimes in society at large) and therefore implicitly contests control of production, even though the aim of the contest is often merely to ameliorate exploitation or claim entry to negotiations. Second, a strike's practical execution centres around that kernel of class society, exploitation of labour power, embodied here in the wage-work relation. Marx posited it as a key contradiction of capitalism that human labour is the sole source of *new* value. Exploitation thus enables its counter power in that exploited workers are simultaneously empowered to withhold the source of value, implying the revolutionary potential of, first, recognising this fact and, second, therefore imagining a world without capital and, thirdly, enabling the imagination of implementing collective social control over production. However, workers may wield this power tactically and for sectoral interests without making any leap of consciousness or agency. Hyman, following Eldridge, cautions that 'one cannot sensibly speak of a strike as though it were a single social category (Hyman 1989, 19). Not every strike is the same. Langford adds,

> Dramatic events in a strike struggle can leave two false impressions: first, that every worker is participating in the strike in a similar way; and second, that the mere fact of participation signifies a major change in political consciousness. (Langford 1994, 112)

The form of exploitation in capitalism enables an accomodationist potential to be encapsulated in strikes alongside the revolutionary implications. Most strikes end in compromise (Hyman 1989). A strike relies on the fact that, within the dominant legal, economic and political framework, neither the capitalist employer nor the workers have

direct access to their own means of subsistence without the other (Callinicos 2006b, 13), and while this gives workers power, it also gives the employer power over the workers, the ability to starve out the strike as long as 'normality' prevails in the rest of production and in the spheres of consumption/distribution and power. The exploitative kernel of class society is supported and reticulated in a fine web of other relations which flow from and to it, which means that strikes seldom pivot on brute economics alone. In practice, the strategic power conferred by exploitation is severely modulated when practised in a single workplace or even an industry-wide level. A strike's outcome depends on the balance of power in and beyond the workplace, on ideology, on the positional strengths of workers in different sectors of the economy, on whether the strike is embedded practically in a broader community of fate (consumer boycotts, community support) and so on. It is affected by external powers such as the state (Hyman 1989; Kelly 1998), by the level of class struggle (Franzosi 1995) – I will return to this shortly – and by what Shorter and Tilly (1971) call its domestication. A strike can be mobilised around any issue in the workplace or beyond it, but strikes are frequently regularised and tamed through legislation and institutionalised bargaining over the rate and conditions of exploitation (a fact which relies at least partly on the mystification of exploitation arising from the wage form: exploitation appears here as a mutually-dependent contract, making its negotiation appear more realistic than its negation). Richard Hyman (1989, 100 ff) refers to the 'joint regulation' of workplace conflict by management and trade unions which he attributes partly to union bureaucracies (Hyman 1989, 236). Here the trade unions help to contain strikes within a docile framework of collective bargaining or social contract.

Joint regulation stands in sharp contrast to Luxemburg's famous description of revolutionary mass strike waves, which produce dynamics quite distinct from tame strikes and merely demonstrative mass strikes. Here the workplace conflict spills over into mutually reinforcing political challenge which breaks down the ideological separation of politics and economics:

> Every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes. … Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle, extending at the same time its external possibilities and intensifying the inner urge of the workers to better their position and their desire to struggle. After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth. And conversely. The workers' condition of

> ceaseless economic struggle with the capitalists keeps their fighting energy alive in every political interval; it forms, so to speak, the permanent fresh reservoir of the strength of the proletarian classes, from which the political fight ever renews its strength, and at the same time leads the indefatigable economic sappers of the proletariat at all times, now here and now there, to isolated sharp conflicts, out of which public conflicts on a large scale unexpectedly explode…. and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike … merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike. (Luxemburg 1906a no page numbers)

What is the connection between one form of strike and the other? Moving from the latent 'structural' possibility to the revolutionary potential rests on a change in *agency:* that workers *use* strikes in different ways and beyond the workplace, possibly accompanied by subjective change in how they perceive striking. Does the domestication of the strike mean the 'withering away' of the strike, ruling out strikes which are inherently antagonistic to capitalism?

Temporal and contextual factors such as those mentioned above are obviously paramount to this question. John Kelly (1998), Richard Hyman (1989) and Robert Franzosi (1995; 1989) all seek to explain the rhythms and reasons of strikes in institutionalised settings. These sociologies of industrial relations begin from a rejection of crude unemployment-related explanations for cycles of strikes, emphasising both the rationality and reason of strikers, which is often hidden from official strike statistics, and the subtle interactions between positioned/located humans and their context.

Kelly draws on mobilisation theory and situates it in 'long waves' in the economy to defend the likelihood of a resurgence of trade union activity (Kelly 1998, 117). 'Mobilisation theory' he argues, 'treats as problematic what previous industrial relations research often took for granted, namely the awareness of the workers of a set of common interests opposed to those of employers' (Kelly 1998, 126). He locates 'the emergence of such consciousness in employer violation of laws, conventions or consensual social values that are seen as unjust', creating a 'distinct group identity, founded on interests ... opposed to the employer and often described in everyday terms as a sense of 'them and us' (Kelly 1998, 127) which may persist in the absence of visible conflict. Kelly proposes that the development of such identities lead to resurgent strikes at the end of a long downswing (Kelly 1998, 84) because, he reasons, capitalist restructuring is usually accompanied by an employer and state offensive

which erodes workers' mobilisation, only to create the basis for a new period of mobilisation because of 'the adverse impact on workers' sense of injustice' (Kelly 1998, 130), motivated by a militant minority. Kelly substantiates his point about long waves with historic data, but is less successful at detailing the formation of 'distinct group identities founded on interest' in the rising strikes inevitably associated with 'the next economic upswing'. (Additionally the prolonged recent economic crisis casts into doubt the inevitability of the next upswing). Kelly's thesis implies a sort of identity eventfulness through experience of class confrontation, and achieves a fuller and more textured sense of the rhythms of strikes than most industrial relations reports. However he does not move far beyond an industrial relations framework seeking to explain the rhythms of strikes.

Hyman (1989) situates the ebb and flow of industrial action in a political economy of strikes, in which he foregrounds the state and the contradictory politics of trade unions in the patterns of British strikes. Strikes, he contends, are endemic because they are 'a response to a problem which they cannot resolve' (Hyman 1989, 231), because of the inherently antagonistic relation between capital and labour (Hyman 1989, 172). He concludes that strikes 'remain of vital importance as expressions of resistance ... although they 'bear no *necessary* relationship to political radicalism'. (Hyman 1989, 238). However, he contends that, although '...questions of power and control are at least implicit in many of the day to day struggles which take place in industry, ... it is difficult to imagine that strikes could ever spontaneously develop into the mechanism of open assault on managerial authority, let alone broader political authority' because '... for strikes to function as an explicit challenge to the structure of control within industry and society, they would have to cease functioning as instruments of collective bargaining' (Hyman 1989, 143). Even if workers become conscious of their exploitation and the trend of strikes moves in this direction, 'such a development would meet the resistance ... of the institutions of collective bargaining – on both sides of the industry' (Hyman 1989, 143). Hyman's description of the '70s and '80s in British industrial relations traces how a period of 'confrontation, containment and resurgence' in the 1970s gave way to 'coercive pacification' under Thatcher (Hyman 1989, 218–26). Hyman stresses the inherent contradictions of the trade union in explaining these periods: 'Workers organisations which are defined and constituted through struggle also tend to contain and inhibit such struggle.' He writes,

> Despite the powerful pressures on trade unionists to behave 'responsibly', opposition and struggle are in reality essential for the very existence of unionism ... but collective bargaining undertaken by 'specialist' negotiators on behalf of the broader membership consolidates a representative hierarchy functionally oriented towards accommodation and compromise with capital and its agents; committed to what has been called an 'industrial legality' which may permit some improvement in workers' conditions yet simultaneously endorses the legitimacy and security of the employer. (Hyman 1989, 232)

Hyman proposes a response to the economic and political crisis, rather than predicting one. He advocates a labour movement 'informed by workers' current experiences and aspirations, their hopes and fears, their grievances and enthusiasms', a grassroots linking up of fragmented struggles across sectional divides, where trade unions also 'connect directly with wider social movements and social struggles' (Hyman 1989, 235ff).

Hyman's key weakness is that he thinks about strikes only as 'an inherent accompaniment to trade unionism and collective bargaining'; and therefore 'their strengths and weaknesses as a form of action can be properly assessed only through a broader appraisal of the meaning and contradictory character of union organisation' (Hyman 1989, 231). He is not wrong, but having studied only domesticated strikes, he concludes that strikes may buck and rear but he cannot contemplate that they may break their enclosure. Readers wishing to generalise his valuable analysis beyond Britain and some parts of Europe in the 1990s would do well to study union movements which have been organically linked to broader social movements while not without a layer of full-time union officials, such as South Africa's social movement unionism which then slid into social policy unionism at the end of apartheid. In Hyman's thesis, the union bureaucracy appears as the whole weight in the conservatism side of the balance of trade union contradiction. This not only risks underestimating the possible weight of workers' own reformism and indeed of their possible volatility, but also of misplacing the source of the union bureaucracy's power, and thus underestimating the contradictory pressures on the union bureaucracy. Hyman's thesis needs to be expanded to carefully consider the particular sources of power of any trade union bureaucracy. Union officials may draw power from sources other than the union itself, particularly in a collective bargaining framework, but in many cases their power in one sphere - such as their influence over government – may demand of them to shake the stick of their independent power, that is the union. The union's contradiction is not only

about its function (negotiating exploitation) but also about the tensions between the *differentiated* pressures on its key components, the full-time officials and the members. (Cliff and Gluckstein 1986). These tensions may be exacerbated in crises. Moreover the normal containment wrought by an industrial relations system may be temporarily destabilised by various proto-insurgencies: through workers' experience and growing distrust over time, through new sections of workers bursting onto the scene expecting immediate compromise and unschooled in its inevitability, by workers changing union leaders, changing unions, or striking outside of unions altogether, albeit under the demand for inclusion into workplace negotiation (such as the Lonmin workers and the cleaners in the other part of my study, not used here). Beyond some studies of wildcat strikes and his subsection on resurgence and containment, Hyman cannot say too much about these disruptions, and has little to say about how strike waves may alter the strike itself.

Franzosi's study of Italy's 'hot autumn' (Franzosi 1995) allows for many different explanations of strike patterns to have salience, but inverts the connection between strike levels and 'the class struggle': the level of class struggle affects the level of strikes, rather than the other way around. Strikes brewed in the crucible of a strike wave produce different possibilities from run-of-the-mill strikes. Franzosi writes:

> During strike waves the shape of strikes changes drastically, along with the whole repertoire of labor actions. During strike waves workers face up against capital and bargain their position as a class, with implications that go far beyond the system of industrial relations where strikes normally tend to be confined. During strike waves the separation of the economic and political spheres of conflict … breaks down and workers bring their weight to bear upon the legitimacy of the existing power structure. Also, while normally a great deal of industrial conflict occurs over the structure of wages - i.e., wage differentials among industrial sectors, among firms within a sector, among workers within a firm - during strike waves it is the distribution of income among classes, and not just within the working class, that is challenged (Franzosi 1995, 20; See also 1989, 359).

Franzosi therefore, while allowing for the containment of collective bargaining, the effects of unemployment, the influence of economic waves and so forth, allows for the possibility of eventfulness, where strikes are shaken out of the rut. But too little is known about the striker whirled up in such events.

My study is part routine containment of collective bargaining and part extraordinary political strike wave. The strikes in my case were ultimately contained but the temporary destabilisation of tame industrial and political relations also

destabilised identities. Identity is worth considering here, not least because it involves an emotive, untheorised element which makes possible a 'gut reaction' in relation to a perceived 'community of fate' – that which is 'felt in the nerves' (see above, end of previous chapter) - and therefore may facilitate revolutionary uses of strikes in advance of properly revolutionary consciousness. Apart from this, the particular collective and individual interpellations which motivate *and emerge from* a strike are important to understanding eventful potential in strikes and for understanding the ways that ordinary strikes connect to and disconnect from more eventful strikes.

Identity features in the work already described. Kelly asserts the importance of considering group identities, not only individual identities, in theorising the rationality of strikes, while asserting against postmodernism the possibility of fusion of diverse identities (Kelly 1998, 32, 81, 123, 126). Hyman appeals to reject the fragmentary identities of capitalism, and attributes the decline of strong worker identities partly to the decline of the unions' reinforcement of collective identity 'expressed through mass meetings, parades, banners, social activities' (Hyman 1989, 228). In discussing the multiple motivations behind the formulation of grievances, he also introduces an element potentially expressed as an identity contradiction, although he does not directly link this to identity: 'The complaints expressed by people in a conflict situation are therefore evidence of expectations which have been violated, and the elements in the situation (including the actions of others) which have served to frustrate those expectations' (Hyman 1989, 119). This hints at misidentification as, paradoxically, a possible source of reinterpellation.

However more detail is always needed of how strikers subjectively and actively create themselves as a collective agent in different kinds of strikes. Fantasia proposes that 'industrial action embodies a transformative potential when it can achieve a degree of independence from the institutional structures designed to contain it... "cultures of solidarity" emerge only when workers circumvent routine channels and workers seek, or are forced, to rely on their mutual solidarity as the basis for their power' (Fantasia 1989, 19). During collective action such as the strikes in his study, Fantasia asserts, 'something new is created in the context of conflict. An emergent culture is created in which new values are incubated, new forms of activity generated, and an associational bond of a new type formed' (Fantasia 1989, 174) 'Cultures of solidarity' are 'forged in crisis', and are not merely a set of ideas about solidarity, but 'cultural formations that arise in conflict, creating and sustaining solidarity in opposition

to the dominant structure' (Fantasia 1989, 19) and 'rooted in the *praxis* of solidarity. Fantasia asserts that class consciousness is not a static attribute but an 'active cultural process' requiring 'investigation of the interconnections and relations between actions, thoughts and feelings' and employs the notion of cultures of solidarity 'so that we may better be able to consider a range of events, behaviours and processes' (Fantasia 1989, 107). We must 'take into account spontaneity and emergence and the forces which generate them' and 'treat as important, not as irrational, the feeling states and the cognitions which sometimes cause individuals to throw caution to the winds and act in the face of great or unknown odds' (Fantasia 1989, 173 quoting Killian). Fantasia considers cultures of solidarity to be created, in at least one case, 'within the context of a pre-existing pattern of active work-group social relations'. However its creation depended on an active group of workers engaging more hesitant workers, with a struggle 'within the work-group prov[ing] to be as important to the success of the strike as the struggle against the company' (Fantasia 1989, 108–9). Moreover, while cultures of solidarity are often transient, an incipient culture of solidarity established in a first, wildcat strike quietly enabled a second strike in one of his case studies:

> There was little evidence [between the strikes] to suggest that anything extraordinary had taken place, or that anything might ... but although answers to [survey questions] might not have revealed any remarkable ideological transformation after the first wildcat, an important shift had taken place in the ability of workers to engage in further collective action successfully. This was revealed in two processes that could not have become apparent until the second strike, a) the formation of a group of activists and b) the perception that solidarity was possible and could be maintained. (Fantasia 1995, 109)

Fantasia's 'cultures of solidarity' therefore imply an eventful approach to identities, where new groups are formed in 'the chemistry of collective action' (Fantasia 1989, 236) and their coming into existence may subtly alter the positional powers of participants in the future, constituting a hidden mini-event in itself. To the question, 'are cultures of solidarity 'class consciousness?' Fantasia replies that there is no reason to believe that these constitute more than a trade union consciousness in his case studies, but stresses that:

> ... ideas should be considered in the context of collective action ... contrary to the belief ... that it is necessary for people to have an intellectual grasp on society ... before they can change it, this book argues that in the process of change and crisis, ideas are rendered a good deal more fluid than they are at other times ... *meanings and interpretations are not revised by individuals alone, but in a social context, intersubjectively. In intense*

> *industrial conflict this often means that consciousness is expressed and re-evaluated in terms of associational bonds.* (Fantasia 1989, 236, my emphasis)

What is particularly attractive in Fantasia's concept is its promise of rooting new identities in new *practices.* We can therefore go beyond conceiving of identity as shallow perceptions of self to see it bound up with the actual material practise of forming a collective agent.

However Langford sounds a note of caution, arguing that Fantasia presents 'an over-integrated view of the participation and consciousness of strikers', deflecting 'our attention away from the experience of many of the workers who engage in strike action' (Langford 1994, 117). He prefers to depict strikers as a 'protest community', where the term protest conveys 'that the strikers have a well-defined and limited basis for their action' while 'community' implies a shared interest without implying a monolithic collectivity (Langford 1994, 121) Langford contends that unevenness in strike participation implies that not every striker participates in solidarity cultures to the same degree, therefore leaving in question the extent to which each of them 'internalise(s) a solidaristic consciousness' (Langford 1994, 118). He argues that Fantasia, by assuming internalised solidarity, misses the possibility of situational solidarity – an instrumentalist collectivism revolving around getting the strike won, rather than any great change in identities. Linked to this, whereas Fantasia sees workplace collective struggles as temporary suspension of daily life, requiring a new repertoire of behaviour, Langford asserts that strikers' different motivations for striking and pre-established individual orientations 'condition what emerges during the course of the collective struggle' (Langford 1994, 119).

> What factors motivate workers to participate in the strike in certain ways? Workers' prior orientations towards work and family, the employer, the union, and politics in general are not likely to be negated instantaneously by the novel experiences of collective struggle and intense comradeship. Therefore, prior orientations will influence not only how and to what extent a worker participates in a strike, but also the meaning which a worker attaches to particular strike experiences. (Langford 1994, 113)

This means, additionally, that we need to look for the old and the new in a strike. Finally, he suggests that 'the elemental solidarity created during an isolated workplace struggle is of a qualitatively different character than the mass solidarity engendered during periods of social crisis' and the former have 'a very limited and self-contained oppositional element' (Langford 1994, 119).

In Langford's own study, workers with different pre-existing orientations unite into a protest community around an ideology of protest facilitated by the management's provocations. Both the community and the ideology are essentially situational constructs, implying neither 'that the shift in workers' orientations from before the strike to the time of the strike itself is necessarily a permanent phenomenon' nor that it is 'the beginning of an ongoing process of worker radicalisation'[35]. Strikers' orientations did change during the strike, with alienated and conciliatory workers mostly becoming instrumental collectivists while about 10 percent moved from instrumentalism or alienation to solidaristic collectivism (Langford 1994, 126); the majority reverted to pre-strike orientations after the strike. He contends that the protest community nevertheless 'represents a new terrain for ideological struggle, differing from the terrain normally experienced in that it rendered temporarily impractical the alienated and conciliatory workplace orientations and enabled the possibility of dispersing 'systematic political ideologies' among the strikers (Langford 1994, 126). Finally, he links the actual orientations which persist after the strike at least in part to the actual material outcomes of the strike (in terms of workplace power as well as the actual contract at the centre of the grievances). He concludes with a discussion introduced like this:

> Many different analysts have argued that while workers may develop workplace class consciousness during the course of a collective struggle, certain aspects of life in contemporary capitalist societies block them from attaining generalised class consciousness (Langford 1994, 130)

In his case study, Langford argues, 'political economic stability' was the key blocking factor, with the workers' grievance ultimately diverted towards electoralism. He notes that there is

> an affinity between the instrumental orientation of postal workers and electoralism. The electoral option answered workers' desire for change in the business plan of Canada Post Corporation. At the same time it made no demands upon workers', requires no solidaristic action, and allows them to get on with 'using work as the means to a gratifying home life. (Langford 1994, 131)

Stability plus the 'dominant shadow' of electoralism prevents the development of the affective dimension of class consciousness which Luxemburg calls 'the class feeling ... highlighted in her discussion of the Russian strike wave of 1905' (Langford 1994,

[35] To be fair, neither does Fantasia propose that cultures of solidarity imply this.

132). The ‘class feeling’ (related to the notion of a community of fate, and akin to the revolution ‘felt in the nerves’ in Trotsky’s description in the previous chapter) is active in the proletariat when ‘immediately they regard every partial question of any small group of workers as a general question, as a class affair, and quick as lightning they react to its influence as a unity’ (Luxemburg 1906b, no page numbers). As long as stability prevails instead, Langford argues, socialist activists will have to be content with working with the minority of workers ‘in the front row’ of the ‘school of class war’ which every strike constitutes.

Langford overlooks two things. First, he relies on what strikers can articulate to measure changing attitudes, perhaps thus overlooking other kinds of affective changes which may even remain uncertain until the next conflict. A more important point for my purposes is that Langford misses in his study the surprisingly ready incipience of solidarism, whether instrumentalist or collectivist, in pre-existing workplace orientations. *Alienation* transforms into instrumental solidarism, for example. In rightly asserting the frequent transience of the strike orientations he describes, he overlooks the volatility of accommodationist orientations into confrontational ones (and back again).

Taking both Langford’s and Fantasia’s insights and my criticisms of each into account, I propose the following initial working model about identity eventfulness in strikes. To begin with, strikes are by definition a direct action, even when they function demonstratively (that is as a form of protest rather than a form of force) and even when the conflict is muted by routinisation. The conflict invites ‘us and them’ interpellations exacerbated by the direct action component, which ensures that the stakes in a strike are high, for both parties. Next, it is useful to understand strike identities as rooted in the practice and events of a conflict requiring the formation of a strike collective, which has a materiality beyond attitudes. It follows from this that strike identities must always be understood as closely related to the ‘particular strategic encounter’ and its context, including the political economy, the type of strike, the level of class struggle, peculiar positioning of the participants, and so on. However we must remember that a strike collective is a collective of people who participate differentially in the strike, and therefore neither the collective identity of the strike (how it projects itself overall) nor the individual collective identities in the strike (how individuals perceive the collective and their place in it) are monolithic. Strike identities are modulated by pre-existing orientations, but we need to pay more attention to the processes by which pre-existing

identities are transformed into or make way for strike identities. We should expect that old identities may sometimes be mobilised in unexpectedly resistant ways, and that even instrumentalist strike identities are somewhat contradictory: even when their aim is reconciliation, they prosecute for it through conflict. The persistence or transience of strike identities probably depends at least partly on the actual outcome of the strike, and persistence is not always readily visible at the end of the strike. These last two points are also connected with improving our understanding of how routine strikes may connect to eventful ones if the strike is used in new ways with non-routine effects on identity. Finally, because authors theorising strikes tend to ask about the extent to which a strike consciousness produces 'class consciousness', they tend to overlook whether and how the specificity of strikes, as a test of strength rooted in exploitation, reflects in strike identities.

Studies of collective identity in mobilisation produce finer detail of the mechanisms by which an 'us' is constructed, but produce similar overall insights to those of the authors discussed above. The role of conflict, however, tends to be underemphasised in this body of literature.

3.2.2. Collective identity and mobilisation

Rather than making studies of class identity redundant to the expanding literature on collective-action identities, the uncertain relation between class location, class conflict and class identities usefully problematises collective identity as a mobilising force, in particular the early assumption that social movements merely mobilise ready-made identities. I will not attempt an exhaustive discussion of the vast literature on collective identities. Competent overviews from social psychology and sociology, such as those by Karen Cerulo (1997), Judith Howard (2000), Leonie Huddy (2001) and Richard Jenkins (2008), will guide the reader to some of the very many aspects of identity which I will have to ignore in the following discussion. Here, I am interested in the collective identities associated with collective agents, or 'mobilising identities'.

Polletta and Jasper's overview points out that focussing on identity in the social movements literature 'seemed a way to explain', amongst other things, 'how interests emerged rather than taking them as given' (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 284), thus foregrounding the 'historical construction of what seem "natural" identities such as "working class", "black" and "homosexual" rather than 'reading off interests and

identities from allegedly transparent structural positions', as well as emphasising the affective and emotional aspects of group mobilisation (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 289). They caution against treating collective identity as a residual category, trundled out when rationalist and structuralist explanations failed, rather than being considered as an explanatory factor in conjunction with other factors contributing to mobilisation. They ask:

> To what extent are collective identities constructed in and through protest rather than preceding it? Is the identity a group projects publicly the same one that its members experience? Are collective identities imposed on groups or invented by them? Do individuals choose collective identities to maximize their self-interest or do interests flow from identities? (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285).

The recurring disjuncture between class identity and class struggle emphasises these questions, particularly the first.

Melucci had, some years previously, suggested that mobilization and identities are not chicken and egg. Rather, forming collective identities is integral to the process of mobilizing.

> By asking the question of how individuals and groups make sense of their actions and how we can understand this process, we are obliged to shift from a monolithic and metaphysical idea of collective actors toward the processes through which a collective becomes a collective ... The empirical unity of a social movement should be considered as a result rather than a starting point, a fact to be explained rather than evidence. (Melucci 1995, 43)

For Melucci, collective identity is constructed in the 'negotiated' process of constructing a collective agent.

> The events in which a number of individuals act collectively combine different orientations, involve multiple actors, and implicate a system of opportunities and constraints that shape their relationships. The actors 'produce' the collective action because they are able to define themselves and their relationship with the environment. The definition that the actors construct is not linear but produced by interaction, negotiation, and the opposition of different orientations. ...'social construction' of the 'collective' through negotiation and renegotiation is continually at work when a form of collective action occurs. A failure or a break in this constructive process makes the action impossible. (Melucci 1995, 43–44)

The last sentence here suggests that collective action itself must become cognitively unitary in order for the action to happen. In real life, individuals may act together in ignorance of their differences, or believing that their own motives, intentions

or outcomes will prevail through the action. Both possibilities are easily enough incorporated into Melucci's constructivist model of collective action, but they must be emphasised if we are to understand an important source of potential eventfulness in movements. I will return to this at the end of the chapter.

Before that, I want to define collective identity. First we need to distinguish between collective identities associated with people acting as a group - as a collective agent - and those identities often labelled 'collective identity' in the literature but not associated with common activity. (These might be called 'social identities' (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004, 81) although that raises problems to the extent that even personal identity is shaped socially.) Identities such as 'black' or 'woman' or 'working class' or 'employee' imply similarities of being, activities and relations without including a sense of common purpose or a particular affinity with others in the same position. Young uses Satre's analogy of a bus queue to illustrate the difference between a 'seriality' and a mutually-identified 'group'. People in seriality – waiting for the bus - may be aware of each other and their similarities, but remain impersonal to each other. They are similar only insofar as they are in similar relations to external 'objects' (like the bus or broad social relations). Should the bus fail to arrive, however, the latent potential of the seriality to bind into a 'group' may suddenly emerge when the people from the bus queue begin to complain amongst themselves about the bus (Young 1994, 725). In my study, public sector workers are a kind of seriality within a bigger seriality called the proletariat, until the strike. The kind of group they then form, and how they form it, is a basic interest of this thesis.

What is most useful about this way of understanding social/collective identities is the idea of 'the group' being an emergent property of seriality under stress. This needs a small refinement. 'Group' identities do not always crystallise a pre-existing seriality, nor depend only on seriality for their invention. For example, Fantasia's cultures of solidarity (Fantasia 1989) imply that new identities crystallised partly around new ways of exercising pre-existing social networks, rather than around a seriality. Additionally we should stress that becoming the Bus Commuters' Committee means that participants must invent identities not available to atomised commuters, which may also go beyond (or not encompass entirely) the original seriality or even misrepresent the nature of the seriality (such as South African textile workers imagining that they and the owners of textile companies are as one against the Chinese.)

Polletta and Jasper's far less entertaining definition describes collective identity as an individual's

> … cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285)

They make the now-ritual nod to collective identity's fluidity, reminding us that it is 'relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities)' - and, we must add, not only interaction with audiences but with other collective actors, and with other sorts of *material* pressures. They continue:

> Collective identities are in constant interplay with personal identities, but they are never simply the aggregate of individual identities. If collective identity describes what makes people occupying a category similar, personal identity is the bundle of traits that we believe make us unique. (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 298)

Polletta and Jasper are correct to say that collective identities are not simply an aggregate of individual identities, but their definition does not get us as far as distinguishing social identity from collective identity except insofar as they assert that collective identities, unlike ideology, involve a sense of bondedness to other group members (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285) (See also Opp 2012, 75; Brewer and Gardner 1996, 84 for similar assertions). If collective identity can only be grasped as a different order of personal identity ('what makes me the same rather than what makes me unique'), then what does it mean to say that collective identity is not merely an aggregate of the personal identities of the humans collectivising? How is collective identity then more or less than an individual identity which positions oneself socially? Further, Polletta and Jasper's definition centres on cognition and perception, and therefore cannot easily integrate Fantasia's implication that collective-action identities are rooted in the material practices of a collective. I will begin with the last point and then return to the question of personal and collective identity.

Mellucci's processual approach to identity is much better at this. Collective identity is rooted in the way a movement:

> … 'construct[s]' an action system. Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place. By

> ‘interactive and shared’ I mean a definition that must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated through a repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals (or groups). (Melucci 1995, 44)

Collective identity refers, therefore, not only to cognition about one’s place in a group but to cognition about its ‘ends, means and field of action’ (which may be heterogenous within the group); to the network of relationships amongst actors; and to the emotional investment which makes individuals feel part of the collective (Melucci 1995, 45). David Snow adds:

> Embedded within the shared sense of ‘we’ is a corresponding sense of ‘collective agency’. This latter sense, which is the action component of collective identity, not only suggests the possibility of collective action in pursuit of common interests, but even invites such action. Thus, it can be argued that collective identity is constituted by a shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ and ‘collective agency’. (Snow 2001, 3)

Mobilisation is both ‘generative of and dependent on’ such identities.

What is most attractive about Melucci’s formulation – that it roots identities in the actual practice of constructing a collective agent – is also its chief possible shortcoming. There is a danger of conceiving the process of building a collective *agent* as identical to the process of developing a collective *identity*. These are closely connected, but collapsing them removes the possibility of disentangling when ‘behavioural involvement expresses identity’ (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004, 81) (that is, identity motivates action) from cases where other factors motivate action which in turn motivates identity (See also Thomas, Mavor, and McGarty 2011), and additionally neglects processes of interpellation *within* the collective – the cognitive process by which we insert ourselves into a context such as a collective agent, or in other words how we make sense of ourselves in a particular situation.

Snow thinks it remains necessary to distinguish the product from the process, to consider not only the process by which identities are formed in collective action but also the ‘sense of we-ness’ that *results* from that process.

> A common theme running throughout a segment of the literature is the insistence that collective identity is, at its core, a process rather than a property of social actors. Such work acknowledges that collective identity is ‘an interactive and shared definition’ that is evocative of ‘a sense of ‘we’, but then highlights the process through which social actors recognize themselves as a collectivity, contending that this process is more vital to conceptualizing collective identity than any resultant product or property (e.g., Melucci 1989 p34, 218, passim). Few scholars would take exception

> with the importance of the process through which collective identities develop, but it is both questionable and unnecessary to contend that the process is more fundamental than the product to understanding the character and functionality of collective identity. Not only is the product or 'shared we' generative of a sense of agency that can be a powerful impetus to collective action, but it functions, as well, as the orientational identity for other actors within the field of action. (Snow 2001, 3)

The last of these points – that a 'shared we' gives orientation to *other* actors - may be overstated, especially when transplanted into highly conflictual collective mobilisations. Opponents may assign identities to other collective actors based purely on partial representations of their compounded actions which have nothing at all to do with the collective actor's own sense of self or movement projection, and the actions may 'project' identities which distort the participants' own understanding of the collective's identities. It is also awkward to talk about something fluid as a product, as if it can be 'finished' and put in the shop window. Nevertheless, the distinction between process and outcome is worth noting if we are looking for enduring 'events' in identity formation and in particular about class formation.

What about the connection between personal and collective identity? First, Snow argues that collective identities associated with movements may have many layers. In his explanation, these correspond first to broad, usually ascribed social identities and then include further layers most often associated with varieties and levels of organisation in the movement, or in a schism between movement activists and movement supporters. This introduces the potential of identity conflicts within movements (Snow 2001, 10). But Snow is also interested in how personal identities come into alignment with (a person's) collective identity. This quasi-psychological focus blurs an important aspect of interpellation. Once a collective actor is conjured into existence - whether called into being by sense of 'we-ness' or by building a we or by shared injury in the absence of shared identity - it takes a life greater than its participants. The collective agent becomes itself part of the environment within which participants develop their identities. Since a collective agent has no cognition of its own, so to speak, having no single mind of its own, the collective agent's 'identity' (as opposed to the collective identities of participants) is projected primarily through what it does, or more accurately through the joint actions of its parts. Its actions may have resounding effects which may or may not accord with the personal motivations, identities and expectations of the individuals comprising it. The resulting

reverberations make the process by which individuals interpellate themselves in a collective very textured indeed, but it is necessary to pay careful attention to this process if we are looking for eventful identities.

To conclude this section, we can now add two more points to our working model of strike identities. First, it is useful to conceive of class location as a form of seriality, which, like the bus queue, may flip into 'groupness' not so much because of social construction of a movement but by virtue of a common attack. Second, concerning the interaction between 'orders' of collective identity, it may be useful to talk about two distinct dimensions of collective-action identity: a personal, cognitive-agent identity regarding who and what the collective is, does and is for, which may accord to a greater or lesser extent with what others in the collective believe it to be; and the second dimension, the identity of the collective as a whole. The latter combines the aggregate collective-agent identity 'negotiated' by participants, and the 'identity' established and projected by its actions.

The literature on mobilising identities presents a wealth of information about the mechanics of collective identity construction. But it has two holes. One regards the specificity of conflict, and the other, related, is to do with identity *damage,* which is an identity process quite different to the construction of action systems.

3.3. By way of conclusion: Reader, meet Identity Damage

Studies of mobilising identities tend to focus on how identities are *made* or built or constructed. They therefore tend to treat the fluidity of identity construction as a continuous, positive process, despite Snow's observation that the emergence of new identities tends to 'cluster in space time' by association with conditions of sociocultural change or challenge (Snow 2001, 4), and thus tend to neglect or overlook processes of 'de-identification' - how identities may be broken down or abandoned.

In mobilisation studies as in strike studies, it has been noted that collective action identities may be transient (short-lived) as well as fluid (shifting as the movement faces new strategic challenges, for example). Little is known, however, about whether and when sharp conflicts leave residual identities which go underground, so to speak, when the particular encounter is over, only becoming salient again if there is another confrontation. An important exception here is Drury et al.'s account of empowerment and disempowerment, which shows that when

> even limited collective actions serve to reflect back the power of the active collective subject, then the emergence of movements toward social change are more likely … [and] such a psychological change entails … also a shift in the content of the identity: who we are, and what the struggle is about … more profound changes were reported, more indicative of a qualitative alteration in identity-content. Thus interviewees described events as 'self-changing', 'radicalizing' or 'transformative' (Drury et al. 2005, 324).

It is also unclear whether sharp, high-stakes conflicts affect individuals' identities differently than long-term movement building, or conflicts where the participants are less directly materially affected by the outcome of the conflict. For example, I join a demonstration against climate change knowing that climate change will have a real material effect on my future, but with little risk attached to the act of joining the demonstration in the absence of police brutality. By contrast when I go on strike in South Africa at least one material effect – lost wages - is immediate, personal and cumulative, regardless of the other demands of the strike. This example relies on crude extremes. Certain demonstrations will involve more immediate personal risk, such as real risk of death or injury in contemporary service delivery protests or the risk of violence for a township lesbian revealing her identity by joining a gay rights march in the township. My point here is to emphasise that not all collective agents face the same level or type of confrontation, and that *confrontation does not (always) begin from differences in identity*. While I have no way of comparing high stakes conflicts with milder confrontations, I suggest, first, that indefinite strikes (as distinguished from demonstrative, one day strikes or short work-stoppages) are necessarily high stakes in the current climate, and second that high stakes conflicts are particularly disposed to identity destabilisation.

What do I mean by *identity damage*? Boundary-drawing – who is 'in' the collective and who is not - is considered an important component in the mechanics of collective identity formation. Movements and movement participants may construct an 'us' in response to or opposition to a 'them'. For example if the actions of an outgroup such as the police are considered illegitimate and indiscriminate by demonstrators, that helps to consolidate a broader in-group identity than might otherwise have been the case (Drury et al. 2005, 311). A sense of 'us' may also crystallise around contesting how 'they' contest the movement's identity (Paltemaa 2005, 455; Alluri 2010). Opposition from an out-group may even facilitate a more inclusive sense of the ingroup, as when police actions led a local roads campaign to link up with the 'anti-

globalisation' movement and expand their definition of 'community' (Drury, Reicher, and Stott 2003). However these cases all assume that the movement develops a positive identity from the experience of confronting an outgroup.

Something else seems to be going on in my study. Identities are not only built during the strike but also *destabilised* during the strike: for instrumental reasons; in the service of the wage demand; through themes embedded in the broader political context; and in the face of betrayed expectations. Some of these identity destabilisations are mobilised by participants (such as using the identity 'parent' to justify militant action). But other destabilisations are thrust upon us. What happens when the outgroup is originally perceived to be part of the ingroup, but its identity becomes ambiguous or clearly oppositional in the conflict? Collective identities may be based on real or *imagined* commonalities, but what happens when conflict situations lay bare that an identification is in fact imagined? Here the importance of an interpellative approach to identity becomes clearer, by which I mean the importance of conceiving identity as a process of *interpreting* who you are in *relation to* your social context and material realities. I propose that misidentification[36] – believing others are more like you (or less like you) than they turn out to be – may be a pivot of rupture in existing identities, and that high-stakes conflicts are more likely to expose misidentification insofar as they force the participants' hands. We shall see in my study that events take turns often unexpected to the participants themselves because they act initially believing their opponents to be something they are not, and without anticipating the differential pressures on differently positioned and located actors.

Misidentification suggests that one way that people bring their personal and collective identities into line is by bringing their imagination of the movement into line with their personal identities - by simply imagining it to be like themselves. An example from my own direct experience is the cleaner who spoke highly of Zuma as an alternative to Mbeki, but when asked her opinion on his polygamy – something I knew she was opposed to from an earlier discussion – she replied, shocked, 'No, he's not that kind of man!' How people sustain misidentification is as interesting a question as how misidentities are laid bare.

[36] Misidentification is nothing like the concept of 'false consciousness'. False consciousness proposes a full or partial blindness to one's own interests and circumstances; misidentification, by contrast, does not suppose a shortage of self awareness.

It seems dangerous to assume that a misidentification, once exposed, is seamlessly integrated into the formation of an alternate identity. I have used the term *identity damage* to suggest that people in the process of de-identifying may have their old identities and identifications called into question without necessarily having a replacement identity readily to hand, thus opening a window of uncertainty.

To conclude, identity, as a complex of reason, strategy, affect and positionality, at least partly inhabits the experiential terrain where things are 'felt in the nerves'. It is one of the ways in which lived classed experience is assimilated subjectively, in a manner laden with affect and injury. It is therefore an area in which class conflict may be *felt* without being theorised (that is, without being expressed in the form of 'consciousness'), and therefore by implication a field in which class contradiction may be, so to speak, subjectively 'stored up' for the future - in the way a compressed spring stores energy rather than the way a dusty room stores files.

Collective-action identities are a matrix in which new identifications may be forged, but also where assumed loyalties may be tested by confrontational episodes. This does not happen in every collective action but when it does, the disjuncture between the unsettling of identities and people's pre-existing models (theories) of the world opens a window of potentiality in that it calls on strikers to explain to themselves, or to explain away, the shocking or unexpected parts of the emotionally charged events they have lived through. The many ways they answer that call or deafen themselves to it will be discussed in the body of the thesis.

Chapter 4. Methodology: improvising opportunist research

This study frequently strays beyond sociology into pastures normally reserved for history, politics, industrial relations and perhaps even psychology. It also tramples other fences: the research techniques detailed in the third part of this chapter drew heavily on journalism, and the research question developed within activism. Stitching these into an academic endeavour after the fact was a key challenge to the study, and their particular configuration is perhaps a small part of its originality.

My foray into these wilds was an emergency response rather than a planned search for novelty. The ad-hoc nature of aspects of my research process would be difficult to justify without explaining, as I do in the first part of the chapter below, the frankly opportunist evolution of the research question. But do not mistake the tone of this explanation for one of apology: an effective sociology of social change in a volatile era needs not only peculiar methodological scaffolding such as described on page 13, but should also be prepared to wrest valid research from unexpected, rapidly moving situations when opportunity arises. I mean more than exploratory research to develop new research questions: I mean being prepared to take existing research questions into new terrain without much preparation.

To say that my research process was improvised is not to say that it was haphazard, however. The longitudinal backbone of the method described below - whether by design or intuition - rhymed with the subject of inquiry, the development of strike identities. To be precise, I got in close at ground level (in Johannesburg and then-Pretoria, now called Tshwane[37]), observed and recorded a strike developing over time, and interviewed strikers repeatedly over the course of the strike[38]. That allowed

[37] The metro region was renamed Tshwane in 2005, but the city itself was only renamed after 2016 (See for example BusinessTech 2016). Therefore I have used 'Pretoria' throughout, not from any commitment to that outdated name but purely for consistency with the interviews and secondary data of the time.

[38] As far as I know there is only one other published study in the English language literature that does this. See Langford (1994) discussed in the previous chapter.

me to get at the development of strike identities both at a personal scale which is normally obscured, and at a collective scale. Later, I was able to use secondary sources to systematise a third and fourth level of context (the strike nationally, and national politics). I was able to do the same thing all over again in a second strike, thereby not only extending the period covered by the research but introducing another layer of temporal comparison on all four levels.

The analysis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) is structured in each case as, first, a multi-layered reconstruction - in timeline fashion - of each strike in turn (a wide shot, so to speak, of the *public* face of identity in each strike plus the strike cultures that build a collective, in the context of the 'shocks' that move things forward), coupled with, second, an aggregated close up picture of how strikers made sense of it all. The second strike is reconstructed not as a stand-alone but *in comparison* with the first. Finally, I switch to a tight focus with a long depth of temporal field, so to speak, where I consider four strikers' development over the entire course of both strikes. The mode of analysis is plain in the findings chapters so I won't say more about it here, but the first section of this chapter ends by briefly elaborating the contextual-comparative frame that pervaded the improvisation.

The second section of the chapter then considers how it was possible to change course while retaining an approach that research is an engaged process of theory reconstruction, *a la* Burawoy. The third section covers various technical details: my positioning as a researcher, the actual research process, and specific techniques, including their adaption and analysis of superficially journalistic techniques. I remind the reader that the methodological framework at the beginning of Chapter 2 is the platform of my methodology.

4.1. How a sideshow sneaked to centre stage and stole the show

It is, of course, in the nature of good research to adapt a research design as you go along to conditions in the field, and quite common to begin in one place and end somewhere else altogether because the research turned up a more interesting insight than the one we were after, but perhaps less usual to change to a completely different case and a more interesting question.

The 2007 public sector strike began just after I had started my doctoral research with a series of carefully planned focus groups with outsourced university cleaners,

intended to explore the class-related strike identities of 'precarious' workers through building collective histories of their 2006 strike[39]. The public sector strikers and the cleaners could hardly have been further apart in the job market. But I knew already that studies of strikes in progress were few in the social sciences, and, besides, any strike was surely appropriate to explore the general hypothesis that formed one leg of my original proposal: that people were likely to reflect class identities differently during strikes than in everyday life[40]. This opportunity, which blossomed into a chance to capture strike-identities in formation as the strike wore on, was too good to miss, but afforded little time for preparation. The research process described later in the chapter therefore developed almost entirely in the field, and at first largely intuitively.

At first, I saw the research about the public sector strike as related to my doctorate, but not necessarily part of it, even though I borrowed interview questions from one to the other. Obviously, anything that improved my sensitivity to strike dynamics was going to be useful, and in the years following I also dipped into several other strikes[41] with the intention of developing a broad background for the main case, but none so intensively as the public sector strike – simply because it was fascinating. Its size and broader significance were qualitatively peculiar at that time (See Ceruti 2007; 2009; 2010a). Journal articles could perhaps do justice to the strike's place on the arc of some kind of turning point in South Africa's history, but it also occurred to me that the ability to compare individual strikers to their earlier selves over the course of the strike, and thus to see how identities unfolded during the strike, was directly relevant to my study and exceptionally rare in strike studies. Should I find a place for it in my thesis?

[39] I continued with this research plan for some time: for the focus groups I invented techniques aimed at getting beyond 'factual' individualised recollections of the strike, most centrally, making an 'emotive timeline' of the strike together, which then formed the basis for asking them to discuss and agree on the best and worst moments in the strike, as well as more conventional elicitation such as asking them to discuss and agree whether actors in and beyond the strike were 'us' or 'them', asking people to come up with three words to describe themselves, the strike, the unions, various public sector ministers, delivery protestors etc. I also attended and participated in the workers' solidarity forum at the University of the Witwatersrand and attended workers' general meetings at University of Johannesburg (UJ). I interviewed individuals from both sites and from other sectors (in which we covered preplanned questions about identity but also wound into wide ranging discussions such as what they wanted to be when they grew up), organized a workshop at UJ on the way forward after the strike, screened parts of the movie Bread And Roses (about Los Angeles cleaners) for discussion, observed at least one tools-down at UJ, informally discussed strategy, noted countless informal interactions with cleaners, and later participated in the formation of a solidarity forum at University of Johannesburg.

[40] I became interested in this hypothesis in relation to a large research project I was working on at the time, about class in Soweto. (See Alexander et al. 2013)

[41] These included Tiger Oats (seasonal workers), ABI bottlers, construction workers, municipal workers (twice), textile workers, Woolworths, Shoprite, Plantation farms and Karrant Beef. I also interviewed Harvesttime workers – outsourced catering workers at UJ who had not been on strike.

Some comparison was built into the cleaners' research from the start, first in the fact that it was conceived in contrast to class identities in other settings, and second in that I was looking at cleaners in two different universities, each contracted to a different cleaning company, which would introduce the effects of different workplace cultures, management styles and organising histories. The public sector strike offered a chance to contrast 'precarious' strikers with strikers who were widely considered middle class, and thereby a chance to complicate how strike and class identities relate. Adapting my study to this comparison seemed promising, although it also promised considerable difficulties[42].

But meanwhile, with no off switch for activist thinking, other possibilities were lurking. During the strike I had been picking up subtle forms of class and identity dynamics in the strike relevant to the debates outlined in Chapter 1 about the robustness of the alliance and the possibilities or impossibilities of a re-radicalisation of Cosatu. At the time, these seemed to me the most important and interesting dynamics in the strike and were foregrounded in several papers on the strike, but – probably because I was immersed in the debates as an activist and intensely invested in their immediate *practical* implications for the movement - they seemed (rather ironically, looking back at Chapter 2) insufficiently theoretical to upstage the academic debates around precarity and class identity.

The second public sector strike, in 2010, crystallised the possibility of the study before you. The inconclusive end of the first strike had become the prologue of the second strike. It was some time before I made peace with shelving the cleaners' strike for later, but the second strike brought more sharply into focus how the *processes* could themselves be the star of the show, not merely a means to uncover the causality

[42] Comparison of different cases works best with '… comparators that are similar. An orange from Spain and an orange from South Africa are better than an orange and a lemon, and avoid the temptation to go for an orange and an apple. The reason is simple: in attempting to identify the causes of difference, one wants to focus on as few variables as possible - the greater the number of possible explanations, the greater the chance of making mistakes.' (Alexander No date). Here, the potentially useful contrast between strikers at opposite ends of the job market risked being swamped by other differences: one strike was in the private sector, the other the public sector; it was a first-time strike in a hither-to unorganised sector for cleaners, whereas the public sector workers were by now accustomed to a cycle of 3-year wage bargaining and demonstrative strikes; the cleaners' strike was not overtly political but the public sector strike couldn't help dragging politics to center stage; amongst the public sector strikers, there were at least three different kinds of workplace (hospitals, schools, and administration) and many different grades and types of workers, while the cleaners were occupationally homogenous across a range of different sorts of work-sites. I was interviewing cleaners a year or more after their strike, public strikers during the strike. And I had not selected my respondents, nor conducted any part of the research into either strike, with such comparison in mind. My intention to compare one whole human to her context, and thus to other whole humans, was probably not much comfort to the supervisor who was worried about this. Fortunately, Burawoy had already systemised some concepts for holistic comparison of the kind I was groping for (Burawoy 1998; 1989).

of the identities ‘produced’. It also drove home the impossibility of grasping strikers’ identities abstracted from the political currents around the alliance.

This form of the study strengthened the ability to get at context and had introduced a new element, namely temporality, or change over time, which is a form of comparison. I will turn now to a brief discussion of these elements.

4.1.1. Holistic comparison over time

My study was not conducted through immersion in the situation as a direct participant, and elements of my research tended to the broad and shallow rather than the deep and narrow, but it resembles reflexive ethnography in its commitment to what Burawoy calls methodological situationism where ‘the situation rather than the individual is taken as the unit of analysis’ (Burawoy 1998, 12) as the researcher seeks to ‘locate… life in its extralocal and historical context’ (Burawoy 1998, 4). Whereas ‘inductive generalisation seeks common patterns amongst diverse cases so context can be discounted’, the alternate strategy ‘traces the source of a small difference to external forces’ (Burawoy 1998, 19):

> A generic strategy looks for similarities amongst disparate cases, whereas a genetic strategy focuses on differences between similar cases. The goal of the first is to seek abstract laws or formal theory, whereas the goal of the second is historically specific causality’ (Burawoy 1991, 281).

The latter lends itself to social process (See, for example, Burawoy 1989) rather than a more taxonomic form of categorisation, which would be encouraged by the generic strategy.

Introducing temporality to the context allows a special form of comparison, namely change over time, which is especially well suited to understanding social process.

I have already explained that this study was born from considering how the context of a strike might affect classed identities. In the chapters to follow, I deploy the analytical device of timelines to situate the development of strike identities in the context of the unfolding strike itself and, as I have mentioned already, to situate the strike in the context of the alliance and national politics. (This hierarchy of scale should not, however, be misunderstood as a hierarchy of causality: my analysis assumes that strike identities ‘cause’ the strike and alliance politics as well as the other way around.)

Two comparisons are at the heart of the time-sensitive contextualisation in my study: a comparison of two strikes three years apart, and a comparison of strikers with their earlier selves over the course of each strike. However, consistent with a genetic strategy, I do not treat the two strikes as separate occurrences but as earlier and later instances in a set of social processes, in which the second strike is rooted in the first. (It is more intuitively obvious with regard to strikers, where we assume that a person's later identity is rooted in an earlier one, but perhaps not quite so obvious when we are talking about identity events, or a rupture in identity.)

This genetic approach to temporality is partly responsible for the asymmetry in the findings chapters. The first is much longer than the second because much more must be explained and laid out as a background for the first, whereas the second strike's background is the first strike.

Next, I look at how I was able to adapt my research to a different purpose after the fact.

4.2. … And how it was nevertheless able to squeeze into the original act's costumes

Two related concerns might be raised about the validity of the study achieved from the change of course described above. First, how appropriate is it to use data gathered with one purpose in mind for a different purpose? Second, how does that affect the integrity between the research and the theoretical framework if the theory came retrospectively?

Four things allowed for the retroactive 'retooling' of the data. First, the final study remained a study about strike identities and classed identities, although this aspect has been demoted to a lower order of analysis than before. Previously, strike identities were going to answer questions about the formation of class identities. Now, the formation of these identities is 'nested' in broader questions around rupture. Second, the focus switched from content (strike identities) to process (the development of strike identities) where the original study had already assumed process albeit without an easy way to get at it. (It is not quite the case that any old content would have done just as well – for instance, if I'd been looking at gender identities in the strike, it would have been much harder to get at eventful identities from the data. The second point holds

in the context of the first[43].) Third, for several reasons, I gathered an enormous amount of 'peripheral' data - peripheral as in peripheral vision, not peripheral as in unimportant – in which all sorts of things that I would never have thought to ask about became visible, often some time after the fact. Even in the original study I did not want to foreclose 'non-class' strike identities nor to miss class identities that did not fit my preconceptions, and therefore in that research design the questions directly about class identity were sketchy and very open-ended. The interviews and focus groups were designed to get people talking emotively about the strike while priming them to think about who they 'are' and who others 'are' (questions about childhood aspirations, describe yourself/the strike in three words, and so on). In other words, I had primed myself to elicit quite general discussions about identity in relation to the strike, hankering for a holistic, if superficial, picture of a person's strike identity. Related to this, I already assumed context to be important, and so I tended to stimulate interviews by inviting a person to update me on the strike, while at the same time - partly because I wasn't too sure *what* in the context was going to be important, partly because I went into the strike minimally prepared, and partly because it was not clear how long the strike would last – indulging a frenzy of observational data gathering (detailed later in this chapter).

Finally – and this is perhaps a version of the previous point – my methodological framework was implicitly reflexive, even in the original research, constantly adapting to new observations and hunches. The adaption from the original idea to this study was, in fact, a direct result of such reflexivity.

Having said all this, what I did was not at all, contrary to appearances, grounded theory. This brings us to the second concern – the integrity of the theory with the data gathering – and thereby to the following subsection, in which I will answer that concern.

4.2.1. Theory in dialogue with itself

Burawoy insists on research based in a 'commitment to the rationality of theory' which he defines as 'the cognitive maps through which we comprehend the world' (Burawoy 1998, 5). The 'road to knowledge', therefore, is via the researcher's engagement, and 'objectivity is not measured by procedures that assure an accurate mapping of the

[43] The opposite direction of inference might be more viable, however, in light of the next, third, point – for instance, I could more successfully generate very sketchy and incomplete but nevertheless valid insights about gendered identities in the strike from the data

world but by the growth of knowledge, that is the imaginative and parsimonious reconstructions of theory to accommodate anomalies' (Burawoy 1998, 5). In this model of science, we develop theory not by accretion of facts from which we can then eventually generalise, but by looking for 'puzzles' or challenges to our core theory. Research attempts to resolve those puzzles by 'turning counterexamples into corroboration of the … hard core premise by building new theories' (Burawoy 1989, 787), not merely patching up but extending theory to anticipate new facts. 'Fieldwork' he writes, 'is a series of experiments that continue until one's theory is in synch with the world one studies." (Burawoy 1998, 17).

How does this square up with the second concern raised at the end of the previous section? How can I stake a claim to this Burawoyesque form of enquiry if I changed the question and the study *after* gathering the data?

The start of the answer is, of course, that even the peripheral data was never innocent. Not everything intruded on my field of vision with the same insistence. Not everything in the strike seemed interesting. What seemed worth pursuing were the things which somehow spoke to questions I was already grappling with. Another way of putting this is to say that I did not go into the strike with only the original hypotheses in mind forsaking all others.

In fact, what I netted first of all was not a shoal of glittering facts but a pair of puzzles regarding the debates in Chapter 1, of the sort which drive theoretical development. The first was, perhaps ignobly, a puzzle for other strands of activist Marxism (if the alliance and collective bargaining were such watertight containers of struggle, why was this procedural strike straining the seams of the bucket, *before* Cosatu had left the alliance?) and a corroboration for aspects of our own (that the contradictions would break the alliance apart from the inside out). I won't go into more detail here because it is all in Chapter 1, save to remind the reader that the strike then immediately presented a puzzle to my own theorisation ('The difficulty is that what happened in the strike does not fit Lehurele's description, yet the *outcome* appears to be exactly what Lehurele expects', as I put it in a previous paper.)

In other words, the concepts, although not always the jargon, of contradiction, subjective and objective rupture and eventfulness were already explicit in my activism when I began researching the strike, and were partly challenged by the strike.

Note that at the beginning of this section, I quoted Burawoy in a way which connects his commitment to deductive research with his commitment to the

researcher's 'engagement in the world'. Theory, and indeed the collection and interpretation of 'facts', are after all human concepts for making sense of our world, not the world itself. For Burawoy, and for me, the researcher's '[e]ngagement with the world is not separate from the scientific process but its very essence …' (Burawoy 1989) (although it is through theory that we keep ourselves steady in this process). The evolution of the research into its present form may have been less viable had I not been thus 'embedded' in activist Marxism.

I will turn now to the details of the process and techniques I used to develop a contextual, moving picture of the strikes and strikers identities.

4.3. Research techniques for real-life experiments in class struggle

I mentioned earlier that I went into the 2007 strike without knowing how long the strike would last, and therefore set out to gather as much information as I could while the strike was still on, falling back on somewhat journalistic techniques. In this section, I will first position myself, tackling a couple of ethical issues in the process, then describe what I actually did, more or less chronologically, before discussing how I took my research beyond the journalistic. Finally I will detail my techniques and analytical tools.



Photo 1: By any means available: the researcher on the first day of the 2007 strike. I am wearing a t-shirt demanding the re-instatement of retrenched workers in Botswana, I have a notebook stuffed into my trousers, a pen and a voice recorder clipped to my collar, a movie camera over my shoulder, a stack of socialist magazines and a small digital camera out of sight in my trouser pocket. Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source: Kameelah Rasheed

4.3.1. The researcher in the research: positioning myself (ethically).

Race, gender, status and so on may influence not only the researcher's familiarity with the field but also how people respond to you. For instance, two colleagues - Mahlatse Rampedi, a young black man, and Hannah Dawson, a white woman of similar age - got very different insights from similar methods of qualitative research about youth politics in Zamdela, an informal settlement[44], as Rampedi pointed out in a seminar (Rampedi 2015; Dawson 2014; See also Hapke and Ayyankeril 2001).

I am a white woman, 41 years old at the time of the first strike, and I was a semi-participant researcher in the public sector strikes. (I will explain the 'semi' below.)

[44] This was not purely an artefact of how they framed their research or different samples. Rampedi, who also did research in a similar setting for a bigger project, reports getting markedly different responses from those obtained by white colleagues from the same *individuals.* (Discussion from a weekly seminar of the Social Change unit).

During the strikes I dressed as I would normally dress in the winter, most often in a political t-shirt (Photo 1) and scruffy trousers with lots of pockets. To strikers who did not know me, I sometimes looked like a journalist trying not to look like a journalist, which made some suspicious but others more willing to speak to me, wanting publicity for their cause. To others I must have resembled those ageing white union officials from a similar background to mine in the 1970s and 1980s, which probably eased access for me. On more than one occasion I met people who I knew from before. At a different time this could have harmed the research because I was known as an 'ultra-left', but under the particular circumstances, where the unions were forced to consider new allies, it generally worked in my favour.

I said that I was semi-participant, by which I mean that I was not a striker but was indirectly invested in the strike's outcome. I generally carried copies of a socialist magazine, because I would have anyway. I was worried at first that this might bias the interviews but it probably made it easier for strikers to accept me even if they were not themselves socialist-inclined. On several occasions I participated as I would have if I had not been doing research, for example speaking in support of the strike on two occasions, discussing strategy and tactics, taking an active part in the strike support committee, and on at least one occasion helping to draft a leaflet supporting the strike. For me this is first and foremost an ethical question: I was an activist before I was an academic and I did not feel comfortable suspending or hiding my support for the sake of personal advancement, especially in those localised settings where there was an off chance that it might make a difference. It was secondarily a question of rejecting the notion that scientific objectivity required an (anyway fictional) neutrality. (Having said that, in practice the time taken to do the research often interfered with my activism in and around the strike.)

I have been active in 'the struggle' since I got involved in student politics in 1985 and was an 'ultra-leftist' by 1987. Since then I have participated to varying degrees[45] in probably hundreds of marches and other kinds of action and many more meetings from a wide range of struggle cultures and in a variety of settings and periods[46]

[45] Often as a supporter (indirectly invested), but frequently as a directly invested participant.

[46] Including student protests before and after apartheid, university occupations (including the Wits cleaners' occupation of what is now Solomon House to resist outsourcing in 1995), political funerals, commemorations and rallies (in the Black Consciousness/Pan African tradition as well as the Congress tradition), several mass stayaways, wage strikes, strike support committees, marches of trade unions, marches of community organisations and social movements, shop-stewards' councils including Cosatu Johannesburg during the states of emergency and then again regularly for about a year in the late 1990s, various trade union meetings (in only three cases of

(although almost exclusively in urban areas). I therefore felt absolutely comfortable in such settings, and was superficially familiar enough with a variety of struggle cultures to be reasonably sensitive to new practices and instances of cross-fertilisation. (I did, however, sometimes feel uncomfortable in the completely unfamiliar role of being a *researcher* in such settings.)

I have therefore experienced all these things I write about - solidarity, effervescence, betrayal, misidentification and unidentification - from the inside, which is an asset riddled with pitfalls. It is an asset not so much for any special insight but chiefly because I am constantly reminded that I could be writing about me, which helps to disrupt objectification of researched people in the researcher-researched binary. The danger is not so much being too close to the phenomena to think about them objectively[47] but in the fact that the people I am writing about are not*, actually,* me[48]. For example, I have never supported a family and have never had the opportunity to strike on my own behalf. This must go deeper than the reminder that I cannot presume the strikers' motivations, risks and desires, but must encompass the recognition that our very humanity – even the extent to which we are recognisably 'human' to ourselves - is formed positionally in an anti-human society. (Chapter 3 touches on this.)

This also affects the relationship between the researcher and the people she is talking to. The history and persistence of racism and the continued racialisation of economic inequality in South Africa must obviously infect every interaction between a white and a black person, in predictable and unpredictable ways. Since most of the strikers were black, and I white, my research was doubtlessly affected. Predictable distortions would include deference, silencing (such as not speaking about race to spare the white person's feelings, or feeling embarrassed about language skills although it's the researcher's language skills which are limited), opening up to the white person because you imagine them to have greater influence than yourself, and automatic distrust or suspicion of the white person. My colleague Hibist Kassa adds[49] that the race barrier would also limit what you feel you can explain to the white person

unions of which I was personally a member), anti-war mobilisations, the after effects of two land occupations, a silent protest and some blockades, and even, for a few months, SACP branch meetings. By way of superficial global extension I can add one strike march in London in the 1990s, and more recently a visit to a Polish nurses' strike, the alter-globalisation mobilization in Edinburgh, and a visit to a hunger strike of Delhi lecturers. Strangely, though, I cannot recall ever being at a delivery protestors' road blockade.

[47] That is, after all, what social science is for

[48] And neither are they each other, but that is another matter

[49] In-person discussion during a writing session, December 2016.

across the language/culture barrier, as well what you think the white person can understand about your life and what you might be embarrassed to 'admit' to[50]. All of these problems are exacerbated by the entanglement of race and class in South Africa, to the extent that, in Numsa meetings, workers use *umlungu,* the isiZulu word for 'white person', to mean 'boss'[51].

Let me stress that these distortions do not by themselves imply low self-esteem, an inadequate sense of self-worth or acceptance of racist ideas. They are habits and techniques, conscious strategies and gut reactions, to having to constantly negotiate social passage through the daily reality of` a racist society[52]. Nor can they therefore be avoided by simply behaving differently as a white researcher[53]. It is possible that my appearance as an activist clearly allied with black activists in the SECC ameliorated some distortions, but it is unlikely that even total familiarity with the white researcher would eradicate these effects in the context of the additional power differentials implied by researcher and researched.

This is not to say that such distortions are unique to white-researcher black-respondent research. Just as surely, other distortions arise in white-white or black-black research, and indeed wherever there is a power differential[54], the most obvious being differences across gender, class and intellectual-manual work; and the rare cases of black-researcher white-respondent research would produce yet another set of cross cutting complexities. Here, however, I am only discussing the effects on my own research.

Such distortions are so deeply ingrained in a racist society, and varied enough, as to be easily mistaken by a white researcher for each person's individual character interacting with their own, but even if you are aware that they exist, it is not straightforward to recognise when and how they are operating, and it is not even given that all their forms are detrimental to data gathering (for example outsiders are

[50] Some of these, she points out, also apply to cross-class interactions between people of the same race, although the class barrier here, I might add, is sometimes manifest in terms of the 'classier' person's familiarity with or assimilation into the trappings of (middle class) whiteness.
[51] This is my own observation from a Numsa meeting, but I am indebted to Owen Manda for first pointing out to us how descriptions of class in a workplace setting were deeply racialized.
[52] Similarly despite a firm commitment to women's liberation I frequently deflect unwanted advances by reference to a non-existent husband despite the awful implications, because it's easier than fighting about it every time.
[53] In fact being 'the right kind of white' often introduces other form of deference, such as expressions of wonderment
[54] Neither am I hereby advocating any form of 'privilege theory', which is often adequate for describing the effects of positionality but tends to lead us away, analytically, from the causes of and solutions to racism.

sometimes privileged with information that would not be shared with insiders; people may feel the need to explain things to outsiders that would be assumed to be understood by insiders). I cannot say I have found a solution to this problem, nor even a way to be sure when these distortions are operating, beyond being keenly aware of it in analysing the data.

A common way around this, getting black fieldworkers, feels ethically uncomfortable because it tends to perpetuate 'native informants' (to borrow Spivak's words – being the unequal inclusion of black people in the academy to extend the reach, understanding and careers of white academics). However interviews conducted for me by colleagues while I was out of town did provide a form of rudimentary triangulation of the more obvious ways that race might have affected the interviewer-interviewee relation and undoubtedly filled some gaps that may have otherwise been there.

While we are at this subject, let me state clearly that no-one was 'my research assistant'; these were colleagues and comrades. This fieldwork, noted in the acknowledgements and again in Table 1 (on page 92), does not fall squarely into 'native informant' mould because I relied primarily on my own interviews (with all the limitations thus implied and noted), and the intention in these instances was not to have people understand and 'interpret' for me; the intention was for someone to be present when I was physically distant at an important time in the strike. Nevertheless, autonomous people, not clones of me, were physically present, and hence gave me insights that I would not have arrived at alone, asked questions in their own fashion and related to people in ways different from me. Colleagues and comrades also accompanied me to the strikes as activists, for their own research or out of companionship, and of course we talked about the experience. People's contributions were still more pronounced when I had colleagues, comrades and friends help me translate toyi-toyism placards and sections of meetings.[55] I have acknowledged prominently in the text where specific insights came from, and I caution the reader to remember that everyone who contributed gave more than time and some nuggets of

[55] I relied completely on others to translate longer isiZulu extracts, anything in Setswana or Sesotho, and especially slang and idiomatic words and phrases. I translated Afrikaans myself, and started the translation of some isiZulu placards and songs myself, but needed assistance to check or complete these translations.

information, having shaped my thinking and thus the final product, even if I alone took the work the last mile.[56]

Coming back to the relation between the researcher and the people being interviewed, it must nevertheless be taken as given that there have been aspects of the intersections of race and class, at the level of subjectivities, that have been obscured by the fact of me being white, and this is no small thing in a thesis about class identities in strikes, given Owen Manda's observation that class terminology was expressed in or replaced by race terminology in the workplace setting, and much more so than in a township residential setting.

I would hazard, however, that the nature of public service workers in South Africa might have mitigated, without eradicating, some of the crudest forms of silencing described above in my research. Teachers, nurses and administrators, the backbone of the public service, were historically considered middle class (and therefore high status) in South Africa; are usually confident with English; are much more likely to have a black director or head of department than in the private sector (thus slightly loosening the subjective if not the objective conflation of class and race)[57]; and in the case of nurses, enjoy more autonomy in their day to day work than in the private sector. Also historically there was a belief, held even by whites and not without good reason, that the public sector provided protected employment for (by implication, incompetent) white people under apartheid. Hypothetically, this might have subtly altered the distortion of black-white interactions in this setting more in the direction of condescension, scorn, defiance or indeed indifference to whites. However this is, for the moment, mere hypothesis.

I am much more confident that my research was less distorted by the kind of problems that sometimes distorted movements around researchers embedded in or dipping into smaller 'poor people's' organisations (Mdlalose 2014). Public sector workers in general command relatively greater power and status in society and greater material resources of their own, via their salaries and hence their unions, than shack-

[56] This is still not the end of the matter, of course, because doctoral students do not usually have a research account to pay people to fill in for them. I had one because I registered for this study while employed on a short term contract in the university, and was later allowed discretionary use the portion allocated by the university of the government subsidy for publications from that employment. But it is also true that my education and the work experience which got me that work were gained on an intensely unequal playing field.

[57] Although whites may remain over-represented in middle layers of management. Nevertheless Mosa Phadi lamented the loss of a distinctly black workplace culture when she left the public sector to return to university-linked research (in-person discussion, circa 2012).

dwellers' movements. Their strike and their unions were huge. I was a vanishingly insignificant resource to them once they had realised that I was not actually a journalist, and I was moreover not directly embedded in their unions[58], and therefore relatively powerless to distort their movement.

Did I nevertheless similarly romanticise the strike and the strikers, in a classic Marxist-on-worker research problem, in the way that the 'academics and left activists coming from the suburbs found shack-dwellers who could be made to look like their dreams and assumptions' (Mdlalose 2014, 345)? That charge is best answered by the findings chapters themselves, while keeping in mind Ahmed Veriava's point[59] that the 'romanticisation' of potentials in the movement by their own members was never the same as the static, career-building academic kind.

I will now look at how the research developed.

4.3.2. Building a research process

Here I am going to describe what I did, narratively and more or less chronologically. This seems like a rather childish approach for an academic thesis but I have done it like this to better illustrate the improvisation of the research process.

For the 2007 strike, I put on an old socialist t-shirt and went to a big march in what was then called Pretoria, with my colleague and comrade, Mosa Phadi, and our unit's brand new movie camera. There we watched what happened, took photos, used convenience sampling modified by awareness of gender, race, age, occupation and so on to conduct very short initial interviews (starting with the question 'why are you here?') using a voice recorder and the movie camera, recorded some of the speeches, and filmed marchers passing. The value of analysing toyi-toyis and placards occurred to me when I watched this footage that same weekend. (I assess the relative merits of various means of recording data later in the chapter).

The interviews were generally very short in this setting, where people were moving fast and very excited. Whenever we interviewed someone, we asked for a phone number with the intention of conducting at least one further interview in a more leisurely setting. (More about interviews later.)

[58] Funnily enough, by the time of the first strike I was only not a Nehawu member because they didn't know how to deduct subs for contract workers.
[59] In person discussion, date unclear.

I continued to attend general marches and rallies around Johannesburg and Pretoria (now called Tshwane), where I continued to expand my sample with modified convenience sampling.

I then began to visit the pickets at the Chris Hani Baragwanath (CHB) Hospital. This flash of inspiration was also born of chance: my offices at the time were a kilometer past the hospital and I got the idea on the way to work. Picketing, clearly, was going to provide an important source of collective identity, and an important strike culture. Because I was otherwise-employed at the same time I was not able to immerse myself in the strike as if I was a striker but I was able to visit this picket a number of times, for a couple of hours at a time. Interviewing here was tightly controlled – strikers were unwilling to speak to me on record and referred me to the shop stewards - but I was free to photograph and record songs, speeches and the report-back meetings which happened from time to time, and to interview some of the shop-stewards.

This methodology unfortunately missed one category – stay-at-home strikers, who stopped going to work but did not attend marches, meetings and the like. This category doubtless affected the strike but their imprint on the thesis is very faint indeed. Readers are cautioned that this is a study primarily with meetings-and-marches strikers.

As you will see, my research was all done around Gauteng and mostly around Johannesburg. Regional specificities are inevitable in terms of histories and levels of organisation, distance from union head offices and national capitals, types of employment, local alliances and ideologies, and many other dynamics, but my research is not placed to specify these.

About a week into the strike I began follow-up interviews with my still-expanding sample. Later I linked these interviews to events in the strike.

During one of the CHB pickets I spoke briefly in support of the strike. I was motivated to do this by my activism, but it didn't hurt me in terms of trust. Despite the difficulties of interviewing during picketing, I was able to discuss the strike informally with strikers while hanging around waiting for something to happen. These discussions were analytical and strategic, and not mere information gathering but usually interventionist in the sense that I listened, but also offered opinions, suggestions and occasionally criticism. I did not feel comfortable bringing the movie camera to these pickets, not only because it was bulky, heavy and made interviewing difficult for a lone

researcher, but also because I did not want people to feel intimidated in light of the threat to dismiss essential workers.

At the Chris Hani pickets I also encountered comrades from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, who I knew from the APF. SECC's offices were also just down the road, and I involved myself with their strike support campaign, which included handing leaflets to patients coming and going from the hospital. It thus occurred to me to wonder what kind of class identities the strike might be inducing in those *not* on strike, so I interviewed a few patients as they were entering the hospital. I also once went into the hospital where I attempted to interview people not on strike. I did this after consultation with shop-stewards, as I did not want to damage the trust I had established, but having explained to them that my purpose was not to 'out' non-strikers. I did, however, offer to feed back any insights about what made the difference between strikers and non-strikers. In the end, I secured one interview there and another two later at the housing department in Johannesburg.

I collected strike leaflets when I could get my hands on them. It was natural to watch the TV news and read the newspapers' coverage of the strike and I began to make notes on the former and collect the latter for clipping later. I also chatted, off the record, with a friend who was an official in one of the public sector unions.

The first levels of systematic, but non-academic, analysis began while the strike was still on. To have avoided activist theorizing in the strike would have been unthinkable and impossible. I discussed the strike at length with comrades in Keep Left and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. I also reported on the strikes for a socialist magazine, Socialism from Below; for the Socialist Worker in Britain; and for the International Socialism Journal. I 'lent' anonymised interviews to an activist journalist from the USA who was writing about the strike. On the basis of my experiences, I intervened in several debates in social movement meetings about the nature of the trade unions, their members and the implications of their relations with the ruling party in that period. Given the nature of this thesis, activist theorizing – looking for possibility in the strike – would prove integral to the research.

Quite a few good ideas fell by the wayside in the press of life. For example, I tried to interview union officials, but they were just too busy, always surrounded by a crush of formal media, and never available later. Sadder, I noticed that many strikers had their own cameras and cellphone cameras, but the idea of photo-elicitation interviews (Clark-IbáÑez 2004) never blossomed because later interviews were conducted on

the phone. I also tried to get a couple of strikers to keep strike diaries during the time I knew I'd be away, but no-one took the bait (until the 2010 strike, when one teacher who had been a student in a short course I taught produced a marvellous document not only recording but interpreting her own experience).

Lawrence Ntuli interviewed strikers after the end of the strike on my behalf (see Table 1 on page 92).

I was lucky enough to get access to a Nehawu employee's personal archive of strike documents and emails which he donated to the UJ library after the strike. Of course these present a 'skewed' picture in that they over-represent that union, but are nevertheless invaluable.

Between 2007 and 2010 I continued my research about the cleaners' strike as originally planned (being drawn more and more into the cleaners' attempts to continue organizing) and 'dipped into' a number of other strikes which came to my attention, mentioned above, while missing a number of arguably more important strikes, such as the national motor-component workers' strike which followed hot on the heels of the public sector strike, simply because they were not active in Johannesburg.

In 2009, public sector wage adjustments were in the news and I interviewed six people by telephone about the aftermath of the strike and their opinions of subsequent political developments.

In 2010, when the public sector went on strike again, it was logical to use the same techniques and sample to document this strike. On the first day of this strike, Tabitha Nong and Botsang Mmoepe took photos and interviews for me because I was out of town for work (see Table 1 below).

I continued to expand my sample but also, mainly telephonically, interviewed people from the old sample. In this strike some colleagues accompanied me for their own purposes: Samuel Amakoa, who was researching teachers' unions, and Dhiraj Nite, who was new in the country and curious about strikes. I have been able to draw on their photos and discussions with them after attending; Samuel gave me his interviews and recordings too, though I used only one (to corroborate one of my own recordings) because I had too much data of my own.

Table 1: Colleagues who helped me collect or process data

In chronological order	
Mosa Phadi	Helped with filming and interviewing on the first marches
Ludwe Ndibaza^	Went together to some marches as an activist
Kameelah Rasheed^	Went together to a march and later shared photos
Trevor Ngwane^	Real time translation in a strike support meeting.
Bongani*	Conducted interviews in my absence
Lawrence Ntuli*	Did telephone interviews in my absence
Guy Slingsby^	Shared his archive and discussed union dynamics.
Siniko Qinqwa*	Translated toyi-toyis
Bostsang Moepe*^	Photos and interviews on a march in my absence; translated some recorded meetings; real-time translation of a meeting we were attending as activists.
Tabitha Nong*	Did interviews and photos on a march and telephone interviews in my absence.
Sam Amakoa^	Shared photos, interviews and discussions from our joint visits to the 2010 strike. Shared references with me.
Mondli Hlatshwayo^	Shared references, reported on a retail strike march for me.
Dhiraj Nite^	Shared photos and discussion after joint visits to strike meetings.
Jarred Bell^	Discussed after our joint visits to some strike meetings.
Nomancotsho Pakade(*)	Key insights about innuendo in songs and placards while translating some toyi toyis and meetings.
Gloria Mphekgwane	Translated placard.
Sam Tshepo Shoai	Translated several placards and toyi toyis in conversation.
Terri Maggot*	Created the Powerpoint slideshow and proofread captions.
** paid; ^ involved independently/for their own reasons; () partly.*	

In the second strike I spent most of the time with teachers: that was Samuel's interest, my offices had relocated, the teachers in 2010 had more mass meetings and less picketing, and were therefore easier to find. I visited the Chris Hani picket lines only twice this time, and observed pickets at Helen Joseph hospital on three occasions because this hospital was next door to my new offices.

This difference necessitates considerable caution in terms of comparison of the two strikes but does allow me to consider the special dynamics of the teachers' union, which I had already noticed during the 2007 strike, but to which I was not able to get close. The 2010 strike therefore allowed me to begin to fill that gap. Unfortunately my paid-work deadlines were tighter during this strike and the strike was shorter than the

previous strike by a week, meaning I covered far less of my original sample during the strike than I would have liked, but still enough to make for a meaningful study.

I ended up with the data summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of data captured during the 2007 and 2010 public sector strike

• **257 interviews** with approximately **150 individual strikers**, detailed later, mainly audio recordings with some also filmed, **50** of whom were interviewed **more than once**, and **19** who were interviewed **in both strikes**
• 3 interviews with non-strikers and about 12 interviews with patients which were recorded **only on paper**
• Approximately eight hours of **film** footage from 3 marches during the 2007 strike and 1 during the 2010 strike
• Approximately 1800 still **photos** (not all unique) mainly but not only of placards
• Audio recordings of 5 **meetings** (Soweto strike support, solidarity meeting, three teachers meetings) and handwritten notes of a strikers' meeting
• 29 audio clips of **speeches** during marches and pickets
• About 100 (non-unique) audio clips of **toyi-toyis** (more can be heard in the background of interviews)

I will return to these techniques in more detail below after I elaborate how what I did went beyond journalism.

4.3.3. Beyond journalism

Many strikers assumed I was a journalist, and there was a superficial resemblance in my techniques. I began with quick and dirty, on-the-spot impressionism, characterised by very short initial interviews, attempting to capture the atmosphere and 'colour' of the strike, and allowed the situation to suggest how to research rather than sticking to a pre-plan carefully linking theory with methods.

At the most basic level, a journalistic approach differs from social science in that the journalist needs first and foremost to discover and report, often descriptively, the

'facts' of a new situation while the social scientist wants to explain them and even to problematise their facticity. (Here I am using a rather caricatured picture of what constitutes journalism. Real life journalism, and real life academia, is both much better and much worse than represented here.) Investigative journalists may dig for hidden 'facts', and a good journalist may offer analytical explanations of events, but ultimately the aim imposed on the journalist is to tell the story while it is hot, and preferably to tell a story no-one else has told (without landing her employer in libel court). A mediocre journalist may begin and end his story with intimidation of scabs without ever asking how the situation arose, thus obscuring a long history of police attacks on strikers or the past court injunctions against picketing which impeded more peaceful ways of stopping scabbing.

Journalists are supposed to tell all sides of the story 'without fear or favour', but objectivity goes beyond balance, and in any case such balance is skewed by the twin pressures of the nature of profitable news and by power imbalances in society. Journalists are under pressure to emphasise what is novel, surprising and unusual. By way of illustration, the funeral of one Israeli soldier becomes more newsworthy than the tenth consecutive day of multiple Palestinian funerals. Meanwhile a solidly substantiated feature about miners whose urine is radioactive may never make it into print because the mining house concerned threatens to pull out its advertising[60], but no newspaper has yet been chastised for blaming a baby's death on strikers.

Of course academics face certain pressures that are superficially similar, such as the requirement of novelty in research, the pressure to publish or perish, and 'power effects', not only those described by Burawoy (1998) but also within the academy (which proliferates narrow niche studies of questionable relevance to society, mediocre and superficial papers rushed to publication amidst fear of rejection for being too controversial, and the decidedly anti-scientific phenomena of never attempting to replicate other people's results and failing to publish studies which fail to produce statistical effects). However academic enquiry looks for what is new and sensational in relation to a body of *theory*, rather than yesterday's news, and academic inquiry is supposed to build validity checks and objectivity into the research methods, rather than this being a matter of reliable sources and getting all sides of the story.

[60] Both examples are based on true stories from my time working on *Business Report* newspaper.

So how did I use journalistic techniques in a non-journalistic way? Much of this happens at the level of analysis but there were also differences in how I applied the techniques in the field.

First, once I had hit upon an idea I aimed to *systematize* what I was recording. So, rather than photographing the cutest placards and rushing back to the office before deadline, I aimed to photograph *all* home-made placards I came across, not only the most picturesque. When filming, I tended to record what was novel and difficult to capture on still camera, but on one occasion, rather than filming a few minutes of a march, I stood in one place and tried to film every contingent. Rather than finding a few novel soundbytes, I aimed to uncover both what was unusual *and* that which was repetitive. My selection of interviewees was essentially opportunistic, much as a journalist's might be, but I was aware of imbalances of men and women or of strikers in different occupations, and tried to correct these when looking for the next opportunity, as well as taking them into account during analysis. And I returned to the respondents throughout the course of the strike and beyond. Second, I did not aim for an appearance of neutrality by telling all sides of the story. Rather I aimed for objectivity by building a rounded picture of the situation, but in order to understand better a very specific viewpoint, namely that of the strikers' themselves. Third, I did not taken the strikers' representations of themselves and what they were doing to represent the whole story of what they were doing. Digging below the surface involved a search for social process and explanation, rather than hidden facts and telling the story.

4.3.1. The interviewed and the interviews

Interviews were crucial to get at the hidden element of the title - strikers' interpretations of what happened in the strike. Questions directly about identity are of limited use in getting at strikers' own identities, because they are cognitively filtered, but they allowed considerable insight on how strikers identified other actors in the strike. Other clues to identity came from how the respondents coloured general discussions about the unfolding of the strike and related issues.

I mentioned already that, over the course of the strikes, I accumulated at least 242 interviews with at least 114 individuals[61], as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of interviews, summarised

Total number of interviews (excludes CHB patients, 3 non strikers and casual discussion)		**257**
Minimum number of individuals interviewed (identified interviews)		117
Unidentified interviews (not anonymous)		3
Number of individuals interviewed only once (identified interviews)		**58**
	In 2007 only	34
	In 2010 only	24
Individuals interviewed more than once (identified interviews)		**62**
	In 2007 only	34
	In 2010 only	10
	In both strikes (includes 6 also interviewed in 2009)	16
	In 2007 and 2009 only	2

The number of repeat interviews (Table 4) with a respondent was not systemised. It depended purely on who was still available and willing to devote more of their time to me, with the imperative of linking interviews to events in the strike creating a kind of funnel effect: if someone talked to me a second time, I would definitely try for a third.

Table 4: Repeat interviews

Number of repeat interviews per individual	Number of respondents
2	32
3 or 4	21
5 or 6	9
Total	**62**

[61] To begin with I tried to keep track by noting each interview – name and date - in a notebook, but found it more reliable to start the interview by saying the date, time and name on the voice recording itself. This would not be a suitable technique in cases where complete anonymity is essential.

I used what I will call consciously adjusted convenience sampling to establish the sample. I approached people who looked approachable on big marches (and in 2010 at teachers' mass meetings). Refusals were not uncommon. At CHB, I went through the shop-stewards. I usually interviewed individuals but sometimes pairs and occasionally small groups. The conscious adjustment involved trying to get a spread of strikers according to genders, ages, sectors and unions, not particularly systematically but simply by looking for people different from those I'd interviewed already (a woman if I'd just interviewed a man, a Nehawu t-shirt after a Sadtu (South African Democratic Teachers Union) t-shirt after a plain t-shirt, a paramedic in uniform because I had not seen any other paramedics, and so on). This did achieve a reasonable spread of characteristics (at least 49 respondents were women and 61 were men; occupations and union membership are summarised in Table 5 and Table 6) but did not guarantee a good spread of one characteristic within another (for example, a balance of male and female teachers). However high context sensitivity in analysis compensates somewhat for this.

Table 5: Known occupations of strikers interviewed

Educators and principals		35
Nurses and student nurse	6	14
CHB kitchens, laundry	2	
Hospital clerks	5	
Hospital general workers	1	
Government departments	5	7
Home affairs	2	
Correctional services		3
Total		**59**

Table 6: Union membership of respondents when known

Nehawu	17
Sadtu	14
Pawusa	6
PSA	3
Popcru	2
Denosa	2
Nactu	1
Total:	**46**

The interviews and most of the thesis draw on both Cosatu and non-Cosatu members, even though much of the thesis is interested in Cosatu members' relation to the alliance, because the attitudes of the latter towards government also confronted the former's adherence to the alliance. Chapter 9 zooms in on three Cosatu members to confirm that the movements were not only among non-Cosatu union members.

The majority interviewed were strikers but we also interviewed three people from correctional services, which was included in the public services bargaining chamber but banned from striking under essential services, three non-strikers (one at CHB, two at the housing department during the first strike), two groups of bystanders at a march and another at a teachers' rally, 15 patients at CHB (not included in the count of interviews above, as these were recorded in my notebooks), the waitress wife of a hospital worker who saw my notes while serving me coffee, a learner from my organisation who came to a solidarity march, a Nehawu official at a march (not the one I knew before the strike), four security guards (one who I met first while leafletting in Johannesburg in support of the strike, one who I had interviewed for my original research, and two who I met at a one-day solidarity strike), a group of SECC strike supporters, and a manager observing the strike. These interviews were intentional but supplementary, and, except for the security guards and the prison warders, I did not try to interview these respondents again.

Of the 19 people interviewed in both strikes, ten were women; five Nehawu members, three Sadtu, two Denosa (Democratic Nursing Union of South Africa) and one PSA (Public Servants Association); three were nurses, three were teachers, one

was a hospital clerk, one a general hospital worker, one from home affairs, and one security guard.

I obtained verbal consent for interviews. Given the pace on marches, the explanation of the research was usually rudimentary when initiating short interviews ('Can I ask you some questions? It's for research I'm doing at university'). Some people asked for more information there and then. For those who did not, I explained in more detail at the end of the interview when asking if they would be willing to be interviewed again. In all other contexts, such as after meetings and at pickets and at the beginning of initial telephonic interviews, I explained that the interview was not for mainstream press and that publication would mainly take the form of a thesis and journal articles, and possibly some popular articles. In all interviews in any context, before asking the person's name, I always offered the option of using a false name (for example, 'What name shall I call you? It doesn't have to be your real name'.)

Although the strikes were protected, the conversations were emotive and frequently politically sensitive. Therefore I have, additionally, omitted or changed all names here in the thesis.

The interviews used very open ended questions and were not standardised across events. They were more repetitive within a particular event but I adapted interview questions freely to context and to individuals. Initial contact interviews on big marches generally started with a broad very open-ended question, most often 'why are you here today?' and later, variations such as 'How do you feel about [insert recent pronouncement of minister/the meeting we have just attended/the dismissal letters/etc]?' If the situation was conducive – if we were standing around rather than marching, if it wasn't too loud and if the respondent was not restless - I then went on to some of the questions borrowed from the cleaners' research and the Soweto research (such as 'Who are the friends and enemies of the strike?' or 'What class do you think you are?) or, later in the strike, a free ranging discussion about the strike. Otherwise I limited myself to lightly probing their answer to the first question and moved quickly to securing a phone number (for example, 'Why are you here today?' 'For 12%, that's all'. 'Tell me why do you need 12%?'). In follow up interviews I tried to be more systematic about identity related questions but increasingly kicked off by asking people simply how the strike was going and then teasing out identity related issues from there as the opportunity presented itself.

Conducting the follow up interviews by telephone saved time. It is doubtful that I would have secured as many follow up interviews if I had had to meet people in person. Disadvantages included the quality of the recordings (using Skype would probably have solved this) and the fact that people could easily get distracted by domestic tasks, children, barking dogs and so on. Also it was harder to read mood on the phone.

Unusually for a South African, I am fluent in only two languages: my mother tongue, English, and Afrikaans (which was compulsory when I was at school). This was not deadly to the research, given that many public sector workers are comfortable with English, but it is unfortunate because even people fluent in English are bound to be much more articulate and evocative in their mother tongues, so the intrinsic quality of the data as well as its actual content are affected (See for example Phadi and Manda 2010). Fieldworker interviews were in several languages and were translated by the fieldworker.

Except for the fieldworker interviews, I made my own summaries of interviews with some verbatim transcription. At the end of the first strike I also tabulated themes from the fieldworkers' transcriptions. I sometimes put the interviews and audio clips on shuffle and let them play while I looked through photos or did some manual work or housework. I analysed interviews in two ways: one way was to get 'aggregates' at different times in the strikes by listening to many different individuals at a particular time in the strike, drawing out recurrent themes and key differences. The other way was to listen to each individual's interviews consecutively to get a sense of development, which I did for the 19 people interviewed in both strikes.

4.3.2. Beyond the interview – placards and toyi-toyis.

I used two other windows on identity and identifications beyond the interviews.

First, hand-made placards. These are not rare in South African marches and strikes, but neither are they ubiquitous. Unions commonly distribute official, printed placards to marchers on their marches, while many marches and protests proceed without any. In these strikes, the hand-made placard rose above and beyond the call of duty, possibly because most public sector workers need a high level of literacy and have access to stationery. These placards were a golden resource for my study. A placard is a means of communication, carrying a message for the public and the employers, but it needs to fit onto a board small enough to carry and catch the eye.

The tendency therefore is to highly concentrated, colourful statements, sometimes funny, frequently emotive.

I captured placards on photo or film and analysed them in three stages, each time flipping back and forth through the photos on screen many times and on more than one occasion. The first pass, which began on downloading a set of photos, reinforced or challenged the impressions I'd formed in observation of the strike, and suggested some themes. The second stage involved winnowing down the photos to make a slideshow to accompany conference papers, which was both a way of developing and of illustrating themes. Again, this took place on many separate occasions during writing the papers. At this stage, though, I did not organise the photos into themes but left them in chronological order. The third stage, while writing the timelines in Chapters 6 and 7, involved organising placards into themes within the chronology, foregrounding their connection with themes/practices and events in the strike. Note that the appendix of photos below is not intended to be illustrative but discursive: they contain relevant information not easily transferred to text, ranging from apparent age, facial expression and bodily stance to whether a placard is printed, drawn or handwritten and in what style and with how much care.

It did not occur to me at the time, but if I was to do similar research again, I would asking people to explain their placards could work as a hook for an interview.

Second, in contemporary South Africa, no strike or protest[62] proceeds without plenty of toyi-toying. I have called these 'toyi-toyis' rather than songs because they combine words, melody and physical actions which (even when they are not directly interpretive as in the mimicking of mortars and machine guns, opening and closing of knees or blocking with buttocks) are crucial to the tempo and mood of the particular toyi-toyi and hence to its uses, as well as contributing to collective effervescence. Toyi-toyis do many things: they are communicative of message and of mood, they help to cement a collective, and they are used to build resolve, revive flagging spirits or let off steam. They are therefore important in projecting identities and in building strike cultures.

I analysed toyi-toyis by analysing content and context. I noted new toyi-toyis and adaptions of old toyi-toyis, their frequency, and the settings in which a particular toyi-toyi was be used.

[62] Except for those occasional oddities dominated by white people

4.3.3. Media archives and secondary sources

I used media reports on the strike to build the timelines in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, together with an archive of Nehawu documents from the first strike. I had kept some newspapers from the time of the strike but mostly I located articles by a simple online search of news, supplemented by following links. I used them to capture the chronology of the strikes, developments in bargaining, statements from government, official union statements and, in the case of the Nehawu docs, to expand the picture of how the strike was organised.

4.3.1. Relative strengths and weaknesses of various recording media

I used all the recording media I could lay my hands on to record the strike.

Pen and paper is slow and therefore distracting for the interviewer and hence for the respondent, and because it depends on the interviewer's cognition, it misses a lot, especially the things you do not realise are interesting until later. However it allowed me to get interviews with non-strikers who were worried about their anonymity and would not have spoken even on audio. Also, the batteries never run out unexpectedly and people rarely want to steal a used notebook.

Audio was my main means of recording. It is accurate, convenient and reliable now that you do not have to worry about flipping the tape (although it is still possible to only discover at the end of the Most Interesting Interview Ever that you pushed pause when you thought you were pushing record[63]). It captures something of the respondent's mood and changes in pace and volume of voice, which are often emotional cues. It affords respondents some anonymity, as their faces are not on camera, and people usually quickly forget they are being recorded. I also used it to capture song clips and speeches while concentrating on other observations, and some of these were also captured accidentally in the background of interviews. Without it I could not have meaningfully recorded meetings which were not in English. Because it is so easy, however, it is possible to record too much data.

Digital audio was excellent for a longitudinal study because it is time-stamped, which helped to keep events in order years after the data was captured.

[63] Based on a sad but true story

Photos not only allow the researcher to capture a scene, an impression of the size of a march, or a placard very quickly, they also capture details that the researcher might not have noticed or realised were important at the time, including background detail. My photos of placards, for instance, allowed me to later pay attention to who was carrying the placard: their gender, roughly their age, and sometimes their union. Looking back at photos also reminded me of details that I'd forgotten. In Chapter 8, I use photostories to build a picture of strike practices. However photos impinge on anonymity, particularly when the person photographed is not aware that they are being photographed; in the analysis, I have therefore taken care to obscure faces when it seems that the placard could be used to slight a person's 'professional integrity'. Even if the person was knowingly willing to take the risk, it is not my place to 'out' them. Photos can also trick one into a kind of selective memory, where things that were not recorded on camera recede in importance or disappear altogether.

Digital cameras allow time-stamping a photo or, in my case, the file itself, which helped me to keep events in order years after the data was captured. (For those who wish to use photos in this way, take care not to lose time stamps if copying rather than uploading photos.)

Film is an extraordinarily powerful medium, for all the reasons mentioned about photos with the additional ability to record sound and movement. It was, therefore, uniquely suited for capturing toyi-toyis. In interviewing, it can capture details that are invisible in stills and audio, such as a person fidgeting or sitting calmly, or their changing facial expressions. However it's hard for respondents to forget it's there, and many find it intimidating while some feel it requires acting. The camera we used was suitable for high quality, professional filming (far beyond what I needed) but also therefore big and bulky, making it difficult to interview people by myself when interviewing on the move and a pig to carry on marches. It's costly to transfer from tape to digital, the resulting files are very big and the footage is continuous, making it difficult to navigate during analysis. Despite this, film was unparalleled for capturing a rounded, atmospheric impression of the big marches. If the point is just data collection, however, and the researcher does not intend to also make a documentary, a hand-held video camera would serve just as well and overcome many of the problems.

4.4. Conclusion: a fitted methodology

In summary, I improvised methodology to adapt to a fast-moving context, using multiple techniques to open various windows (toyi-toyis, placards, interviews) onto strikers' contextualised individual and collective subjectivities. I collected data on multiple scales (consistent with an interpellated understanding of identity) and across time (consistent with investigating a moving subject, thus centring process) to build a multi-layered reconstruction of the strikes that facilitated *holistic temporal comparison*. The truly formative elements of the methodology were an 'engagement with the world' that was sensitive to what *could* be, not only what was (consistent with activist theorising), and a genetic deductive approach (consistent with conjunctural analysis) focussed on a paradox – at the time of the research still open-ended - around how the strikes damaged but did not damage the alliance. In the chapters following, I employed this methodology to analyse the strikes as a *chronology of turning points.*

Chapter 5. Strike one, 2007: 'We put you where you are and look how you treat us'[64]

Over the next three chapters I will argue that the 2007 strike ('strike one') was a result of and a challenge to the actually existing *practice* of the alliance, without necessarily *re-theorising* the alliance. Cosatu leaders next focused on changing the leaders in their alliance partner, the ANC, thus instituting a notably different technique for 'practicing' the alliance (open contestation), but one within the bounds of its original theory, as the first section below will clarify. Nevertheless, the challenge legitimised open critique of the government, prying open an interstice in which identities were destabilised.

It also inadvertently set up an experimental test of the theory of the alliance, which worked initially in a way which seems *counter*-eventful in the 'deflection' of this strike, but proved more eventful *for identities* in the next strike (Chapter 8).

The bulk of this section is organised into a long-view 'timeline' of the strike (Chapter 6) - a view from outside - followed by a closer examination of subjective identity developments during the strike in Chapter 7 – strikers' views. This analytical distinction is necessary to reserve the possibility that some identity events were not visible in the events or outcomes of the strike, but it is an uncomfortable distinction because strikers' identities not only 'resulted' from the strike but were also among the motivators and catalysts of its course. I have therefore not resisted describing identity themes in the timeline where they flow into and from the course of the strike, although I have mostly saved interview material for the next chapter. The relation between the two chapters should not in any sense be understood as cause and effect nor structure vs. subjectivity, and the reader who skips straight to the second will miss many important identity themes in the first. Rather, Chapter 6 should be understood as a wide shot of the strike, leaning to description of the public face of the strikes and the

[64] Some initial analysis now contained in this chapter and the following two chapters was presented at the South African Sociological Association conference in then-Pretoria in 2007 and some at the How Class works conference, Suny, Stonybrook 2010

‘strike cultures’ of the strike, plus analysis of how the strike unfolded. Chapter 7 will then zoom in to analyse how individuals made sense of the identities/identifications within the strike collective.

Before that, this chapter, Chapter 5, will sketch some elements of context and background, beginning with a brief history of the alliance and the role of nationalism in it; from there, I will sketch the political and economic context which increasingly strained it in the years leading up to the strike. Elsewhere, I wrote: ‘Trade union mobilisations seldom appear in writing about social movements, and it is seldom noticed that South Africa’s second delivery movement, whose beginning is marked by riots in the Western Cape in 2005, was a workplace movement as well as a township movement’ (Ceruti 2012, 101). This chapter aims to situate the 2007 strike in a context of broader discontent. The chapter will then tie up some loose ends about who went into the strikes and how I conceptualise public workers as workers, as well as how they may conceptualise themselves in ‘normal’ times.

5.1. Are we there yet? The alliance in theory and practice, in brief

The Tripartite Alliance as we know it today came into being in 1990 when Cosatu, which had already identified itself as part of the ‘mass democratic movement’, formally joined the alliance between the ANC and the SACP after the unbanning and return from exile of those organisations. This restored a labour component which had been missing from the alliance since the collapse of SACTU in the 60s after political organisations were banned in the wake of Sharpeville.

The glue in the alliance gradually formalised by the SACP and the ANC in the 1950s was nationalism or, to be precise, the SACP’s deference to nationalism in the form of the National Democratic Revolution. Although ‘the ANC is not a class organisation championing the interests of one class’, and while the Communist Party is the vanguard of and ‘fights for the power of the working class’, the ‘alliance between the ANC/SACP is very clear, its goal is the establishment of a national democratic, non-racial state, a popular government of the people … the South African Communist Party is committed to this goal’ (Dawn 1987, 16–17).

One consequence of this analysis was to recognise the ANC as the leader of the alliance during the ‘first stage’, being the ‘representative of all the patriotic force of our country … recognised by all the elements of the national liberation movement,

including the SACP, as the leader of the alliance' (Dawn 1987, 16–17) and therefore able to forge unity of the oppressed nation. Underpinning the theorisation and practice of the alliance was what became known as a two-stage approach. As the SACP leader Moses Mabhida put it, 'We are clear about the priorities of our struggle, first national liberation and then an advance towards socialism' (Tambo and Mabhida 1984). In turn, this strategy was theorised around the concept of Colonialism of a Special Type (see, among many others, Bundy 1989; Callinicos 1985; Hudson 1986, Karon and Ozinsky 1986, Lewis 1986), which held that South Africa 'combines the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony in a single, indivisible geographical, political and economic entity' (Bundy 1989, 3), which results in 'a convergence, among the colonised, the nationally oppressed (blacks) of economic and class interests' (SACP cited in Hudson n.d.).

In theory and in practice, therefore, the cross-class alliance presumed the subsumption of divergent class interests to unity in the anti-apartheid struggle, and for communists to defer to the ANC leadership.

For the rest of this section, I present a summary developed and substantiated in a number of my own works done over some time. These are where readers can find a great deal more detailas well as other sources.

The unions had played an independent and often leading role in the recurring waves of strikes and protests during the 1980s that helped to end apartheid and forced the negotiations forward (see Ceruti 2021). Cosatu frequently planned together with its allies, the non-racial, multi-class United Democratic Front (UDF), but firmly resisted affiliating to the UDF. The UDF was a host of affiliated campaigns and organisations big and small, such as school/university groups, civic bodies from townships, campaigns against repression, detention and conscription, and so forth. Many of these were steeped in 'Congress politics'[65], which was not absent from the union movement either.

Cosatu joined the alliance in 1990, influenced too by the newly unbanned, newly returned from exile SACP, which had quickly moved to recruit union members, and perhaps by the UDF dissolving itself, mostly into the ANC. But Cosatu had not lost the habit of independence in the tumultuous years of transition that followed, and on crucial occasions, the federation seized the reins when the ANC dithered (see Ceruti

[65] Most often defined as the non-racial, Freedom Charter-centred politics of the ANC and its allies.

2021). Yet they also found abundant common ground against the apartheid regime, and it is to be expected that any bonds that were forged amongst the new allies in that period would be deep, given the intensity of the times.

In 1994, a crucial element in the theorisation of the alliance moved forward in actuality when the ANC won two thirds of the vote: by all previous theorisations, was this not the achievement of the first stage? Did the theory stand up to developments?

The transition had been intensely contested not only physically by the apartheid regime, but also ideologically by international and local capital and global powers, in the context of the collapse of 'actually existing socialism'. By the time the ANC started making actual state policy, it had already shifted substantially from the kind of national liberation economics that could be mistaken for socialism (Ceruti 1995). Only two years after that first election, Mbeki had already produced that government's 'home grown Thatcherite program'.

It may therefore seem paradoxical that this is the period where the unions' differences with the ANC were heard less and less in public. Nevertheless, the alliance gave union and former union figures such as Alec Erwin access to the policy-making process. They were not immune to the post-USSR economic neo-orthodoxies that had taken root in the ANC (Ceruti 1995), but Cosatu had its own relationship goals. Social policy unionism and national interest were sparkling in the federation's leaders' eyes, and for some time, they accepted the ANC as the center of the alliance and all three partners agreed to never fight in public for the sake of the policies they intended to develop together.

By the time of my study, many things were still holding people to the alliance, including notions of national pride. But that secretive intimacy at the top of the alliance was wearing thin, abraded by frustration. The second stage seemed to have receded into the far future in favour of wrangling capitalism, and the alliance seemed not to be working as an effective channel for the unions. The next section turns to these intensification of tensions in the alliance.

5.2. The political and economic context of 2007

The years and months leading up to the strike were increasingly volatile politically. Mbeki was still president, but cracks were showing. Mbeki gained his reputation as a sophisticated statesman who steered South Africa down the path of

neoliberalism. That path took the African National Congress (ANC) far from its promises during the country's first democratic elections. Mbeki's arrogance within the ANC and his willingness to alienate trade union leaders in defence of that path became legendary (See, for example, Buhlungu, Southall, and Webster 2006, 223). As tensions with Mbeki's style grew, the strategic decisions involved in even procedural strikes took on a more volatile quality. Take the example of the South African Transport and General Workers Union (Satawu). Satawu was a relatively new general union, formed in 2000 (from the Transport and General Workers Union, TGWU), which aimed to organise in the 'difficult' new sectors such as subcontracted cleaners and security. The union was involved in 25 disputes in 2003 and 20 in 2004. Only the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) approached these figures with 20 strikes in 2003, while other unions chalked up 5 or 9 or 1 dispute.

It is possible that union officials were hoping for some easy victories from an expanding economic pie. By 2006, the year of the security strike, Thabo Mbeki was proclaiming the success of his neo-liberal policies as South African economists announced an economic turnaround: productivity was steady, business confidence was up and several companies announced large profits (Numsa 2005). The cost to the ANC's own constituency had been enormous. At least a quarter of people of working age were unemployed by the government's own conservative figures – 40 percent using the expanded definition - and a survey by Naledi, the research arm of Cosatu, 'found that between 1998 and 2002 workers' share of national income dropped from 50 percent to less than 45 percent. By contrast, company profits rose from just less than 27 percent to 32 percent' (Letsoalo 2007).

In the decade after democracy, union strategy was dominated by a reliance on labour law combined with the belief that unions could influence broad economic policy through high-level meetings of the tripartite alliance, generally dubbed 'corporatism' (Desai and Habib 1995; Habib and Taylor 1999) but which I would rather characterise as 'social policy unionism'. Strikes and protests were generally limited to one-day shows of strength. A number of small community organisations, such as those affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum, coalesced outside the Tripartite Alliance to tackle distributional issues and were generally sidelined by union leaders.

Things came to a head on three fronts by 2005. As the government began planning for the 2006 local government elections, protests first exploded in a township in the Western Cape where residents were still using bucket toilets, and spread rapidly.

In 2005 there were reportedly 881 protests, averaging one or two a day, according to figures announced in parliament (although Duncan and Valley (2009) caution that the recording of figures may be problematic). Many of those involved seem to have been ANC supporters, members or sometimes local branch activists distanced from the steering room of Mbeki's tight ship. Their demands were couched in terms of broken promises, accountability and democracy. The delivery protests precipitated a crisis in the ANC. Party members could see that the organisation was being cautioned that its blank cheque was reaching expiry. The 2005 ANC national general congress revolted against Mbeki. First, the congress threw out an Mbeki-backed proposal to reduce workplace rights for young employees. Second, it demanded a rethink of internal procedures - for instance, making the president more accountable to the organisation.

Mbeki's policies were also creating more and more friction with the unions, and a public spat broke out between Mbeki and Vavi. Vavi believed the government should change course, favouring more interventionist policies to increase employment; Mbeki insisted on a steady course and reminded Vavi, none too sweetly, that Cosatu was not the government. Unions were feeling the impact of the jobs crisis and wage restraint from the bottom to the top. Many had lost thousands of members to unemployment and casualisation (Buhlungu 2006, 7; Pillay 2008a), increasing the burden on some of the employed. Even a cleaner might feel privileged compared to her unemployed neighbour, but it's doubtful that many workers felt like labour aristocracy. The pressures on the rank and file meshed with different but related pressures on the officials, who not only had to face the weakening of the unions which employed them but also the scorn of members watching their living standards drop while their leaders were repeatedly snubbed by Mbeki. Vavi and Mbeki had traded insults before, but this time the anger did not subside. On 27 June 2005 the turnout for one of several scheduled one-day strikes surprised everyone, indicating that the desire to 'do something' about the state of affairs was deep and broad in general society. About two million people supported the strike against job losses and about 30,000 crammed into the centre of Johannesburg. There the assembled marchers heard Vavi lambast Mbeki. A few days earlier Mbeki had suspended the deputy president, Jacob Zuma, from the cabinet because he was facing charges of corruption connected to an arms deal. Zuma had never shown any particular enthusiasm for workers' struggle, but he was from the old school of the ANC, which listened to the unions before ignoring their suggestions, and came from a rural area rather than a posh university like Mbeki (See

Ceruti 2008; Buhlungu, Southall, and Webster 2006). The battle between Zuma and Mbeki was thus linked to that between labour and capital, and Vavi thus sent a signal that it was acceptable to directly confront Mbeki, his policies and the capitalists who benefited from them. It is likely that this increased union members' confidence. That same week, at a strike rally of municipal workers, Vavi said, 'Workers have little reason to celebrate the gains of democracy as the rich have become richer and the poor poorer,' and warned that the strike was the first of many (Staff Reporter 2005c). The anger was compounded when several company executives decided to celebrate the 'feelgood factor' with enormous pay increases—for themselves (Staff Reporter 2005a; Robinson 2005). Retail executives rejected workers' demands for a 9 percent pay rise, while, as the Naledi survey says:

> Studies have shown that, between 2005 and 2006 alone, executive pay rose by as much as 34 percent. Research conducted by independent analysts, the Labour Research Service, and trade union Solidarity demonstrates that executives in South Africa enjoy the bulk of company wealth, while the gap between remuneration of CEOs and that of workers runs by a factor of over 50 to one. In other words, remuneration for the average CEO is more than 50 times that of the average worker in the country. (Letsoalo 2007)

This was like a declaration that Mbeki's economic turnaround was not for everyone. However if unionists were hoping for easy victories now that there was money to spare, they had underestimated capital's understanding of wage restraint as the key to bumping up profits. Capital dug in to try and starve out the various strikes. The settlements ending these strikes were neither clear defeats nor victories. But the strikes did create a sense of a battle unleashed, in which the strikes themselves were a first shot across the bows. For example, a group of cleaners asserted that they had not won their demands in the strike, but still saw the strike as a victory because they had stood up for their rights. Specific questions about strategy and tactics in the strike were often prefaced, 'Next time we strike, we must make sure that…'. (Cleaners' focus group, 2008)

Delivery protests continued into 2007.The government's initial strategy to deal with the protests was a public relations exercise: 'Quick response and communication', and a cautioning of councillors 'not to make unrealistic promises'. Mbeki himself went on a gruelling tour of poor communities, where he passed the buck to local officials. That quickly gave way to a second reply from the government—more rubber bullets and arrests—when delivery protests erupted again in September. The new protests,

mainly over housing, hopped around Soweto, spreading to the townships of south and east Johannesburg, to Alexandra, to Cape Town and beyond. The protesters now numbered in the low thousands, rather than the hundreds. Police ran out of rubber bullets during a day of skirmishes with some 2,000 people from Kliptown. Some 50 people were arrested in Alexandra and Johannesburg. Even a picket by striking auto workers in Germiston, west of Johannesburg, was attacked by police (report from a friend involved in the strike).

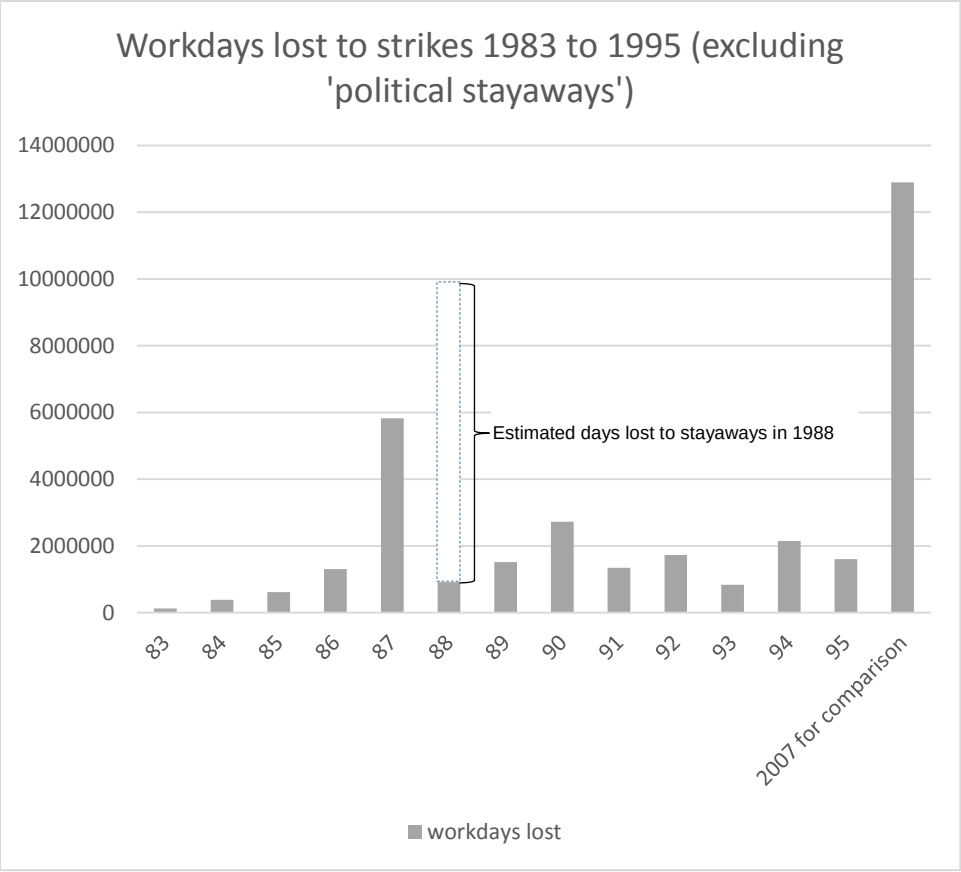
These issues went right to the heart of the ANC itself, creating serious battles at its congress and policy conference. Crucially, much of this debate was cast in terms of capital versus labour. So, for example, ANC strategist Joel Nietshitenzhe defended a proposed economic policy document at the conference by saying that 'our revolution is multi-class' and should not become a 'hostage to narrow sectoral interests'. Vavi replied that 'as the majority, the working class cannot be dismissed as pursuing narrow sectoral interests'. (Vavi, 2007) The ANC youth league also replied to the document, saying, 'We have the problem of capital and labour being treated as equal partners of the developmental state… There is an absence of characterising monopoly capital as an enemy in the unfolding democratic revolution' (Tabane and Robinson 2007).

However Vavi and the leaders of the Communist Party remained constrained by their political outlook, as predicted by the contributions considered in the introduction. They would not look beyond the outcome of the battle within the ANC. At the twelfth congress of the South African Communist Party, Vavi argued, 'The ANC remains an important progressive formation for the working class. The challenge is how we consolidate, retain and deepen its progressive posture and working class leadership under the current conditions of intense contestation. As ANC members we need to defend the progressive strand in ANC policy and its continued bias towards the working class.' He argued to change the 'current situation where the movement works…like a rubber stamp and the alliance a crisis management body' (Sapa 2007o) but increasingly placed Zuma as the great hope for the workers' corner (although Zuma's comment during the strike, that the public sector strike was damaging the country's image abroad, placed him firmly in the camp of those who want to balance between labour and capital.

5.2.1. The return of mass movements: the eve of the 2007 strike

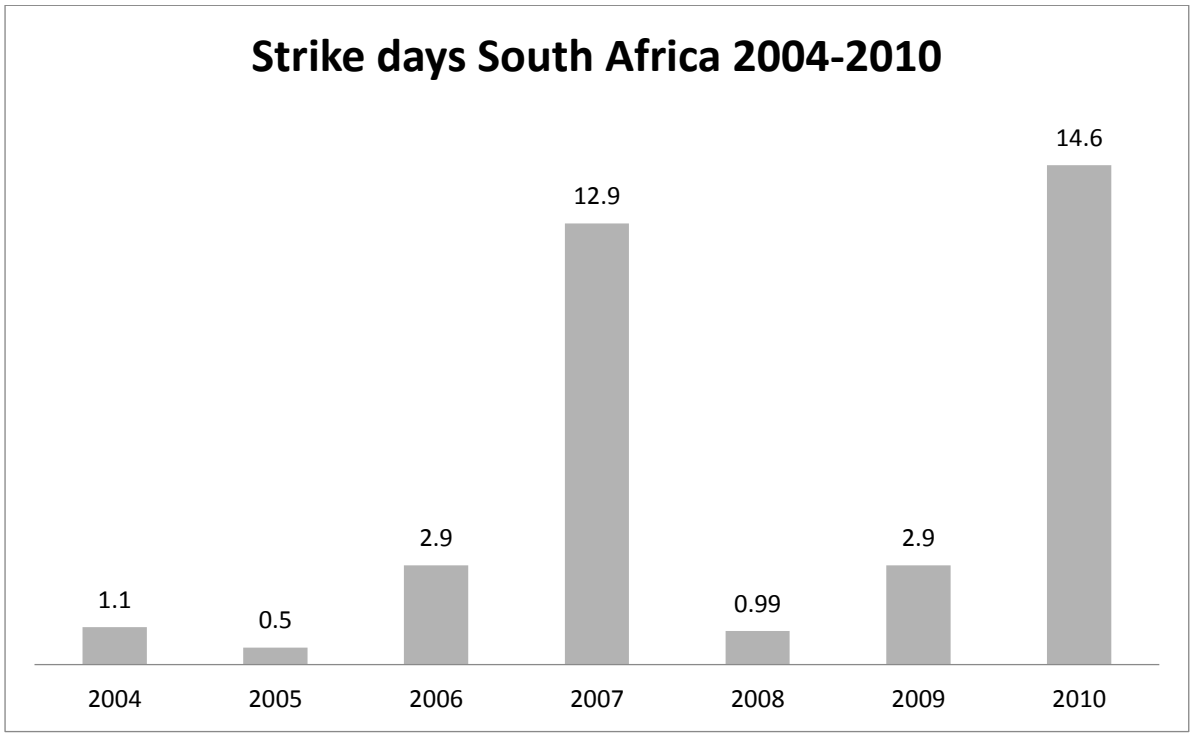
Numbers alone do not make a strike eventful, but the size of the 2007 strike relative to its immediate past was significant at that time, coming amongst a generally rising level of strikes (Figure 2). After the first democratic elections (see Figure 1), the number of strike days declined steadily for a decade, and only begin to turn around in 2006. The three high profile, bitter strikes by security guards, outsourced cleaners and Shoprite workers pushed strike days to 2.9 million in 2006. The mid-2007 strike report from Andrew Levy Consultants put strike days at 11 million for the first half of the year alone (*BR* 2007; Letsoalo 2007) before subsequent strikes in the petrol, tyre and pharmaceutical industries and others brought the total for the year to 12.9 million working days shown in Figure 2 (Andrew Levy, quoted in Sunday Times 2009).

Figure 1: Strike days in South Africa, 1983 to 1995



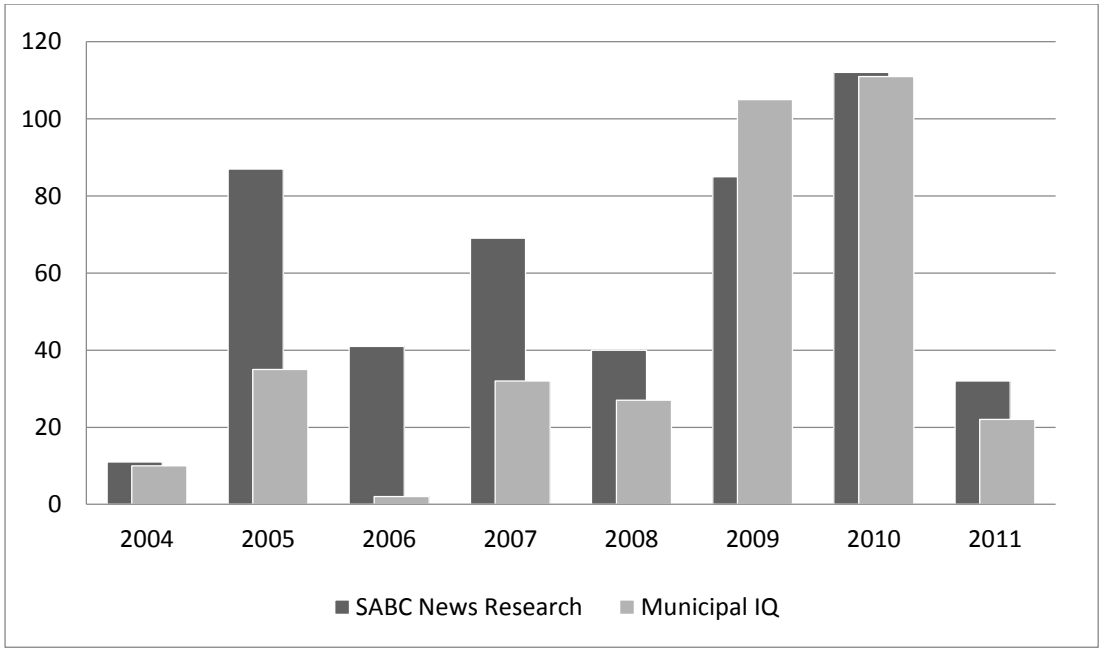
Source: compiled by the author from South African Statistics 2001, Statistics South Africa

Figure 2: Strike days in South Africa, 2004 to 2010



Source: Andrew Levy Employment.

Figure 3: Protests in South Africa, 2004 to 2011



Source: SABC News Research and Municipal IQ. The 2011 figures include the periods until May (SABC) and April (Municipal IQ). Taken from Alexander and Pfaffe (2011)

More work days were lost to strikes in the first half of 2007 than in the previous seven years *combined*. The next most strike prone year in the democratic era until then, the year of the elections, 1994, clocked up just 3.9 million days. This made the 2007 strike the largest industrial strike recorded until then, dwarfing even the political stayaways of 1988 (Figure 1).

The rhythm of strikes was modulated by three year bargaining agreements, but, as Figure *3* shows, the strike levels tracked a revival in community protests. A search through one news website, www.sabcnews.com, produced reports of the following protests over just more than two months in 2007: 20 May, police fired rubber bullets at protesters in Mamelodi; 29 May, 1,000 people in the Free State burned tyres demanding electricity, five arrested; 26 June, 800 people gathered in Sebokeng to protest poor service delivery; 15 July, hostel residents blocked roads during a march for clean drinking water and better housing; 17 July, people from Langa in Cape Town marched to parliament to demand houses; also in July, people in Mamelodi and, separately, Maropeng forced their way into the municipal offices, and about 500 people from Philippi in the Cape burned tyres, stoned vehicles and marched to the council offices after their homes flooded. There were also protests demanding housing in Thembalihle and Kliptown in Soweto, and Posmasburg. Protests in Khutsong had dragged on since 2003 when Khutsong was “relocated” from the richer province of Gauteng into the much poorer North West despite residents’ express wishes to the contrary.

Was this a strike wave, or merely a series of co-incident strikes? I argue that this was a strike wave for two reasons. First, the strikes all responded to the same economic period of hardship and growing inequality, within a rapidly unfolding but common political context. Many originated, too, in the crisis of a trade unions strategy which had come to rely on labour law and high level meetings between government and labour leaders. Second, these strikes produced a series of unifying themes across the years and strikes, which became at times capable of encompassing both the strikes and growing township struggles, such as the frequent cry for ‘a government that listens to the workers’. It also produced a rudimentary sense, both mental and practical, of being caught up in a wave of connected events. For example, some strikers from Karrant Beef marched together with the Shoprite workers to Diepkloof Shoprite in 2006 (my observation, 2006), the year before the public strike. This sense may have extended beyond the strikes themselves: in 2008, I interviewed a group of

subcontracted catering workers who were contemplating striking. I asked them to think back to their feelings about the controversial security guard's strike in 2006, hoping to assess how their own situation might have modified their earlier views. 'We supported them. Because we knew that one day we would be on strike.' Whatever they actually thought in 2006, these workers had now become certain that their place in society would result in a strike. (Their dispute never came to a strike).

5.3. Who went into the strikes?

In the introduction. I mentioned the contention that Cosatu had become a labour aristocracy, and the public sector strike seemed to confirm that for some activists and analysts.

Cosatu's changed composition reflected a restructured labour market, with outsourcing absorbing unskilled work while, as Habib and Valodia (2006, 234) showed, the number of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs had decreased in most sectors (except financial) while the number of highly skilled jobs had increased in most sectors between 1998 and 2002. Habib and Valodia wondered whether shopstewards' attitudes to service delivery reflected a 'degree of relative privilege amongst permanent organised workers, who are out of touch with persistent poverty and deprivation' (Habib and Valodia 2006, 174). They pointed out that 87 percent of respondents in the 2004 Cosatu Worker Survey were 'satisfied' with water and electricity services, 68 percent were satisfied with education and training, 61 percent satisfied with housing and public transport respectively, and that their levels of satisfaction are only low with regard to HIV (49 percent satisfied) wages (37 percent) and jobs (17 percent). However when compared with the Ipsos-Markinor survey in the same year, of the general population, the picture of a 'more satisfied' Cosatu member becomes more complicated. This survey asked people to list the biggest problems facing South Africa – it is in this sense a reverse of the question asked in the worker survey. More respondents mentioned jobs here than the percentage of dissatisfied shopstewards, but housing seemed to be a bigger issue for shopstewards (29 percent dissatisfied compared to 9 percent of the general population). Only 9 percent of the general population mentioned land, but 31 percent of shopstewards were not satisfied with delivery on this issue. Shop stewards appear just as dissatisfied on HIV aids (51% compared to 48%), more worried about education (22 percent/16 percent) and health

care (31 percent/22 percent) and the percentage dissatisfied about electricity and water was similar to the percentage of the general population worried about 'development/infrastructure (water, electricity, roads)' (13 percent/15 percent).

So who went into this wave of strikes? First, the social composition of the strikes was by no means only middle-aged and mortgaged. Cleaners and security guards generally described their class as 'lower' in my interviews. It's still not uncommon for cleaners to live in shacks. Security guards now have to get a diploma, and their graded industry offers the hope of promotion, but they are also an insecure sector and the possibilities of advance quite limited. Themes of human dignity were central in their strike. The Shoprite strike, for the first time, organised casual workers together with permanent workers on a meaningful scale in this chain. It included a list of demands concerning casuals - although most of these demands ended up as bargaining chips abandoned on the floor of the negotiating room (My observations and notes, 2006).

Public sector strikers, however, seem to cut against this grain. Below, I will briefly consider a small sample of public workers' pre-strike ideas of their class and allegiances, then sketch a working definition of public workers' position in circuits of accumulation in conclusion.

5.3.1. Are teachers and nurses middle class? (And other attitudes)

Strikes are generally thought of as working class activities. Apart from hospital cleaners, this strike organized exactly that layer of workers who were in the past labelled 'middle class' – teachers, nurses and administrators. And they had many of the trappings of 'the middle class' – a teachers meeting in Soweto was noticeable by the hundreds of cars parked outside. Many public workers in the research for this thesis saw themselves as only striving to be middle class. I will argue later that most are skilled reproductive workers.

Black teachers and nurses were commonly considered to be middle class in the townships during apartheid. Our 2006 survey of perceptions of class in contemporary Soweto (Phadi and Ceruti 2012; 2013) revealed that, in the residential context of Soweto (which encouraged a geographically and therefore racially bounded, income and consumption-based model of class) self-labelling as middle class overlapped with self-labelling as working class. Working class most often seemed to mean having work, while middle class was more complicated, as it was adopted by two thirds of our

survey respondents and did not correlate reliably to possessions or quality of life in the way that labels such as 'lower class' did; but it frequently centred around the concept of 'affordability' (being able to afford) as well as perceptions of mobility.

I also analysed the 172 public workers netted in the Soweto survey for an unpublished conference paper. There was a mild significant association between being one of those public workers and calling yourself middle class. Around 74 percent of public workers in the survey called themselves middle class, compared to 65 percent of other employed Sowetans. (It's not representative of public workers as we were sampling Sowetans, but it works as a comparison between public workers and other Sowetans; also several of the strikers I interviewed were in Soweto.) There was an even stronger association with calling yourself working class, as might be expected. However people who said they had been on strike were more likely to call themselves working class, and this didn't affect any other class identifications. (Remember that 'strike' need not mean an industrial strike – it can also be taken to mean a student protest, a stayaway or a shut down.) In June 2006, 64 percent of the educators and 57 percent of health workers in our sample said they had been on strike before. Public workers in general were a little more likely to say they had been on strike (42 percent of public employees compared to 27 percent of other employees).

Finally, 60 percent of public workers in our sample were ANC supporters, slightly lower than Sowetans in general. We also asked some opinion questions. Public workers in Soweto in 2006 were more likely than other Sowetans to agree that things were better under apartheid, less likely to agree that a man's word should be final in a marriage (nurses and teachers in particular) and less likely to agree that anyone can get rich. They were not different from other Sowetans however on whether Cosatu should split from the ANC, whether Jacob Zuma should be the next president, on gay marriage, or any other opinion questions.

5.3.2. Are teachers and nurses workers?

In this thesis I will conceptualize public strikers as mostly workers, in the technical sense of being paid a wage less than the value produced by their labour. Some public employees, of course, are managers and directors, but in general, public sector employees, as *state* employees, can be conceptually divided into three broad roles which fit differently into circuits of exploitation: repression and control, servicing the

population and infrastructure – this last, in South Africa, often shrunk to three-month public works contracts and some state shares in part-privatised companies. Police are obviously in a repressive role. The administrative machinery of giving persons identities, social grants and social work support is deeply ambiguous: apparently servicing the population, but often overlapping into policing the poor and regulating the population at large. Most teachers, nurses and other healthworkers are primarily in the role of servicing the population – in this case, that part of the population which cannot access private schools and private healthcare (teachers and healthworkers may, of course, also contribute indirectly to the apparatuses of control and repression in ideological or moral ways).

For the purposes of this thesis, I define the majority of healthworkers and teachers as waged *reproductive* workers, workers whose 'product' is people (Jaffe 2020; Hester and Srniek 2021; see, for example, recently, Bhattacharya 2017; Hashimoto and Henry 2017; Ray 2016); they 'maintain' the health of sections of the workforce who cannot afford private healthcare as well as a large number of people in the labour reserve/'surplus labour' (unemployed); they 'add value' to future workers via schooling[66]. In other words, they contribute not only to social stability but also to circuits of exploitation and accumulation, but *indirectly,* via the patient or the pupil.[67] Social workers have one foot in this door, averting the worst of social crisis together with social grants and the like, and another foot in forms of administrative control through the very same task. The work of administrative workers may enter circuits of exploitation differently, as they are not reproductive workers – for example via organising the population, collecting information about it and so on, or doubly distantly by 'maintaining' the state itself, collecting tax, filing legislation, certifying documents and so on, within the machinery which seeks to maintain conditions to facilitate accumulation.

This conceptualisation is important because it speaks to how the power of a public sector strike is felt by their opponent; their power to inflict damage on the opponent is indirect because their work contributes only indirectly to accumulation,

[66] Police also seem to have people as their main 'product', but they are not, in my view, reproductive workers, as their task does not revive or enskill anyone. Indeed I don't count them as workers at all, but I won't go into this here as they did not really feature in this strike except in their repressive, state role and as the hope for escalating the strike that failed to bark.

[67] On the flip side of this conceptualisation, I conceive of the state as itself bound in circuits of accumulation, *at minimum* as a general manager of national conditions for accumulation. But you don't have to share my concept of the state to see that lower grade state employees as reproductive workers.

and then via the persons of proletarian people. A minority of tax people, bookkeepers and other people responsible for the state machine have a more direct influence, independent of their distance from circuits of exploitation, in the state's immediate self-interest in maintaining its own operations, but very many of them are administering in departments which are not directly responsible for state maintenance (such as the department of housing).

Therefore for public workers, withdrawing labour is only the first step in precipitating the crisis needed to actually move their opponent. This will become clearer in the next chapter, which traces the rise and decline of the 2007 strike.

Chapter 6. The long view: An analytical timeline of strike one

In this chapter I will discuss the 2007 strike in four **interpenetrating** phases: the failure of negotiations, the road to the strike, striking, and the stalemate in the strike. In Chapter 7 I will consider a fifth phase, the aftermath.

In this first strike, the dominant imagery in the strike was for an *equalisation* – a rebalancing - of the alliance. Nevertheless we will see that strikers' identities regarding government and democracy were unsettled as the strikers navigated this 'narrow' sectoral conflict in which the employer was also an alliance partner *and* claimed the mantle of national representative and liberator. In some cases, destabilisation seemed to reach no further than cognitive dissonance, papered over after the strike by deference to 'the way things are', a return to a kind of natural order of things. But other strikers transferred their hopes to a shakeup focussed on Zuma, and a few cemented or renewed their distrust of government during the strike.

In this strike, the frustrations of union leaders meshed with the frustrations of their members, enabling strikers to de-identify with elements of the once-'liberation' government. It is only at the strike's denouement that we see subtle differences in the way these distinct positionalities accommodated to the partial defeat of the strike. Destablilised political identities were then invited to reform around the axis of a remote-control insurgency into the ANC leadership. It will not become obvious in this section how this differs from the view of the alliance as the valve on the pressure cooker, but in later chapters we will see how the differences amongst positionalities mature.

The timeline is woven around three key dynamics. The choice of these dynamics reflects my analytic framework, but they are also genuinely explanatory regarding the course of the strikes. The three dynamics are the twists and turns in bargaining; political rhythms and ruptures; and the strikers' organisation and strategies. While the first two feature prominently in the news reports that make up a large part of the timeline's sources, they never appear in their entirety, not least because there will

always be discussions that happen behind closed doors. I have supplemented these aspects of the timeline with union statements, speeches, email correspondence and the like, which helped to reduce homogenised or press-conference keyhole views of the unions.

The timeline is only loosely a time*line*, in the sense that it teases out how some things led to others but is condensed here and detailed there, and its chronology is frequently disrupted forward and back for the sake of analytical links and exploring counterfactuals.

A timeline sensitive to eventfulness suggests a chronology of turning points. But at the scale of this study, developments seldom turn on anything discernible as a pin-point. This does not negate that there are decisive hours, sometimes even seconds, but these usually congeal (by which I mean, make irreversible) processes *already in motion*. Up close, therefore, developments resemble wavering arcs, containing (as outlined in Chapter 2) different possibilities, which diverge rather than turn, and in which the paths not followed sometimes merely fade rather than being 'switched off' decisively.

Before becoming strikers, workers are usually invisible in news reports and appear only very subtly and indirectly in union documents, as numbers at meetings or a 'mood' at a workplace. The third dynamic, the strikers' organisation, is distorted here by a distortion in sources in different phases of the timeline. Although I tried to remain sensitive to indirect evidence of the 'hidden element', the first section of the timeline relies heavily on views from the outside and therefore is predisposed to a somewhat monolithic view of the top, such as I criticised previously. However the striker dimension of the timeline balloons on those days where I attended events in the strike. Here my own observation, notebooks, strikers' reports, photos, film footage and some informal discussions allow fine detail and texture - but narrows the scale, becoming localised and chronologically patchy[68]. As with any history or on-the-hoof sociology, access to certain resources (Slingsby's Nehawu archive) or proximity to certain picket lines (Chris Hani Hospital being next to my office in 2007, as discussed in Chapter 4) also biased one part of the story towards - in this section - Nehawu and a particular

[68] There is a level to the dynamic of the strikers' organisation which I can't get at, and which could only be properly got at by a network of activists embedded in several workplaces, namely the combined chemistry of the members and the leaders, of mass meetings and pickets, of workplace culture in the years leading up to the strike, of networks in and outside of work.

hospital. We should be careful about generalising from these parts of the story, but I defend their value as specific instances illuminating certain *dynamics*.

This chapter is exceptionally long, because it is the first properly detailed history of this strike and has to contend with many sketches – not excluding my own - written at the time but often from a distance. Because most activists and academics were very sure of their conventional story of the strike, I carry a historian's burden, not merely a sociological one, if I am to produce a corrective counter narrative, or at least a complicating narrative. This history of the strike, by itself, counts amongst the original contributions of this thesis to activist and academic knowledge.

Let's refresh our memories of Chapter 5 that the overtures of the 2007 public sector strike were played amidst a larger cacophony of struggle revival. Retrenchments had threatened the base of the unions amidst neo-liberal triumphalism, which sharpened alienation at the highest levels of Cosatu about the cabinet's policies. These policies were personified in President Mbeki or bound to him through the concept of the '1996 class project', an SACP characterisation of Mbekism. There were significant strikes in 2005 and 2006, adding to spreading delivery protests and open dissent inside the ANC.

We will see that a key feature of the 2007 strike was the increasingly contradictory position of the union leaders, in which doing things as always before produced unexpectedly conflictual results.

6.1. Failed negotiations in a failing alliance

The road to the strike was a protracted process yielding little. Wage talks opened on 28 November 2006 (Nehawu head office 2007a), and the dispute was declared towards the end of March 2007 (Cosatu unions engaged in the Public service co-ordinating Bargaining Council 2007). Two more months passed before the strike started. In part, this reflects the many legal steps to a protected strike[69] and the time taken to get proper mandates from members about detailed proposals. In part, it reflects that the actually existing practice of the alliance was breaking to some extent - becoming openly conflictual - but none of the participants had broken with it in principle, only with the ways it wasn't going their way. In part it reflects that the talks

[69] In current South African labour law, strikers cannot be fired simply for striking if they have followed the steps to a protected strike (sometimes incorrectly called a 'legal' strike).

were, in a sense, stalemated before they began. All the old ways out remained for the parties at the bargaining table, but these had become increasingly costly, to each in their own way.

Numerically, there was little to distinguish the opening offers and demands in 2006/2007 from previous rounds of wage bargaining. However the parties brought to the table the tensions building in the alliance, increasingly conflicting pressures, and the cumulative frustrations of demands unsolved from previous rounds of public sector bargaining. Going through the same old motions of collective bargaining between comrades now emphasised these contradictions rather than soothing them.

A taste of alliance tensions, and the partiality of this break, is evident in the October draft secretariat report of Sadtu, the Cosatu-affiliated teachers' union, which declares 'people power' under threat and writes further:

> The ANC's ascendancy to government has presented us with opportunities and threats. On the one hand we have an opportunity to use the state to advance socio-economic interests of the working class. On the other hand, there is a danger that government power can be used (as it is the case right now) to deal with the working class through implementing neo-liberal economic policies (Monare 2006).

The statement situates Zuma's dismissal in 'the changing class character of the ANC' towards business (Monare 2006). In the same month, Cosatu reported a 'fruitful and frank' discussion between Zwelenzima Vavi and Tito Mboweni, the Reserve Bank governor (Vavi 2006), only to have to issue a statement three days later condemning the interest rate increase (Cosatu 2006a).

A press release from Cosatu in October, a month before bargaining opened, suggests increasing combativeness at the grassroots in and around some union organisation. It reports 1000 Nehawu members on strike in KwaZulu Natal over the provincial Works Department's failure to implement a new grading system; 350 members of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru), on strike against private prison operators; Soweto teachers' threatening to strike; and 'looming disputes' for Nehawu members in the department of justice and the office of the premier, again over non-implementation, here of a transfer scheme (Cosatu 2006b).[70]

There were growing pressures on the unions to dig in. It would be overstating things to suggest that the strike resulted from a grassroots rebellion. Rather, it

[70] The non-implementation issues suggest that employer intransigence was a factor in this combativity.

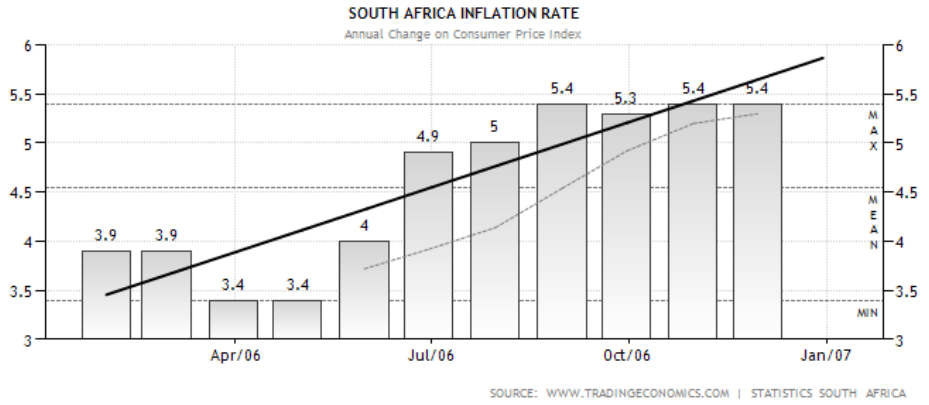
represented a convergence of worker frustrations with the frustrations of the leaders.

But in any case the employer removed any other honourable course, reproducing in negotiations the behaviour of the beleaguered but aggressively neo-liberal presidency. The unions had not moved from their opening demand of 12%[71] since April 1 by the time the strike began, but then, the employer had moved only a token 0.7% by that time, and that only after the deadlock was declared. Their opening offer was 5.3 percent from July, or four percent from the union's implementation date. This was, if not intentionally provocative, indicative of The Treasury Department's determination for firm inflation control against Cosatu's criticisms (See for example Cosatu 2006c). The employer received the unions' opening demands in the first round of bargaining without comment, then went on the offensive in the next round on 19 January 2007: 'The employer refused to make any concrete offer on our demands', Nehawu later wrote: 'They then attempted to force trade unions to agree on the employer's principles for negotiation' (Nehawu head office 2007a). These included a four-year agreement and linking wages to the Consumer Price Index (CPIx) at 5 percent.

The offer matched the inflation rate for the previous month, but fell very slightly below the average official Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) rate for the whole of 2006 (Statistics South Africa. 2008; See also Kimani Ndungu 2008, 7) (and was in any case on a rising trend - reaching an average 7 percent for 2007 (see Figure 4 and Figure 5) – which was going to erode the actual settlement as soon as it was implemented).

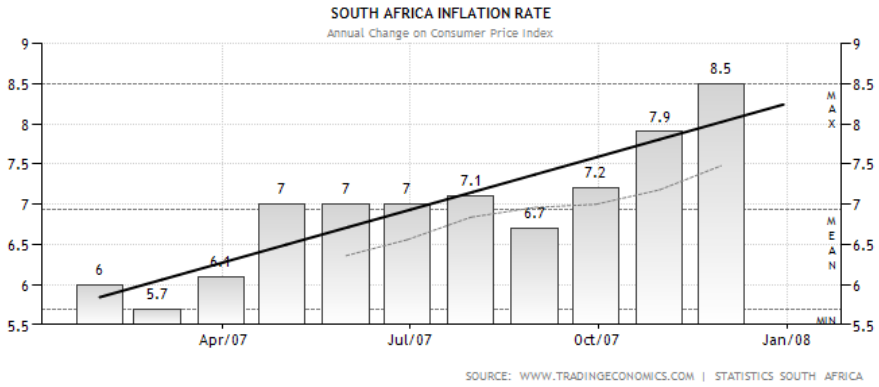
[71] Throughout, I have rendered 12% astylistically because of its iconic nature in the strikers' placards and vocabulary in the early days of the strike, where it appears with the percent sign rather than the word 'percent'. I have done the same thing for certain iconic employer offers.

Figure 4: Inflation for 2006



Source Statistics SA via http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/inflation-cpi

Figure 5: Inflation for 2007



Source Statistics SA via http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/inflation-cpi

And food inflation, at 8.7 percent, was much higher than the average in that year (Moola and Schoeman 2008). Moola and Schoeman (2008 See their figure 3) show overall inflation adjusted according to the relative proportion of the income spent on food to be close to 6 percent for middle income earners, and as high as 8 percent for the lowest income group. Contemporary analyses of the South African household (notably, Mosoetsa 2011; but see also Ceruti 2010b; Alexander et al. 2013) also show the pressures unemployment put on even 'middle class' workers – or perhaps particularly on middle class workers – to support relatives. The widening wage gap in South Africa's public sector - 15:1 in 1995, 30:1 by 2006 (Kimani Ndungu 2008, 9) is one illustration of the enrichment of both an old and a *nouveau riche* whom 'middle class' workers were encouraged to emulate, but from whose ranks they felt increasingly excluded.

It is not unusual in the routine of collective bargaining to begin with an opening offer several percent above what you are really aiming for[72], but in this case, the unions' double digit opening demand reflected the pressures on their members of several years of mediocre settlements, which in turn reflected badly on the unions. The unions also tabled a number of other demands related to housing subsidy, medical aid equalisation, filling of all vacant posts (estimated to be 35 percent of posts (Cosatu unions engaged in the Public service co-ordinating Bargaining Council 2007)), a single-year wage agreement in place of the existing three years, and an agreement on what constituted an essential service during a strike. It was also not uncommon for such non-wage demands to end up as bargaining chips discarded on the floor of the negotiating chamber, as with casuals' demands in the shop workers' strike in 2006. But many of these other public sector demands had been deferred from previous rounds of bargaining for several years, keeping them at centre stage in the unions' frustrations. The failure to agree an essential services agreement essentially limited the ability to strike by leaving open the question of whether all nurses, for example, were essential services. In 2006 and 2007, these demands were once more ignored by the employer throughout the six rounds of bargaining before the dispute was declared. For example in the third round, the employer refused to discuss vacant posts, saying it was not a 'matter of mutual interest' (Nehawu head office 2007a).

January 2007 gives a rare glimpse of a mood 'on the ground' during this period leading towards the strike. Clinic nurses in KwaZulu Natal province went on strike for two weeks because they were not paid rural allowances. The unprotected strike[73] went ahead against the advice of officials from Nehawu, the Cosatu-affiliated health workers' union, who later said they supported the issues but condemned the decision to strike. It ended at the beginning of February when the provincial health ministry issued dismissal warnings to around 12 000 nurses, then dismissed at least 700 on the Monday following the Friday return to work. Nurses disputed that they had failed to return to work (Zulu 2007; Department of Health Kwa Zulu Natal 2007; Saville and

[72] In 1991, for example, the unions opened with a 10% to 15% demand against the government's opening offer of 5.7 in January 1999, and by June had come down to 10% against a new government offer of just 6%.(Nehawu 1999), and had lowered their demand to 7.5 percent by the time the government declared its final 6.3 percent offer which precipitated 25 August's one-day strike.

[73] An unprotected strike – often incorrectly called an 'illegal strike' - is one which does not follow the procedures laid out in the Labour Relations Act. The Act lays out a number of steps between declaring a deadlock and getting a certificate to strike. These procedures tend to work as a series of 'cooling off' periods which mitigate against strikes, while tying the rank and file to a layer of specialized full-time officials, who in the lowest periods of class struggle substituted themselves altogether for the rank and file in the union's business.

Zulu 2007). It is not clear what happened next, except that the unions were still contesting dismissals in May (Saville 2007). The practical constraints on actually replacing 700 qualified nurses at government wages imply that the dismissals and subsequent case-by-case reinstatements were a strategy to intimidate the nurses and then weed out the 'troublemakers'. Although this strike's trigger was quite specific and regional, it reveals, on the one hand, a culture in government of a punitive approach to strikes. On the other hand, for nurses to strike without the union's blessing implies not only that they were very fed-up indeed[74] but is also suggestive of the extent to which strikes were being re-admitted to the popular repertoire at the time.

Back at the bargaining chamber, each side's resolve must have been strengthened by the announcement of a budget surplus (BBC 2007a) on **20 February,** with the government seeing in the budget surplus proof that abstemious policies were working[75], and the unions seeing proof that there was money to meet their wage demands just as the employer closed the door on any remaining illusion that early negotiations would allow wage demands to shape the budget. There were no new offers in the round which coincided with the budget announcement, although the unions presented a counter-proposal to the employers. In the next round, the only movement was that the employer tabled the concept of Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD), which would involve special payments to professionals. The unions criticised it as vague and divisive (Nehawu head office 2007a).

A month later, after the sixth round, on **20 March,** the unions affiliated to Cosatu finally declared a deadlock in negotiations, the first step to declaring a dispute and bringing in an outside facilitator. Remember that by this stage, there had been no movement from either side on percentages.

In a press statement the unions hinted at mass action with the threat that 'labour will revert to its different constituencies for further mandates to defend their demands'. (Cosatu unions engaged in the Public service co-ordinating Bargaining Council 2007). A few days after the deadlock was declared, a commission on cabinet ministers' pay

[74] Or alternately they were too new to the union to have yet been beaten into a collective bargaining mould. I don't have any information on how long these nurses had been unionised.

[75] Working, that is, to achieve a deeply neo-liberal version of success – the R5-billion surplus owed less to improved tax revenue than to failure to spend R5.3-billion, especially in budgets at a regional and local level (See Nehawu communications department 2007a) –a serious breakdown for local democracy, helping to explain the delivery protests.

recommended increases of up to 57 percent (Sapa 2007a). The justification - to make their posts competitive with business - only added fuel to certain flames.

6.2. 'This is the road to the strike'[76]

This period contains both the wrapping up of the failing negotiations and the beginnings of the next period, building the strike.

In the next two months, the conflict became much more public as it escalated. The minister, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, was particularly vocal in the press once the conciliator had issued a certificate of dispute on 3 May. Her discourse mixed threat and cajoling, and perhaps aimed to drive a wedge between the unions and the workers, while remaining unshakeable on the mandated budget. This newspaper reported on **May 5** that Fraser-Moleketi had said that:

> ... government would not improve on its 6% offer but was willing to have further engagements. "It is in the interest of all citizens that wage negotiations between public sector unions and government remain open. We must conduct these talks further in a manner that will not disrupt public service. We must find common ground. The breakdown in conciliation came after only three real meetings and we would have liked to look at extending the conciliation process," said Fraser-Moleketi. She warns that there will be no work no pay "but there is no need for it because there is no need for public servants to go on industrial action". (Mbanjwa and Sapa 2007).

It is hard to see what the parties were supposed to further engage on in light of Fraser-Moleketi's opening assertion, and the unions whose members were already distanced were not keen to sell the package allowed by the negotiating team's strict adherence to budget. The incremental increase in the employer's offer barely adjusted for the rise in inflation since negotiations had begun.

It is not surprising then that '[u]nions were in agreement that the government's refusal to budge from a six percent offer was "an insult",' (Mbanjwa 2007) which put them in a difficult position, and that they therefore refused government negotiators' request to extend the conciliation period by another day, having already extended it by 30 days (Mbanjwa 2007) to the end of April. A statement released by union negotiators again linked sectoral wage issues to government policy:

> Regrettably, the employer's offer, revised by a miserly 0.7 percent to six percent, falls far short of the objectives underlying our demands: to halt the erosion in the purchasing power of our salaries and to bring about real

[76] These are the words of a worker on the 25th May pre-strike demonstration. She is quoted in full in Chapter 7.

> improvements in the living standards of our members. ... [taking inflation into account] in real terms, our members have been subjected to wage cuts ... The reason the government is making such a miserable offer is that it remains committed to its neo-liberal Growth Employment And Redistribution policy. This policy has made it possible for South Africa to have the fourth fastest growth in the number of billionaires in the world at the same time as poverty has deepened for the working class majority (Negotiators of Cosatu public sector unions 2007).

The press statement goes on: '... regrettably a strike is unavoidable. The responsibility for this lies entirely with the government as employer. As we have maintained throughout, a strike is a last resort. But we have been left with no alternative ... all Cosatu Sector Unions have mobilized their members towards industrial action,' to be detailed at a meeting called for 7 May (Negotiators of Cosatu public sector unions 2007). (The meeting eventually took place on 9 May.)

Cosatu threw its weight behind the public sector workers shortly before the dispute certificate was issued, on Workers' Day, **1 May 2007.** The SABC reported that Zwelinzima Vavi, Cosatu's general secretary, 'warned of rolling mass action if the government refuses to give public servants a 12 percent [sic] pay increase' at a May Day rally in North West province, situating this demand in a call on 'the President Thabo Mbeki and his cabinet to reject recommended 50% increases in their own salaries'. He 'emphasised that the current economic policy does not benefit the working class' (SABC 2007b). He also called on workers to 'elect an ANC president of their choice' who would be 'sympathetic to workers' issues' at the Polokwane conference of the ANC, scheduled for December 2007 (SABC 2007a). At the same rally, Jacob Zuma set himself up as that person when he said that there had not been enough progress on worker issues and 'urged workers not to shy away and [to] criticise the government if they feel that their rights are disrespected'[77] (Ensor 2007a). [78]

Curiously, Nehawu's May Day leaflet mentioned neither the bargaining nor any specific demand, but called on members to 'remember what still has to be done' (Nehawu 2007a). This sentence had appeared many times before and since in the days of alliance unity, but this time, it was not prefaced by a list of government's achievements but with a brief description of the strikes which gave birth to May Day,

[77] It is instructive to compare this with Zuma's stance at the time the thesis was being written, which now included 'ANC threatening to be tougher on ill-discipline post-Mangaung: Zuma' (SABC 2012)

[78] Cosatu's involvement throughout this and the 2010 strike indicates not only the numerical importance of the public service unions in Cosatu, but also that Cosatu took public sector wage negotiations as an indicator of the health of the alliance and a battlefront over economic policy.

and followed by the unequivocal sentence, 'The working class has had the worst of times[79] since winning democracy in 1994. Workers have not benefitted.' (Nehawu 2007a).

These early strike threats were not unlike the threats of past years which culminated in, at most, two days' demonstrative strikes, but in 2007 the unions had begun preparing for a 'full-blown' strike before the certificate was issued, even if they were secretly hoping that the threat alone would shift things along. A **9 May** 2007 report from the Nehawu National Strike Committee explains that the union's special NEC on 18 April 2007 '... decided that we should ... definitely go on strike starting from May 2007 if conciliation fails to resolve the dispute (Nehawu National Strike Committee 2007). The meeting set a date for the strike (25 May 2007) and outlined a detailed mobilisation programme, prioritising 'mass-based meetings' in all the provinces, and direct mobilisation in 'institutions where our labour power is strong other than the Health Sector' (essentially the administrative sectors, such as Home Affairs, Department of Labour, courts, Provincial head offices and so on). It is not clear whether this priority reflected that organisation was already strong in the health sector, or that the unions wished to concentrate the strike in sectors whose 'essential nature' was not in dispute. Essential services workers are not allowed to strike and the ministry generalised 'essential' to all nurses, amongst others, while the unions had been arguing for essential services to be defined as an agreed level of skeleton staffing. Elsewhere, the report describes an ongoing attempt to challenge the ministry's definition but also contemplates 'the last option of mobilising our members consciously to defy essential services'. The report also outlines plans to gather international support, to bring other unions outside Cosatu into the strike, and to ensure that provinces set up 'campaign structures/strike committees' where this has not already been done (significantly, this means that some provinces had already developed these structures before the 9 May meeting) and calls for lunchtime demonstrations in the week leading up to the set strike date. The strike was to be kicked off with mass marches. (Nehawu National Strike Committee 2007).

All this suggests that the Cosatu unions were not just grandstanding. The 'price' of using a strike is that it requires bringing 'the masses' onto the stage of history, and

[79] Possibly a reference to Mbeki's 2008 State of the Nation speech in which he quoted Dickens, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times' (Mbeki 2008).

the focus on rallies, marches and pickets in the strike plan suggests that the union leaders were preparing to do that. On the part of the leaders at least, this determination may have reflected a determination to enforce that the alliance should work for labour too, as a two-way street. The public sector negotiations were also perceived as part of a broader battle by other sections of Cosatu. On 10 May, a spokesperson for the municipal workers' union, Samwu, said it was 'currently considering the forms of extending solidarity to fellow workers in the public service should government's position remain unchanged and adamant', and added that the 12% increase 'was "necessitated and a direct consequential factor" of economic policies adopted by government' (Sapa 2007b).

From here the breach only widened. By **the middle of May**, Fraser Moleketi was warning 'tough action including possible dismissals ... against employees engaging in illegal strike action such as go-slow and work-to-rule (Ensor 2007b). On 17 May Cosatu unions issued an official strike notice in terms of the Labour Relations Act (Majola 2007a). The day before, Cosatu had announced an 'indefinite strike', now moved back to start on 28 May (Musgrave 2007) and keeping the 25th as a day of action. The move was partly to accommodate the non-Cosatu unions which would only have results of members' ballots around 25 May (Sapa 2007c; and Majola 2007b), but Cosatu unions were adamant that they would strike from the 28th 'with or without the participation of independent unions representing about 40 percent of unionised public servants' (Musgrave 2007). An impressive sheaf of regional reports on mobilising for the strike, starting from **19 May** with substantial budgets devoted to busses and rallies, shows that Nehawu officials were kicking into high gear (Nehawu Gauteng 2007). Meanwhile a mobilisation report details more than 40 mobilisation meetings in Mpumulanga province, lunch time demos involving between 15 and 130 people in 44 Eastern Cape workplaces, including many hospitals, and despite several postponed meetings in Gauteng's sketchier report, some lunchtime demonstrations 'were initiated by branches themselves ... [and] started with few comrades demonstrating but as it gained momentum we saw many comrades coming to demonstrate' (Nehawu head office 2007b).

Government made no new offers but attempted (and failed) to negotiate independently with some of the smaller unions (Staff Reporter 2007a). Meanwhile Durban municipal manager, Mike Suttcliffe, picked up the punitive theme, warning would-be sympathy strikers that a strike would be 'illegal' while Samwu was discussing

whether to strike (Mhlongo and Sookha 2007). Memoranda from Human Resources departments were sent to all staff members of government departments. These included a table for managers to list all those absent on the day of the strike and provide reasons if they could not, warned that 'no work no pay' would apply, and warned that 'employees are not allowed to promote the aims of the strike on the premises of the department, e.g. singing, shouting'. This last injunction would prove important later in dividing the strikers.

On the eve of the opening marches, Fraser-Moleketi was stil 'cling(ing) to talks', saying that '(t)he government was committed to resolving the public sector wage stand-off in a non-confrontational way' (Quintal and Sapa 2007). But that opportunity had passed. A formidable force (Photo 4) had been coalescing around the union leaders' discontent and the wage demands, bringing their own daily discontents to the party, containing a headstrong element who would prove hard for either the union leaders or the employer to steer.

6.3. 'This time I must strike'[80] - the workers step up to the 'indefinite' strike

May 25, the one-day warning strike, was one of those periods where a handful of hours decisively congealed something until then only in the air. It settled the question that a significant section of public workers were behind the unions' wage demands. The demeaning overtones of the toyi-toyi, 'Moleketi quickly closes, Madisha [then Sadtu's president] opens' (from isiZulu, *Moleketi usheshe wavala, Madisha vula)*, with the opening and closing mimed in movements of the knees which created a sexual undertone, left no doubt how these public workers felt about the minister's recent public relations. This march surely cemented the confidence of both the union leaders and many workers for the strike ahead. Nehwau estimated that 250 000 marched nationally in all nine provinces (Nehawu online report, recorded in my notebooks). Nehawu and Sadtu were the backbone of the march. Most of the smaller, non-Cosatu unions were still balloting on the strike, but the Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (Hospersa) joined the demonstrations[81] and its leaders

[80] Text of a placard carried on June 1, the first day of the strike.
[81] In the bargaining chamber, Cosatu had roughly half of the recognized unions and roughly half of the votes, calculated by membership, according to Clarke (2007, 46) .

were to be seen across national TV at the front of the march, arm in arm with Nehawu and Sadtu leaders (Photo 5). (Note my suggestions for navigating the photos in this footnote[82].

The atmosphere in Pretoria (Tshwane) that day could be described as festive (evident in film footage (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) and Photo 6, Photo 7, Photo 8) despite a strong undercurrent of frustration. (Look at Photo 5 to Photo 8 now.) The printed placards distributed by the unions covered all the key negotiating demands. But most of these were ignored in home-made placards, which were much more complex expressions, while toyi-toyis[83] expressed things in a subtly different idiom.

Before I detail these layers of expression, it is worth noting that I heard several toyi-toyis which I had not heard before alongside the old standards. Old standards included 'Hold the sun from setting, we miss home in South Africa' (originally an MK and ANC exiles' song) and 'The scabs are afraid, we will shoot' ('*Dubele dubele*'). Newer mixes were custom-made for the occasion or customised from older toyi-toyis and familiar songs from other genres such as religious worship. In the 2007 strike, some remixes involved a simple name substitution, such as 'Zuma [originally 'My father'] hold me by the hand so that I don't burn. The heart of Zuma [Jesus] is pure, I will hide in it'[84] (translation by Siniko Qinqwa). Similar adaption has been observed by several authors (Makgopa and Mamaleka 2019; Mati 2016; Phajane 2020) who researched toyi-toyi in the aftermath of Fees Must Fall (#FMF). The choice of metaphor here speaks volumes despite the simplicity of the adaption, given that workers felt attacked by the incumbent government. Other songs seemed to be entirely new. Such innovation and adaption itself implies the development of collectives: new toyi-toyis can be invented by an individual interacting with a group, or by an interactive group; they can be invented in the heat of the moment, on the bus travelling to a march,

[82] Readers can either (1) browse the photos in the appendix in batches, using my recommendations in this form (Now is a good time to look at photo x to photo y). Ctrl-click (in Word) or click (in PDF) on the photo number in the recommendation to be transported to the first photo of the batch; ctrl-click or click on the page number when you reach the return link [Return to page z] at the end of the batch to be transported back to the place the text. Alternately, (2) readers who prefer to browse the photos one by one alongside the text can find them in a Powerpoint here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1aJw1HX4ATwqrczIAuO3ktf8Hu5Svm-yssiiX-gilUQ0/edit?usp=sharing_eil_m&ts=622afecb . Those with a printed copy can keep their place in the appendix with a finger or a scrap of paper.

[83] Remember that I have called these 'toyi-toyis' rather than songs because they combine words, melody, call-and-response, dance and other physical actions.

[84] Such adaptions have the obvious advantage of being easily picked up by people who don't have a pre-existing union/organisational culture.

waiting for meetings to start or hanging around a picket line, but they are seldom composed at home alone or in a union officials' meeting, and are always open to further adaption of words and movement. Phajane (2020), writing about toyi-toyi in #FMF, could as well have been writing about the strikes in the following summary of the 'functionality' of toyi-toyis:

> The use of revolutionary songs [in #FMF] … was understood by its functionality. … namely, communicative, mobilising, and an expression of collective identity. The … communicative role of revolutionary songs is multi-layered [including] emotional, spiritual, and nostalgic expression … [and] offered an outlet for people to express themselves … as therapeutic tools for regulating emotions. … revolutionary songs have the ability to create struggle nostalgia, meaning that they elicit reminders and memories of the original context in which the revolutionary songs were first created. … mobilisation was experienced on two levels in revolutionary songs. Firstly, mobilising others to join in the movement; and secondly, mobilising the members of the in-group to come together … the mobilising power of revolutionary songs lies in their ability to provide psychological affirmation, self-assertion and [to] soothe members of the movement The third theme … was to express collective identity. (Phajane 2020, 72 ff)

That day in Pretoria, many placards and songs conveyed the sense of drawing a line in the sand (Photo 9, Photo 10, Photo 11, Photo 13, Photo 14, the Hospersa poster in Photo 15. Now is a good time to look at Photo 9 to Photo 15). If there was a central visible symbol in this march, it was the percentages (Photo 16, Photo 13 again). Justifications for the 12% featured high in interviews, as we will see in the second part of the chapter. Cries of '*tshelete'* (money), accompanied by the gesture illustrated in Photo 17, were ubiquitous (Now is a good time to look at Photo 16 to Photo 18). However we should not mistake this for a cold figure. The money was mired in an emotively charged, confrontational discourse, evident in the song '*Voetsak* man[85]/ *Voetsak* man/ They want money/ Fraser (is) the fool (From Pedi and Afrikaans, *Voetsake man, Voetsake man, Banyaka tshelete, Fraser wasetlayele)* (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a), and placards captured in our film footage (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) which read 'Educated as I am, 6% *wa gafa* (Pedi, crazy)' and 'Geraldine, 6% *wa penga (*Xitsonga, crazy - widely used beyond Xitsonga speakers). Moreover the percentages frequently worked as markers in the *polarisation* of the conflict, as in Photo 16 again and Photo 18. Such representations also, in many cases, embedded the percentages

[85] *'Voetsek'* is an Afrikaans word which means 'go away', but with a tone closer to 'fuck off' – a phrase one would use to chase a dog, widely used beyond Afrikaans speakers. The phrase is habitually completed with the contextually meaningless word 'man'.

in contexts which were beginning to strain the bounds of economism even if they remained sectoral. The double standard between the public workers' offer and the ministers' recommended percentage was one of the strong resonances between the union leaders' statements and the public workers' placards ('We want a living wage like some lazy MPs and ministers' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a), Photo 19, Photo 20, the other placard in Photo 15). (Look at Photo 19 to Photo 21 now) Remember that Vavi had raised this point on May Day, and again in Pretoria he said that if the employer would not give the housing allowance, then 'we must ask what kind of houses they live in' (Vavi 2007). This theme also appears in Nehawu's speakers' notes for that day, which condemn wage inequality (Cosatu public sector unions 2007, 2), contrast the 'low cost' of 'doing business for the bosses' with 'the high cost of living' for 'the working class, the majority' (Cosatu public sector unions 2007, 1) and further assert that 'after 13 years of freedom the workers deserve better, for our labour that brought water, health, education and social grants to millions of our people, we deserve better' (Cosatu public sector unions 2007, 2).

The sense of distance implied by these contrasts is sharply captured in the toyi-toyi with the words 'They are making themselves gods' (from Zulu: *Baikentse Badingwana'* (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a). The distance was partly rooted in a sense of injury (Photo 21). A toyi-toyi redolent of cumulative injury appealed to the ghost of the now-deceased leader of the ANC in exile: 'Oliver Tambo, we are getting reduced, they retrench us, they abuse us, they are infecting us with Aids (Translated by Noma Pakade). The song moreover implied an unfinished business of liberation: in the late 80s and early 90s, the very same tune appealed to Tambo to talk to Botha ('*tete noBotha')* to release Mandela.

In the same way that the minister's words were turned around in placards such as 'no pay, no work' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) in response to the 'no work, no pay' policy for strikers, the sense of injury was turned into personal insult, ranging from the basic such as 'Fuck you Geraldine' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) and Photo 14 again to the more textured, such as the representation of Fraser-Moleketi as a baboon in Photo 22. On one such placard pivoted a small demonstration of a rebellious mood that day in Pretoria. When Fraser-Moleketi came out between three ranks of police (Photo 23) to receive the memorandum in front of the marchers assembled at the union buildings, she said something to Vavi and Vavi was seen putting his arm around Fraser-Molketi's shoulders while announcing into the microphone that a particular placard must be

taken down because 'The minister's mother is not involved in this dispute'. (Look at Photo 22 to Photo 23 now.) I could not see the placard from where I was filming but the audio is clear (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a). The protective gesture towards Fraser-Moleketi after Vavi's sharp speech was interesting in itself, demonstrating Cosatu's continuing ambiguity to the alliance. But the placard holder refused to lower the placard, and many other placards were waved at the minister in response to Vavi's appeal. It took Vavi several minutes to calm the resulting hub-bub in the crowd, probably involving verbal wrangling between 'disciplined' marchers and placard-showers standing their ground.

The memorandum was eventually received in a small, now familiar performance suggesting a larger symbolism. The marchers pointed to an imaginary dotted line while they sang '*Signa mo!'* ('Sign here!' Sesotho borrowing from English (Recording 2007a)) as the minister acknowledged receipt of the memorandum in full view of all those gathered there. The inference of accountability was one of the ways in which the sense of distance described above was already beginning, in this context, to shade over into a political dimension captured in the placard 'Bring back Geraldine the activist' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) and the placard about Fatcats in Photo 15. After all, 'They are making themselves *gods'* suggests not only distance but also assumption of (undeserved) power. Similar sentiments were reflected in the Hospersa placards in Photo 24 and Photo 25. We can assume Hospersa supporters, being outside the alliance, would feel greater latitude to criticise government, but the reference to the proletariat in Photo 15 or the placard in Photo 26 are more likely to have come from members of an alliance organisation, where Marxist rhetoric such as 'proletariat' was commonly bandied about. Abuse of power is suggested in placards about corruption (Photo 27, Photo 28) which, however, offer an individualised political explanation. But what appears to be a natural tendency to inversion such as we saw with the insulting placard was already producing a more subversive riff regarding power, suggested in 'We demand what belongs to us' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a) and the double-sided placard (Photo 29 and Photo 30) carried by member of Cosatu's police union, Popcru. On one side it implies the threat posed by dissatisfied public workers to the 2010 world cup, on the other a political threat to the incumbent government. (Look at Photo 24 to Photo 30 now.)

The memorandum delivered in Pretoria warned that 'failure to meet these demands by the 31st May 2007 will result in indefinite labour action...' (Cosatu unions

2007). This resonated with at least some marchers: one placard read 'Roll mass action roll' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a). I asked one marcher whether she was prepared to strike if the government did not meet her demands. She replied emphatically, 'This is the *road* to the strike!' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007a). Others were more hesitant, first stating the hope or the firm belief that the government would now come to its senses, as it seemed to have in previous years, after the day's display of strength. Even these strikers however remained firm in their commitment to the rationality of their demands.

To prevent or even limit a strike now, government would have to move sufficiently to make a climb-down 'respectable'. Remember that in previous years this had been achieved quite modestly, as much through the device of comradely accommodation as real improvement[86]. But this year, the momentum to strike had gained considerably greater inertia[87] than in those years, while at the same time the government's resistance to improving the offer was considerably greater. By **Wednesday 30 May,** two days before the intended strike, matters had proceeded no further than tabling a 'working document' cobbled together by a technical team. The document (the government's idea (Majola 2007e)) intended to allow both parties to 'seek new mandates' (Makgetla 2007) by highlighting areas of agreement and disagreement. The clumsy hybrid of union and government proposals contained both a 6.5 percent and a 9 percent wage increase proposal (Makgetla 2007, 2) with different allocations of the same budget, but none of the unions' key demands. Fraser-Moleketi must have therefore been hoping for that old Alliance magic when she told Parliament on Tuesday that she hoped that the document would 'remove the "need for any industrial action"' (Makgetla 2007).

For the unions, however, the document represented only that negotiations had 'collapsed again' (Majola 2007e, 1). Cosatu rejected the minister's public statements that there had been a 'talks breakthrough' as 'misinformation'; '...there is no new offer on the table, the parties remain far apart' (Staff reporter 2007a). The minister - who had been quoted as saying she 'cannot understand why unions are embarking on industrial action in light of government's announcement of a new wage package' (SABC news 2007b) – elsewhere claimed that: 'Moving from an adversarial situation

[86] And the unions' 2007 discourse admitted as much, justifying the demand.
[87] I use 'inertia' here in the sense of a property of matter by which it continues in its existing state of rest or uniform motion.

... to a situation where parties have managed to jointly produce a document for further discussion represents a major breakthrough in my opinion.' (Sapa 2007d),

But a commitment merely to talk further was exactly what was no longer enough in this once familiar, subtly mutating waltz between now-adversarial allies. The formalistic promise in a Nehawu communication that 'we will continue to engage genuinely to find a solution' (Majola 2007e, 2) is lost amidst plans for strike mobilisation (See for example Majola 2007c). A media release from Sadtu's National Strike Council on the Wednesday declares that 'regrettably ... the employer has not shifted' leaving no choice but a national strike from June 1, which would mean 'a total shutdown of schools ... mass action and protest marches... Members have been balloted on strike action resulting in a massive and overwhelming mandate for strike action' (SADTU media 2007, 1–2). Another document from Nehawu discusses secondary strikes, and advises contacting 'Strike command center' for 'further clarity or questions', showing the union leaders' organisational commitment to a strike (Majola 2007d).

And this feeling extended beyond Cosatu unions. The Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie, a teacher's union which was

> traditionally inclined against strike action, urged its members to join the strike: 'This is the time to show absolute [worker] solidarity and everyone's participation is now needed, it said in a notice to members (Staff reporter 2007a).

The public workers were the intended audience for much of Fraser-Moleketi's good-cop bad-cop publicity. The friendly negotiator was backed by an arsenal: security and police were 'on standby' in case of 'intimidation' (Sapa 2007d); immigration officers were interdicted from striking the day before the strike (SABC news 2007a), and the minister brought an 11th hour interdict barring unions from encouraging the vague category of 'essential services' workers to strike (SABC news 2007b). The essential services question would prove to be important in the strike. On May 29, Nehawu had faxed a draft minimum services agreement to 'strategic institutions in particular public hospitals ... to be submitted for negotiations with the local managements in an endeavour to maintain a minimum service at the hospitals for the duration of the strike' (Majola 2007d). However the government continued to insist that 'essential services' described certain occupations (nurses, for example) rather than the actual level of services, which allowed much more leeway for strike bashing than a minimum services agreement.

What about the public workers? A strike mobilisation report from Nehawu Free State (unfortunately I do not have an equivalent report for Gauteng). suggests considerable unevenness: at one extreme, reports that in Marqard's clinics and schools, '[m]embers showed signs of being scared to take action' and 'Members [at Clocolan Hospital] raised a concern about essential services and the indication here is that participation would be minimal'; towards the other extreme, a report that in Botshabelo hospital 'members were highly mobilised for the strike' (Provincial Secretary 2007, 2, 4–5); and an instance in May where:

> the workers from all around the area were together waiting for the regional deployee to come and address them in the meeting [in Kroonstadt]. None of the regional deployee [sic] turned up and one of the shop stewards saved the situation and addressed the workers (Provincial Secretary 2007, 2)

It is easy to overlook that pockets of self-organisation in the workplace had either persisted through or re-emerged despite the years of demobilisation as the unions were drawn increasingly into a bureaucratised, top-down model of unionism in the years after the end of apartheid and easy to forget how invisible they were at the time,[88] particularly in the glare of the much more independent workers movement on the mines that became evident in 2021; indeed, even top-down workplace organisation had come to seem rare around this time.

On **Friday 1 June 2007, Day One** of the strike got off to a promising start. Journalists reported schools around Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal deserted (Mhlongo 2007a; Staff reporter 2007b), and early pickets at the entrances of major hospitals including Johannesburg General (Tromp 2007)[89]; two major hospitals in Cape Town, Grooteschuur (Staff reporter 2007b) and Tygerberg (where police used teargas and stun-grenades to move 500 strikers away from the main entrance); King George V in Durban; and Pretoria Academic hospital (Tromp 2007).

Fraser-Moleketi had already begun subtly to label strikers in the media with her statement the previous day that 'security services, including police, will be on standby to deal with any *situation of intimidation*' (my emphasis) (SABC news 2007b).

[88] (On corporatism, see for example Buhlungu 2009; Buhlungu and Tshoaedi 2013; Desai and Habib 1995; 1997; Hlatshwayo 2007; Pillay 2013; Mosoetsa and Tshoaedi 2013; on the persistence of self-organisation and its clashes with corporatism, see Desai 2009; Sinwell 2014).

[89] The reporter claims they were singing *alethi umshimiwami* (bring my machine [gun]), by then Jacob Zuma's trade mark song, but it is possible they were singing *alethi imaliyami* (bring my money) to the same tune, like the strikers getting off the bus in the opening sequences of my footage of the Johannesburg march

However these pickets did not shut down hospitals entirely and it does not seem they ever were intended to.

> The 20 to 25 percent of staff needed to maintain essential services such as trauma and intensive care, "and no-one else", would be allowed across the picket lines, said provincial secretary of Nehawu, Soraya Jawoodien. (Sapa 2007e).

Similarly at Johannesburg General,

> 'Today is the beginning of the strike. Until they reach an agreement, the hospital is going to run on half-staff,' said union shop steward Danny Losaba at Johannesburg General. Around half the 3000 union members on staff remained on the job to cover essential services while half were on strike, he said.(Reuters 2007a)

And Nehawu general secretary Fikile Majola said unions had

> negotiated separate deals [for minimum service agreements] with some institutions.... 'Responses have varied. At Chris Hani Baragwanath (in Soweto) we have agreed to certain things,' he said. Asked if workers would strike where there was no agreement, he said: 'We will impose our own minimum service.' (Musgrave and van Gass 2007)

A report late in the day said 'management at Cape Town's two major hospitals, Groote Schuur and Tygerberg, said they were in business, albeit at reduced staffing levels and with cutbacks in non-essential services' and there was 'a similar story at Johannesburg hospitals, where staff were turning away non-emergency services' (Staff Reporter 2007b).

The march in Johannesburg (Photo 31), one of several in the country (Mhlongo 2007a), was broad, determined, angry and cheerful all at once.

The day exhibited again a certain effervescent quality, illustrated beautifully in a film clip (but see also Photo 32; Photo 33). The strikers in the clip – mainly women, mainly teachers, going by the t-shirts and a subsequent interview - are toyi-toying more energetically than normal for this already-upbeat tune whose words encapsulate the concept of a go-slow or a sit-down strike ('We will do just like this, We are those who want money. We will not work, we will sit' *(Thina senz'nje, basifun'imali, asisebenza sohlala!*). They enacted '*sohlala*' from time to time by sitting in the road (Photo 34) thus reproducing a tactic employed by the 'social movements' such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (see Photo 35) and mimicking the delivery protestors' roadblocks (informal settlements are frequently along highways and large roads). (Look at Photo 31 to Photo 35 now.)

At the end of that song, I interviewed a teacher from this group. She could hardly keep still while we talked[90]. When I asked why she was there, Pansy[91] replied 'For money, that's all we want.' This was a typical reply on that day. Almost everyone gave some version of 'All we need is money' or 'All we need is 12%', with one person prefacing it: 'We are fighting for our rights. We need money'. Pansy appeared to be in her late 30s or early 40s and was wearing a red t-shirt but not a union t-shirt, and she said confidently that it was not her first time on strike because she had been on strike the previous Friday. Then I asked her what it felt like to be on strike and she said: 'It feels like you are just getting yourself down[92], and you are relieving the stress you have in the classroom without payment, without anything' (Pansy 2007).

This interaction with Pansy captured an important feature of the day. It is a glimpse of the psychic value to participants of striking and collective action, beyond its use as a tool in collective bargaining. We see the dual possibility of the strike as a 'stress reliever' – a temporary disruption that may help to restore the status quo (see for example Hyman 1989; Lehulere 2005; and particularly Shorter and Tilly 1971 on the domestication of strikes); which remains nevertheless one of the human attractions and strengths of a strike - and many other forms of purposeful collective action. We should not overlook the potential psychic and indeed physiological impact[93] of participating for the first time in two big, buoyant marches such as this and the last. This was heightened, I contend, by the volatile political context *beyond* the strike. Not only first time strikers but also many former strikers[94] may have felt, even if only subliminally, on the threshold of a phase change[95], tangible in, first, strategy (the form of the indefinite strike); second, in the breadth of these marches; and, third, perhaps most subtly, in the latent political implications.

[90] I have mostly confined interviews to the next chapter, but I include this here as confirmation of the observation to follow.
[91] All names have been changed.
[92] In the slang sense – to relax and socialize or to loose inhibitions on the dance floor – rather than the dictionary meaning, as in the track 'Get Down' by Rudeboyz. According to Wikipedia, the phrase, which I know as US slang, actually has African roots, in a particular posture adopted 'in moments of intensity or ecstacy'.
[93] See the *New Scientist* report on the 'feel good' effects of doing physical activity purposively together in large groups such as churches, exercise classes, and so on (Gefter 2010).
[94] Of those who had been on strike before, some would have experienced a protracted strike (such as the 1985 and 1992 strike at the then-Baragwanath Hospital, mentioned by many healthworkers there). Many others would have participated only in the one or two day demonstrative strikes of past years' bargaining. Some would have participated in short localised actions like the nurses described earlier, or teachers' independent demonstrative strikes in previous years.
[95] By which I mean to imply an accretion of changes transforming into a qualitative change.

Let me elaborate on the breadth of the march, which was also a feature of the day. The placard in Photo 36 evoked not only the end of a tether such as demonstrated in Photo 37 and the sense of a battle joined in the second placard in Photo 38, but also a layer of first-time strikers. In interviewing I met professional nurses, administrators and teachers who had also never been on strike before the previous Friday. (I do not have a clear picture how these layers were organised and interacting with people who had struck before, by the time of the strike. This would be a research project in itself.)

The theme of unity was not visible in the placards prepared before the day but it was ubiquitous to the experience of the day, cropping up frequently in interviews. It was sometimes remarked on in racial terms, such as the group from Pawusa (Public and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa) who mentioned participation of white and 'coloured' together with black strikers, but it went beyond this (Photo 39). It was not the first time that a disproportionately-white union had joined a public sector strike – it happened in 2004 – but this time, a total of 19 public sector unions, including those outside Cosatu, joined the strike (Mhlongo 2007a) (See also Photo 40). Before the speeches began, the MC went on for a full minute and a half with the customary salutes in the form 'Viva Nehawu Viva', 'Viva Hospersa Viva,' and so on, to each of which the assembled replied 'Viva' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b). (Look at Photo 36 to Photo 40 now.)

This unity represented at least in part that the Cosatu unions were thrown together with new allies by lurching circumstance, just when the crisis in the alliance was calling forth considerations of realignment of allies. The unions had mobilised some support from broader society, largely but not entirely along the lines of reviving the old struggle networks. Some taxi associations in KwaZulu-Natal came out in solidarity on the day (Mhlongo 2007a) and the South African Council of Churches issued a statement which read:

> SACC supports the strike; in a country where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, it is befitting that the lowly placed and those who earn little are listened to '(Staff Reporter 2007b).

Speakers in Johannesburg included representatives of the learners' organisation Cosas (Congress of South African Students)[96] and the Treatment Action Campaign,

[96] …but at that time, I would say, extremely unevenly rooted in actual schools.

TAC, an organisation for HIV-positive people demanding state-provision of anti-retrovirals (Recording 2007c). Cosatu was also agitating for inter-union solidarity. In Johannesburg, Willie Madisha, president of Cosatu, called on metal workers, mine workers and transport workers to strike in solidarity with the public servants (Staff Reporter 2007b) (Also audible in the background of Ceruti and Phadi 2007b, 1) and:

> in a statement issued from its Cape Town head office, the South African Municipal Workers' Union said it had called on all its members 'to join the public-sector worker demonstrations across the country today [1June]' (Staff Reporter 2007b)[97].

These calls made simple pragmatic sense, but they also began to project the public sector strike as the centrepiece in a larger battle. And, for union leaders tangled in the day to day minutia of the alliance as well as the intrusion of the alliance into their negotiations, it was exactly so (and, we will see, later became so for the public workers). For those called on to deliver solidarity on someone else's behalf, its centrality may have been less clear – we shall see that the unions were less successful turning the statements into real solidarity (while social movement were mostly slow to jump in and provide it). We will see how this ideological placement of the strike later turned into the get-out clause at the end of the strike, but in turn built in a pressure which helps precipitate the next strike.

The day's character was shaped by its label as the first day of the 'indefinite strike'. Marchers I interviewed readily echoed Madisha's statement from the platform that they 'would not end the strike until they got the 12% increase they were demanding' (Staff Reporter 2007b).

The necessary sense of resolve was communicated in many ways that day. A toyi-toyi popular on this day and throughout the strike translates roughly as 'our strength (power) will never end" from the Zulu *Azose ngephela mandla* (Recording 2007b), from the Zulu, roughly, 'our strength will never end'. This is a church song, here adapted with the backing line *lelizwe elami'communisi* (Zulu, 'This world belongs to the communists'). Commitment (and effervescence) was also reflected in the toyi-toyi, by then popular among social movement activists, '*Yonke ndawo, umzabalazo yazivumela; ye nale, umzabalazo yazivumela* (from Zulu, 'Everywhere/In every place, the struggle agrees with us; there and here, the struggle agrees with us') (Ceruti and

[97] I am not sure how this call was received by Samwu members.

Phadi 2007c, 9m28) [98]. An older toyi-toyi, *yarona,* narrates that the brave ones should go to the front (of the crowd). The sense that the demands are righteous is captured in a placard which read, 'Fraser Moleketi won't give us 12%, Comrade god will give us.' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c 36m46).

One way of communicating resolve was the 'performance' of anger. A man from Sadtu, for example, was at first only assertive as he told the camera: 'We are not here to play. We queued during election times to vote for them and now we really need money.' His agitation built as he continued: '*I will remain here* (on strike) because I want to survive. I think you have captured my point, neh?' (My emphasis). At this point other strikers jumped into the frame behind the man, joining in as he emphasised, now almost aggressively, 'We are angry! Angry!' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c29:17).[99]

Of course, many other layers of meaning and motivation are visible in these expressions of anger, such as the Sadtu man's implication of unreciprocated support in 'we queued to vote for them'. I will come back to these in a few paragraphs.

That the anger encountered on the day was real, not only a communicative act, is illustrated in the film clip of an elderly-looking woman, a cleaner in a court. She calmly reasons through the necessity of an increase, starting: 'I feel alright [to be on strike] because I need money'. When she's done describing 'friends' in answer to my question, 'Who are the friends and enemies of your strike?' I have to prompt again, 'And enemies?' 'Moleketi!' she burst out, suddenly exasperated and completely losing her cool: 'He [sic] don't want to give us money! Why he don't with the money?! [S]He knows we are suffering!' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c 29:00)[100].

Her last sentence highlights a warp thread on the loom on which strikers were weaving complex strike identities. She **expects** the minister to know and understand the strikers' suffering and feels the minister's offer as a deliberate affront. The fibres of this thread seem to be largely an assumption of a shared humanity calling forth certain humane obligations, implied in Photo 41, Photo 42 and Photo 43 and made explicit amongst the complex of themes in Photo 44, which culminates in (in Sesotho),

[98] I would argue that the strikers are communicating first of all with themselves and each other when toyi-toying – building their own resolve in other words – and only secondarily seeking to communicate with others outside the strike (media, bystanders).

[99] It is possible that such conscious demonstrations of anger arise from the habit of the 'demonstrative' one or two day strikes which had become common in public sector negotiations in past years, where the union leaders might say that

[100] Using 'he' for Moleketi does not necessarily indicate ignorance of Moleketi's gender. This is common in South African English when the speaker's mother-tongue uses an ungendered second-person pronoun (such as isiZulu, u-).

'you are not human'. This is crucial to understand the **personalisation** of messages directed towards Fraser Moleketi in the placards discussed above and below, and her **depersonalisation** in some instances. Placards drag in her marriage (Photo 45, Photo 46, where Pandor, the minister of health, is also addressed personally as a kind of pet, and Photo 47), her lifestyle (Photo 48) (not unjustifiably, compared with the strikers' lives) and her mother (Photo 49). Her person is caricatured in Photo 50 as a feminised fatcat with a baboon's tail, possibly intended as a very serious insult in a country where 'baboon' is an epithet beloved by racist farmers. One venomous placard accused her of 'whoring' with the department's money (Photo 51). We have already encountered the popular toyi-toyi with its sexualised overtones, 'Moleketi quickly closes, Madisha [then president of Sadtu] opens'. Some placards, such as Photo 51, could be construed as threatening her personal harm. (Look at Photo 41 to Photo 51 now.)

Let me note two implications for identity here before dealing with the sexualisation of (de)personalisation. The first is the clear illustration that some forms of dis-identification rely on a previous, betrayed identification. The second is that this particular identity/disidentity flip begins with a sort of *denial* of classed positionality – an assumption of common human experience enabling mutual understanding – which creates cognitive dissonance when the minister's behaviour contradicts. Explaining to oneself why this human will not give the money could tap into the recognition of differentiated social positions, but does not automatically go to recognising the minister as 'expressing' a function of the state through her person, despite the widening social distance - partly because it *can* be deflected into personalised individual explanations.

It is perhaps no surprise that sexist stereotyping emerged most sharply where the minister's person entered the discourse, and the specifics or presumed specifics of that person consequently come to the fore, since gender is embodied and embodiment is itself gendered[101] (though note other less clearly sexist possibilities for gendered personalisation of the minister in the caption of Photo 48). It has been suggested to me that these sexist tropes reflected Zuma's influence (discussed, though not in relation to the strike, by, for example, S. Hassim 2009; Southall 2009) but I found nothing to suggest nor deny this. While its undoubtedly true that Zuma's statements would have given courage to certain ideas about women in society, strikers did not mention Zuma at this stage of the strike, and I came across only one reference

[101] Thanks to Prof. Kenny for this particular phrase.

to Zuma (on a car window). It seems equally plausible to me that the sexist insults here were rooted in more ordinary, everyday sexism.

Either way, a natural and valid disgust for sexist expression does not obviate digging for the purpose of such expression (which is anyway complicated even at this surface level: shortly, footnote 102 will complicate the use of the word prostitute in the toyi-toyi '*Yini* Moleketi?' and Chapter 8 will put a wrinkle in assumptions that sexual innuendo was reserved for women – see footnote 141 in particular).

Crudity and insult, in general, worked as measures and mechanisms of *social distance*, and were prominent in placards rejecting the government offer (and note that insulting placards were not always sexual, embodied or gendered, but were often crude). While there are plenty of placards which relied on human appeal and reasoned argument (Photo 52, Photo 53, Photo 54), others seemed intent on rudeness, ranging from insulting the minister's intelligence to peppering the placard with swear words (Photo 55, Photo 56, Photo 57, Photo 58, Photo 59) – a reply in kind to the insult perceived in Moleketi's microscopic shift in offer, as illustrated in Photo 60, Photo 61 and Photo 62. (Look at Photo 52 to Photo 62 now.)

The demand for respect in Photo 60 above lays claim to basic humanity. Photo 63 implied both broken loyalties and an appeal to be recognised as *human* – not a dog – through the wage increase, an appeal echoed in various placards equating the government offer with peanuts (Photo 64, Photo 65 and Photo 66). (The 'rats' in Photo 65 are scabs, non-strikers.) Demands for recognition as humans shade into demands for recognition at work. So, in the interaction with Pansy described on page 142, we see that the stubborn adherence to 12% was not merely about a monthly budget calculation but included discontent over the lack recognition (which Pansy refers to in the phrase 'without anything') of the stresses, difficulty and importance of the work, also reflected in Photo 67, Photo 68 and the demand to get 'what we deserve' already seen in Photo 42, Photo 46 and Photo 48 above. Another placard at the back of Photo 55 above reads '6% is for unskilled, unprofessional, unreasonable people like yourself!', by implication not for the skilled, professional and reasonable strikers. Photo 69 contrasts strikers' many qualifications with the minister's ('the liberation struggle'). Of course inventorying the work's importance to society in this way entwines with reciprocity to shade into interdependence – the notion that nothing will happen without the strikers' work - which comes across sharply in Photo 70 and Photo 48 above, but also appeared in a more basic form in the strikers' inversion (implicit, after all, in the

strike tactic) of the government's 'no work no pay' threat illustrated in Photo 71 and Photo 72. The themes of interdependence and the importance of the work shade over into 'threatening' or conditional placards and toyi-toyis, although not all themes of threat relate directly to work. (Look at Photo 63 to Photo 72 now.)

One toyi-toyi, '*diba kamona*', adapted from a soccer song, simply describes and acts out trapping its object: it translates as 'hold (close) this side, hold that side, we want Moleketi' (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c 27m27). We already saw personalised threats in Photo 51 above, and another placard implies an unspecified threat in Photo 73. Photo 74 implies defiance of the law. These placards seem to parallel the performance of anger: the resort to threat is an indication of reaching the end of the rope, communicating how serious is the minister's perceived slight.

The formula of unacceptable offer and 'or-else' reply is, of course, hardly foreign to the quotidian business of collective bargaining, and would have been heard from the union officials. On 1 June, for example, a speaker from the police union, Popcru, warned from the platform that, although 'ministers were still able to "sleep very nice"' because '"you will see some of us working today [police were defined as essential workers and not allowed to strike] … you will not see that forever. We are not government dogs"' (Associated Press 2007).

But placards such as Photo 75 and Photo 76 build their conditionality on direct allusions to the strikers' work – the first emphasising that good teaching is conditional on proper pay, the second threatening to withdraw labour totally. One thing going on here is that emphasising *inter*dependence begins to flip into a more one-sided emphasis and the ministers' dependence on the strikers. We will see this mature on 13 June.

In at least two placards (Photo 77, Photo 78), the threat takes a political form. Remember also the Sadtu man mentioned earlier, who framed his wage demand in a reminder that 'we queued to vote for' politicians. (Look at Photo 73 to Photo 79 now.) These reminders to the powerful were encapsulated in a signature toyi-toyi of this strike, which I first heard on this day. The refrain *Yini Moleketi?* (What's this, Moleketi?) was sung especially enthusiastically by women. Nomancotsho Pakade translated: 'What's this, Moleketi? We took you from amongst the prostitutes and put you on the gravy train, but now you are closing the doors. *Voetsak!'* (Closing the doors here carries a sexual undertone). On the surface this appears deeply personalised and

merely sexist. But, as Pakade pointed out, the idiom of the prostitute[102] implies someone who sold themselves to the highest bidder, a strongly political image in South Africa where ministers such as Jabu Moleketi - Fraser-Moleketi's former husband - went directly from the SACP to overseeing the privatisation of state assets. The song reminds us whose votes took Moleketi to that place where she need no longer see, feel or sympathise with the troubles of ordinary people.

This brings us full circle: personalisation may deflect classed analysis, but it can also be a device for **making** class analysis, where the individual appears as a kind of metaphor for their class.

In this discussion I have ignored themes already discussed on 25 May, but the reader will have noticed a few, such as the persistent theme of inequality, which reappears unreconstructed in Photo 80, Photo 81, and Photo 82. (Look at Photo 80 to Photo 82 now.)

The Cosatu unions' decision to go ahead with the strike from June 1 paid off by pulling the smaller unions in its wake. The Johannesburg march could certainly be considered a success, and news reports indicate that the strike was felt in workplaces and particularly township schools. But the 'indefinite strike' had only just begun, and now came the much harder task of sustaining it beyond the initial excitement. Here, the practical effectiveness of various strike cultures bumped up against the government's entrenchment.

6.4. Escalation: the challenges of striking

Friday 1 June gave the unions substantial confidence in their ability to mobilise public sector workers, but failed to move the government negotiating team. Friday's assurances of 'an extra 2-billion' had turned to mist in Monday's negotiations (Mhlongo 2007a). If Cosatu unions had expected results from simply producing a real strike - an act not merely exercising instrumental force, but also sounding an alarm about how deeply their relationship with their comrades in government had deteriorated - the same structural and political tensions which drove them to this dramatic gesture were

[102] Moreover, as Pakade explained, *izifebe*, the isiZulu word translated here as 'prostitutes', is not necessarily gendered: the word can mean prostitute and 'bitch' but also promiscuous men, immoral people in general and both male and female adulterers. In fact, the verb *–feba* means to commit adultery (isiZulu.net). Without diminishing the sexist potential and actuality in these expressions, these additional meanings point to the expression of a sense of *betrayal* – "going outside the relationship".

also acting on the state to make it 'stubborn', setting the scene for a rapid escalation in the early days of the protracted strike.

The challenges to sustaining the strike included police intimidation; government intimidation over essential workers, which began to split the strike; the difficulty in enforcing a strike where the 'product' is humans; failure to mobilise public support; difficulty in countering negative press and therefore morale; loss of wages, obviously; and separation of different sectors of strikers from each other.

The Cosatu unions' core strategy was to maintain the strike through various sorts of picketing[103] which aimed to bring work to a standstill or, in the case of hospitals, down to skeleton staff, combined with regular strike meetings. This relatively conventional mode of striking was uneven but quite successful in the first week, as reflected in Nehawu strike reports from different regions (such as Mackie 2007a; 2007b; Nehawu Limpopo 2007; Nehawu Mpumulanga Province 2007; Regional Organiser, Free State Nehawu 2007).

The pickets not only closed schools and government departments but also attracted press attention and, crucially, contributed to forging a strike collective. Picketing demonstrated unity of purpose and commitment to the strike.

Daily strike cultures varied. Soweto teachers, for example, used 'grasshopper pickets' in the opening days of the strike, going in groups from school to school, which also evaded most confrontation with the police. Children were kept home once it was established that the strike was real, so it was relatively easy for teachers to achieve a shutdown. Regular mass meetings for all Soweto teachers held the strikers together once the need for picketing had diminished (Author's notebook 2007)

Major hospitals were characterised by standing mass pickets, reported at Tygerberg in Cape Town, King George VII in Durban, Bloemfontein hospital, Johannesburg General, and Chris Hani Baragwanath (CHB) in Soweto. Police violently dispersed these pickets in several cases during the first week of the strike (Reuters 2007b; IOL 2007; Jeffries 2007), but at first this seems to have cemented the sense of a purposeful collective for those in the pickets.

At Chris Hani Baragwanath (CHB) hospital, which I was able to observe most closely, the standing picket also transformed easily into meetings which discussed

[103] The smaller unions outside Cosatu did not necessarily embark on the 'indefinite strike', but their members may have been involved in partial striking, outlined later.

strategy and developments in the wage negotiations. As the strike wore on and the novelty wore off, much of the day was spent sitting around waiting for something to happen, but toyi-toyis remained an important way of passing the time and another way of cementing a collective. Popular songs on this standing picket included '*Asozi ngephelemandla*' (We will not lose power) and the slightly humorous '*Dibele'* (Recording 2007d) which mimed blocking one's troubles with one's backside. On at least two occasions after the Soweto schools were closed, teachers came to support the CHB health workers, transforming the standing picket into a grasshopper which moved to all the gates of the hospital, and disrupted traffic on the main road near the Bara Taxi Rank (Photo 83, Photo 84; Photo 85; Photo 86). Strike reports from other regions indicate that teacher support for hospitals happened elsewhere too. (Look at Photo 83 to Photo 86 now.)

Other strike cultures included those of partial strikers. These were people who said they were on strike, took part in the 25 May and 1 June marches, but who reported for work the following day. One person I interviewed, for example, gave me a work telephone number when I asked if I could contact him during the strike. They were not necessarily *non*-strikers, however. Tebza, who was then working in administration in Pretoria, told me that most workers in his building were arriving at the workplace and signing in but then going out to toyi-toyi, or striking on the job by coming to work without doing any work (Tebza, 16 June). Such strike cultures may have been consciously or accidentally improvised by first-time strikers in newly-organised workplaces, or reflect different styles of diverse unions and varied workplaces. I do not have more information on this.

The first day of the strike had already introduced several categories of workers whose relation to the strike was somewhat ambiguous. One such category was the police. There was a heavy police presence on 1 June, ranks of police separated strikers from the Gauteng legislature (Photo 87), and police broke up pickets; yet, perhaps because police were not allowed to strike although their wages were affected by the outcome, they were widely regarded as being on the strikers' side, and they did not seem to feel threatened by the huge crowd on 1 June (Photo 88). At this stage, a police strike remained one of the (phantom) cards still to be played on the unions' side of the negotiating chamber, as we heard from the Popcru speech above. (Look at Photo 87 and Photo 88 now.)

From early in the strike, the employer exploited the state machinery and extended the essential services concept to drive a wedge amongst the strikers.

Before the strike, a labour court order had interdicted Cosatu, Denosa and Nehawu from 'promoting, encouraging or supporting the strike by employees engaged in essential services' and interdicted their 'members… who are engaged in essential services… from participating in the strike' (Justice Francis 2007). The definition of 'essential' stretched way beyond medics: an annexure declaring 'nursing' an essential service also names 'support services' in health care ranging from 'catering, medical records' to 'forensics, laundry, hospital engineering' and even 'pest control'. Barely three days into the strike, '(t)he director general of the health department, Thami Mseleku, told a press conference on Sunday that any health workers who failed to turn up to work on Monday would face the sack' (Sapa-AFP 2007).

That weekend, the Department of Health issued an ultimatum to return to work (Butshingi 2007). This was no empty threat: by the 11th June, Nehawu head office was receiving dismissal notices from all over the country (see, for example Nehawu Ekurhuleni region 2007; Majola 2007f; Johannesburg Hospital 2007b). Contrary to Fraser-Moleketi's sly implication (Fraser-Moleketi 2007a), most of those dismissed were support workers, not nurses or other kinds of medics: for example only four out of 40 dismissed at CHB were nurses of any kind, alongside eight clerks, two drivers, eight cleaners, three laundry workers and some 'food service aids' (Chief executive officer CHB 2007). Similarly Johannesburg hospital dismissed five nurses/nursing assistants out of 45 dismissed, alongside four 'operators' (probably radiographers and the like), six general assistants, four laundry aids, five food service aids, three porters and a linen supervisor (Johannesburg Hospital 2007a). Combined with the sabotage of the union's plans for skeleton staff, which I will come to shortly, this swiftly erased the middle ground occupied by partial strikers. Gradually, as the strike wore on, the inclusive identity 'all the public sector workers' was replaced with the polarised identities striker and scab. Strikers were also *ascribed* polarised individual identities which worked on some of them. Nurses, for example, were conflicted about the strike both practically, as targets of dismissals, and morally through the implied contrast of The Nurse's high, respected calling with The Bad Nurse who abandons it for personal gain. Fraser-Moleketi admonished:

> These nurses are being sacked in the interests of the patients and the country. We cannot have casualties or deaths in our hospitals because of

> the *selfish interests* of those who are *charged with the lives of others* (Fraser-Moleketi 2007a).

Meanwhile government moved swiftly to weaken the strike through direct force. From day one and on several occasions in the first week of the strike, successful pickets at hospitals were broken up by police using, variously, batons, rubber bullets, stun grenades and water cannon in Durban, Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Johannesburg (Jeffries 2007; Reuters 2007b). About 30 strikers were arrested in Bloemfontein on the Monday, accused of intimidating staff at a hospital, and four were arrested - reportedly without warning - at King George V hospital where 200 workers allegedly blocked an entrance (Reuters 2007b). Criminal charges were laid against strikers for 'illegal gathering" outside KwaZulu-Natal's provincial legislature. Troops were deployed inside and outside schools and hospitals, completing the impression that the strikers were dangerous (REuters 2007; Kotane undated; Du Plessis and Khoza 2007).

The pickets successfully disrupted work, but their power by themselves to achieve the strikers' goal was limited by the non-profit nature of the strikers' 'product' – human health and children's education. The more the pickets were successful in disrupting work, the more contradictory the potential effect. The pressure on the employer was real but more ideological than direct. Government's public-approval stockpiles, so to speak, had already been shrinking before the strike, but the strike was concentrated in the realm of population services and therefore a long way from disrupting the 'core' operations of the state - policing, border control, non-welfare related administration and the like, most of which were prohibited from striking. The initial success of the pickets therefore put the employer on the spot but was turned into grist for the employer's propaganda mill. Ten days into the strike, CHB management claimed that 'at least two deaths can be said to have been contributed to in some way by strike action' (Chris Hani Baragwanath 2007) and by the middle of the month, the death of an unborn baby and a toddler were being blamed on the strike (Sapa 2007l; e.TV 2007). Additionally, the employer was connected in high places to a literal army of forced scab labour. No doubt the possibility of being court martialled cast a long shadow on the righteous appeal - 'Don't be used as a replacement against your better life' - from SASFU, the tiny soldiers' union (SASFU 2007).

Nehawu, at least, had not counted on picketing alone to do the trick. Their plan was supplemented by the essential services plan mentioned already, and then by a solidarity programme aimed mainly at other unions and community organisations.

The essential services plan for hospitals was sabotaged by interdicts restricting picketing, which also banned strikers from entering hospital premises. For example, police chased the skeleton staff out of George V hospital in Durban on the basis of an interdict on Nehawu against strikers entering the premises, leading Nehawu's Pakama Ndunakazi to comment, 'If you chase those people, who is going to provide the minimum service?' (Reuters 2007b). Nehawu Gauteng province requested the regions[104] to 'arrange urgent meetings with our Community Structures' to 'engage them' on the strike and inform them 'the main assistant [sic] that we need from our communities in support to our strike is support that include but is not limited to our community members providing minimum services to our public that we are servicing; unlike the current situation where the minimum services are provided by SANDF members' (Mamuremi 2007). But the call received hardly any publicity and, although I heard the suggestion at a meeting at CHB and although Nehawu documents show that several community meetings took place around the country, I do not find any evidence that regions really organised volunteering. Government was able to seize all the credit for such public volunteering as did occur (Fraser-Moleketi 2007a; Chris Hani Baragwanath 2007). No other campaigning around the skeleton staff took place. So the interdicts and dismissals began to drive two wedges into the strike – first, between strikers and partial strikers, and second between strikers and the public.

The need and the potential for relating to the public is illustrated by the contradictory attitudes of patients entering the hospital. I asked about 15 what they thought of the strike. None were aware of the union's plans for a skeleton staff. Some felt that 'gossiping nurses' didn't deserve 12% (Patient 8 2007). One thought that 12% would increase inflation which would hurt those, like himself, with no wages (Patient 14 2007). But most reasoned along the lines that while the strike was 'not okay' – 'if you've got problems you must talk to the boss' (Patient 10 2007) - the 12% was okay: 'The strike is wrong because people are dying [but] 12% is right, this hospital is life support – why the government doesn't give 12%?' (Patient 7 2007).

[104] Each province is divided into regions in union structure

Attempts to mobilise community solidarity exposed how rusty parts of the old alliance machine had become. The erstwhile community organisations - civics and the like - had been sundered by class differentiation after apartheid in the context of new geographic mobility, and their remains absorbed into ward committees and ANC branches, whose loyalties on the strike were divided by the nature of the employer. One strike report tells of a meeting to organise community solidarity at Kalafong hospital being disrupted by 'management' and Metro police (Mackie 2007b). It is unclear how – indeed whether - the strike committees related to the new, second-wave of community networks developing in the 'popcorn protests' and the demarcation disputes, where ANC branches and splits within them sometimes played a role. The Treatment Action Campaign, which was independent of the alliance but whose leading members were sympathetic to it, issued a statement supporting the wage increases which condemned government for failing to reach an essential services agreement (Treatment Action Campaign 2007), and together with the Aids Law Project, considered interdicting government against dismissals of nurses on the basis that this would interfere with future provision of anti-retrovirals (A. Hassim et al. 2007). But it does not seemed to have mobilised its members around the strike.

It remains a substantial but underappreciated near-event in the strike that Soweto unionists became open to working with new social movements such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. This seems unremarkable today, in light of Numsa's United Front, but since the SACP and Samwu withdrew from the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in the late '90s, the unions had treated the organisations germinated in this earlier wave of post-apartheid delivery protests with suspicion, derision or outright hostility. Now they were grateful for the assistance proffered by about 10 activists from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) who formed themselves into the Soweto Strike Support Committee after a meeting on 7 June attended by 2 strikers from CHB. In this instance, the union's openness was surely aided by existing links (a CHB striker who knew someone in the SECC from long ago had, some months before, gone to the SECC offices, which were just down the road from the hospital, for help with an unfair labour practice at the hospital, which was satisfactorily solved), but any novel show of solidarity would likely have been welcomed. However few of the APF's affiliates pushed at that door to see if it was truly unlocked. The umbrella body issued a statement towards the end of the first week of the strike (Photo 92), stating that it 'fully' supported the strike, and contextualising the

'legitimate and reasonable' 12% demand in a history of neo-liberal restructuring and appeals to intra-class solidarity: 'As part of the 'army of the unemployed', the APF also calls on our communities to support the strike' (Anti-Privatisation Forum 2007). However the constituent organisations were not excited by the strike. These organisations drew their membership from layers of the proletariat socially quite distant from the 'middle class' strikers. Moreover, their identity had been formed around independence from the ruling party. These organisations had been born in the crucible of being betrayed by and breaking with the ruling party. Some, such as the SECC activists, distinguished between union leaders and members but most APF affiliates accepted the arguments outlined in the introduction, which conflated the unions, whole, with the government. This remains a giant 'What If…' question about the strike: what if the APF's organisations had related to the strike more broadly, consistently and practically, with their independent politics?

The experience of the Soweto Strike Support Committee, itself new to strike support, illustrates some of the difficulties of 'mobilising communities' around the strike. SECC had successfully organised people who were on the receiving end of cut-offs, but they couldn't therefore just conjure up 'the communities' like a clay army around the wages of 'middle class' workers. The committee's public meeting in the second week of the strike worked mainly to organise the general membership of the SECC (Photo 89, Photo 90, Photo 91). What the strike committee never managed to do was to mobilise the strikers themselves to campaign with the public. This would have been a substantial force numerically and influentially, but the strikers' energy was focussed on maintaining the pickets, even through the lockout that started on 10 June. In any case, talking to the public could have been construed 'intimidation' if done within the zone designated by interdicts. (Look at Photo 89 to Photo 93 now. I will come to Photo 93 in a few pages.)

The main hope for a successful solidarity programme was concentrated on other unions. On 1 June, the public sector unions had filed notice for a secondary strike beyond the public service[105], for example in the airports company and South African Revenue Services (Nehawu communications department 2007b). Then on 7 June, the federation Cosatu added its weight, calling for a solidarity day on 13 June (Staff

[105] In South African labour law, a secondary strike is a strike 'in support of a strike by other employees against their employer' (Section 66(1) of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995) – in essence, a protected solidarity strike.

Reporter 2007c). And indeed the (uneven) generalisation of pressures on industrial relations across sectors gave hope that 'ratcheting up the dispute by bringing the entire economy to a standstill', as Sacob denounced the move, would decisively tip the balance. The municipal workers' union, Sawmu, was trying to strike over its own issues at the same time as the public sector, but they were being blocked by the labour courts. That this was not merely a leaders' concern was illustrated by the enthusiastic response of the occupants of a garbage truck passing the CHB pickets. Meanwhile Numsa, the metalworkers' union, headlined a press statement: 'Engineering industry is edging closer to a "mother of all strikes",' in which they stated their plan to canvass for the strike in two weeks (Hlangani 2007). Nehawu members at South African Revenue Services (SARS), which fell outside the public service bargaining chamber although a government department, had filed strike notice barely six weeks after the solidarity day (Sithole and Charles 2007) and by this time, workers in the fuel-distribution industry were already on strike (R. Howard 2007).

But fertile ground remained a long way from functioning solidarity, even of a coincident sort. The engineering strike was tied up in the red tape necessary to reach a protected strike, and would not start until 10 July, long after the public sector had gone back to work (Staff Reporter 2005b). And despite the new pressures, the post-apartheid habits of incorporation were not dead. While the municipal workers' union was enthusiastic in its support, the NUM and the Chamber of Mines 'agreed' that 'production [should] remained unaffected' by the solidarity strike, and that the employers would then provide transport to the demonstrations (Webb 2007). This amounted to full-time shop stewards and union officials marching. Similarly the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) declared that it 'fully supports the strike action by the Cosatu public service affiliates' but that it's members 'won't be embarking on the sympathy strike… Our participation will be confined to lunch hour demonstrations and picketing' (CWU 2007). It is more difficult to understand why Nehawu would not have tried to coordinate the SARS dispute with the public sector strike, until we understand that the routine bargaining which was breaking down in 2007 would have, until now, been prepared with a year planner – three year wage agreements were the norm in the new collective bargaining dispensation.

Meanwhile that old bargaining script was grinding along in the background - grinding the unions down rather than grinding out a settlement. A week into the strike, the majority of public sector unions outvoted Sadtu to reduce the demand to 10% in

order to break the mediation logjam (Staff Reporter 2007c), plus 3% in 2008 (Majola 2007g). Government did not mirror this substantial concession. It later 'welcomed' the mediators' proposal of 7.25% (Fraser-Moleketi 2007b; Sapa 2007f), a figure whose inelegance reflected the incremental shift recommended – a mere 0.7%. Nevertheless the ministry declared this 'substantial' as it later contrasted its own concern for 'the interests of the people of South Africa whom we have undertaken to serve' with the union's rejection of the proposal (Minister for the Public Service and Administration 2007). On the unions' other two critical issues – the essential services agreement and the return-to-work agreement – the mediators were noncommittal, merely recommending that the parties should 'urgently conclude' these matters to facilitate a return to work (PSCBC mediators 2007; Public Service Unions? 2007). The public sector unions called to intensify the strike but nevertheless persisted with mediation on the Tuesday afternoon before the solidarity strike (Majola 2007g), while Nehawu assured its provinces that they would sign nothing 'if it does not include the return to work agreement' (Majola 2007g).

And what of the broader context? On the eve of the solidarity day, Tuesday 12 June, I made the following notes while watching a TV news broadcast dominated by the public sector strike:

> ETV 7pm: Moleketi: 'Teachers who go back to work will have police protections'; Zuma at Popcru [congress] – calls on both parties to negotiate a peaceful solution, can't answer if strike is justified 'because he is not involved in the negotiations'; Unborn baby dies because of shortage of staff (used words unborn baby and unborn child three times). [Vote by text] 'Do you support the actions of striking public sector workers?' 66% say yes. Meanwhile in Umlazi a train is stoned for being two hours late [this incident was not connected to the public sector strike].
>
> ETV 10pm Back to FM [Fraser Moleketi]: 'We will not be taking any chance on security'. Zuma: 'The ANC has always sympathised with the strike, the strike is a negotiated process'. Samwu wins in court against [state] interdict [intended to prevent it from striking]. (Author's notebook 2007)

Although historic loyalty to the ANC tended to steer criticism away from president Thabo Mbeki's person in the strike (See, for example, Photo 93), the strike could not help infringing the battle for the heart and soul of the ANC. Zuma's first comments on the strike, delivered from the edge of the Popcru national congress where he had that day been endorsed by Popcru's president in the battle to lead the ANC (ka Nzapheza 2007), were at best ambiguous. On the Thursday, the day after the sympathy strike,

he was firmer that 'both parties' could have done more to prevent the strike, which he said was 'not doing any good' for the country's image abroad (Staff Reporter 2007e). But on the Tuesday, his call for a return to the negotiation table was taken by many to be admonishing government's failure to make a better offer before the strike. That same day, Mbeki had weighed in on the strike from parliament:

> 'What kind of society are we building and what moral lessons are we imparting when insults, violence against fellow workers and damage to property become the stock-in-trade during protests of this kind?' Mbeki asked MPs in the National Assembly on Tuesday during debate on the Presidency's budget vote. (Staff Reporter 2007d)

Vavi had also spoken out on the strike from the Popcru congress, on the Monday (11 June). His comments, appealing to government to negotiate seriously, could also be misconstrued:

> 'We're quite aware of the consequences of allowing the strike to prolong to the second and to the third week,' he said. 'Workers will be soon angry, they will be frustrated, and they will see anybody going to work, irrespective of how genuine their reasons are, as basically betraying their cause. And very soon the strike will turn violent. We don't want that, and that is why we say to the government, our door is open on Monday afternoon.' (Sapa 2007f)

Extending the strike to other sectors remained the big hope for drumming some sense into government's negotiators. Vavi 'hoped the government would act decisively to avoid a planned general strike on Wednesday in support of the public sector unions', (Sapa 2007f). And the Popcru president gave negotiators a week to reach agreement, warning that the union's members were 'not sitting here because we're afraid to join' the strike, and were only held back by 'respect for the safety and security of South Africans' (Sapa 2007f), and indeed the union had filed papers with the court to strike.

A lot was being pinned on the solidarity strike. Would it rise to the challenge?

6.5. Slouching towards a stalemate

Wednesday **13 June** was paradoxical: a highpoint that was simultaneously a pivot towards the strike's end, seeming, somehow, to consolidate the employer's power just at the moment of the biggest challenge to it. Strikers' representations of power were canted off the established norm to a point close to capsize, and solidarity extended beyond the sectors on strike and those allowed to strike. Unsurprisingly, the national federation was not able to conjure up a total stayaway *a la* 1980s by press release

and a snap of fingers as if there had not been thirteen years of demobilisation and legalistic domestication separating the highpoints of community-union alliances from the just-now-cracking trade union cultures of the day. Government is somewhat moved by the display but does not move on the core demand, eventually forcing a divisive settlement which helped widen the cracks in the bargaining-chamber alliances amongst different unions and which divided the strikers themselves. The first hints of divergence in the respective motivations of union leaders and strikers now become apparent. For the former, extending solidarity seems to have been supplanted (unevenly) by increased efforts to settle as the upcoming ANC policy conference figured larger and larger in Cosatu's strategic estimations. Nevertheless it took nearly two more weeks to put the strike to bed, as those who remained on strike failed to imagine a strategy to continue, but continued to perform (and feel) 'resolve' even as fatigue set in and their power declined: no work no pay was biting, the workforce had been effectively divided and the focus on scabs couldn't win.

The solidarity march on **Wednesday 13 June** in Johannesburg, which I attended, was one of 43 marches around the country that day (Sapa 2007m). It is difficult to judge the exact magnitude of the strike that day from available sources. The Western Cape public service administration claimed that national government departments 'appeared to be functioning as usual' that day and that there 'had been a "return to more normality" in the health sector,"' (Sapa 2007j), yet a spokesperson for the Home Affairs ministry reported 'major disruption to services. "Not a lot of people are at work, especially junior staff," [wa ga Tau] said. "It is mostly people employed in management who have turned up for work"' (BBC 2007b). The strike also extended beyond the bargaining chamber's scope into other parts of the public sector: for example 20 out of 33 SARS (South African Revenue Services) workers at the Maseru border post struck that day (Sithole 2007).

The strike's effect beyond workplaces was also uneven: public transport in Johannesburg was functioning normally except for trains, but Pietermaritzburg was 'as quiet as a Sunday' (BBC 2007b), Durban's taxi rank was 'deserted' (Sapa 2007i), and even the sleepy little town of Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape - population 4 028 (Census 2011 nd) - was 'totally shut down' (Secretariat 2007).

Government's estimate that 'in all centres across the country 70 000 participated in the marches' diverged wildly from the unions' estimate of 600 000 nationally (Gerardy 2007), as did Cape Town police reporting 5 000 to the unions' 25 000 (Sapa

2007j). Most press reports are unhelpfully vague here ('thousands', 'tens of thousands', and occasionally 'hundreds of thousands'). One report about the Durban march, however, exposes a problem with police estimates.[106] This reporter confirms the police estimate of 5 000, the widely reported figure for the Durban march, *at the starting point*, but notes that the march grew along the route to 10 000 by the time it reached the city hall (Sapa 2007i). Similarly, the Johannesburg march was reported to have 'swelled' as the morning went on (Sapa 2007g) although many news reports contented themselves with a 10am estimate, and in Bloemfontein, only 'a few hundred' marchers set off from the starting point but 'thousands' joined later, with 'many' union members 'along the way … sitting on pavements or waiting in trees for the procession to arrive' (Bate and Muchena 2007). Using only independent eyewitnesses estimates like these and my own calculation for Pretoria based on one shop steward's observation that the march 'close[d] five traffic lights at a time' (Sithole 2007), we reach 50 000 for just four cities (4 000 for Pietermaritzburg (Sowetan, multiple reporters 2007), 15 000 in Johannesburg (*Reuters* 2007c), at least 20 000 in Pretoria[107], and 10 000 for Durban) before taking into account Cape Town, Bloemfontein, and regional centers with strong union traditions such as Port Elizabeth, for which I have been unable to find any independent reports. (Nehawu Eastern Cape reported very big marches in Port Elizabeth, Queenstown and Grahamstown, for example (Secretariat 2007), which I have been unable to verify). Even when the union's reports of numbers marching need a pinch of salt ('+-3000' (Secretariat 2007) seems a little far-fetched for Lusikisiki, and perhaps it was meant to read '300'), the remarkable number of separate demonstrations which took place is unlikely to have been exaggerated. The government estimate is almost certainly deflated, even if it truly meant only major centers. It is also unclear whether lunchtime demos such as those proposed by CWU and Numsa took place, which may have featured in the unions' calculations.

The Johannesburg march felt smaller than previous events, but that was hardly surprising. Apart from growing financial constraints , Willie Madisha, Cosatu president and former president of Sadtu, was speaking in neighbouring Pretoria (Craven 2007) while none of Cosatu's office bearers was speaking in Johannesburg. Several unions beyond the public sector were visible in Johannesburg, although with the exception of

[106] And possibly also a problem of treating journalism as an office job.
[107] Using the Jacobs method (Wikipedia 2015) with a photograph of the march (Getty Images 2007) to estimate crowd density and area measurements from Google Earth based on the shopsteward's observation.

Samwu, their representation seemed to be skewed towards full-time shopstewards and officials. In the documents I had, Samwu mobilisation was reported in 8 out of 11 Eastern Cape provincial marches, and in text messages from Pretoria, Evander, Kwamhlanga, Mmabatho, Sedibeng, Bloemfontein, and Mmabatho. Other unions noted at some of these marches were Numsa, NUM, Saccawu, a retail union (which had been involved in a major national strike two years before) and Satawu, the general and transport union, which had been involved in separate strikes of security guards and cleaners the previous year (Secretariat 2007; Sithole 2007; Mafela 2007). Kwazulu-Natal appears to be the only case where active solidarity extended substantially beyond the unions, in this case to the taxi associations (SABC` 2007). In Johannesburg I encountered a couple of Cosas members and a handful of members of APF affiliates (Photo 94 and Photo 95).

The placards that day developed many now-familiar themes. There were the usual contrasts such as Photo 96, Photo 97 and Photo 98, Photo 99 (evidently recycled from an earlier march); elaborations on a sense of grievance and the worth of the work (Photo 100); and statements reiterating the inadequacy of public sector salaries (Photo 101 - Zimbabwe's inflation rate went beyond 10 000% that month). (Look at Photo 94 to Photo 101 now.)

Conditionalities - such as the promise of better performance in return for 12% in Photo 100 - were increasingly politicised by now (Photo 102, Photo 103), as was the sense of extreme distance from government reflected in Photo 104 – a serious insult to a former liberation movement - and Photo 105, which is one of very few references to the then-state president which I encountered. The reference to Zuma in Photo 106 may similarly have implied a warning to the incumbent. The reference to the world cup in Photo 103 is possibly a reply to press reports that the strike was damaging South Africa's image 'ahead of the world cup' (Staff Reporter 2007e). Meanwhile insult and 'vulgarity' continued to signal this distance in non-political discourses. The placards in Photo 107 and Photo 108 represent a kind of peak abstraction of this type of placard, but other personalisations of Fraser-Moleketi use a report-card format to cast her as a slow or naughty child (Photo 97, Photo 109), an idiom which is redolent of the association of parenthood with adulthood and with monetary responsibilities which, apparently, Fraser-Moleketi could not understand. This association emerges again in in Photo 110, where Fraser-Moleketi's refusal to compromise is associated with her lack of children. An identity flip is operating here: 'what kind of mother are you?' implies

that Fraser-Moleketi had disappointed expectations that she would act in a motherly way to strikers.[108] The line 'No woman president' is most likely another veiled anti Mbeki-ism, as the Mbeki-faction was touting the idea of a woman president to undercut the Zuma faction. (Look at Photo 102 to Photo 110 now.)

The health minister's liver provided another occasion for cutting humour. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang had had a liver transplant earlier that same year, and the rumours – then unconfirmed – were that the minister remained an alcoholic who had persuaded hospital staff to sneak booze into her hospital room (and therefore did not deserve the liver, which would have been hard to come by). The now-famous liver starred in placards asserting that it should rather have gone to a baby and linking the minister's ill-health to 'too much Russian vodka'. The moral condemnation implied by the accusation of alcoholism here works as a retort to the cabinet's moralistic condemnation of the strike the day before (GCIS 2007). But additionally, the message in Photo 111, Photo 112 and Photo 113 is a very narrowly concretised, but full-blown, version of the themes of power and dependency implied in Photo 114 and in the 'no 12% no vote' placards discussed already (Look at Photo 111 to Photo 114 now). Here, the inversion of our-dependency via interdependency into your-dependency is completed: not just the minister's position in government, but her very life, had been literally and completely in the hands of the very same nurses she was now dismissing. The mushrooming of 'liver' placards all on the same day – there were many more than these – is of course not some magical airborne osmosis. Someone must have mentioned the minister's liver in a mass meeting or during a picket and others heard it and related the anecdote until it became a meme. But, while many things are said at meetings – such as the suggestion that Nehawu have a 'fall-back' position of 8% - only a few are taken up like the liver. We can reasonably expect that people pick up on the items that somehow capture what they already think, or which transform a common observation into an insight for them about the way the world works. The insight buried here is a particularly powerful one in the context; later, in Chapter 7, I will tie up how this speaks to the limits of studying class formation in static and residential contexts (Wright 2005; Savage 2003; Savage, Silva, and Warde 2010) and suggests the possibility of class subjectivities consistent with recognising class as 'a description of conditions of existence of labour under capitalism' (Skeggs 2010, 341). However we

[108] We will see the idiom of government as parent/should-be-parent elsewhere, in interviews with strikers.

must remember that its concretization, like the personalization of Fraser-Moleketi, could work as a door to systemic insight but also conversely to deflect insight by narrowing its application.

Nevertheless, the same sort of idea carries through more subtly in the appeal in Photo 115, which equates the well-being of the community with improving health workers' conditions. Like the placards in Photo 116 and Photo 117, Photo 115 attempts to redraft the mental map of identities in the strike so that the community and strikers are united against the ministers, who are to be blamed for the disruptions to community services. A nurse makes it explicit in a press interview: '"It hurts us that our people are dying but… [w]e blame the government for not giving us what we want, for the death of our patients and also for our children not being in school,"' (Mangena 2007). The appeals for a 'speedy solution' in these placards were not, it seems to me, only about public sympathy, however. They suggested also the first hints of fatigue – again not surprising amid mass dismissals the previous day (Photo 118) and announcements that wages would be docked on the Friday, 15 June (Keating 2007). (Look at Photo 115 to Photo 118 now.)

However the speakers' notes for the solidarity day encouraged resolve: 'As matters stand now, we are very far apart with the employer. We are very serious about getting our… demand' (Nehawu 2007b). Sadtu general secretary Thulas Nxesi called the negotiations 'a sham' and warned: '"I have bad news for those who want to go back. We are so far from going back"' (Sapa 2007k). He:

> … gave little hope that the dispute would end any time soon. 'We regret to inform you that what is supposed to be negotiation has so far become a joke. Instead the employer, which is our government, did not show any political will and commitment to deal with issues on table,' he told the [Johannesburg] rally. (Mangena 2007)

And in Cape Town, Vavi warned: '"We are not moving one inch. So the government has a choice: do they foresee a long winter or do they want to settle?"' (Mhlongo, Peters, and SAPA 2007).

Yet less than a week after these militant speeches, negotiators were seeking a mandate for a 'fallback position' of 8%. (Ngqiyaza 2007; Mbanwa 2007). In a curious inversion of the usual script where private spats in the alliance were covered by smiles in public, a public performance of defiance - referencing the length of the strike and the strikers' resolve - imperfectly cloaked a grim scramble offstage for a compromise the strikers would stomach.

Negotiations had resumed on the weekend, focussing first on 'peripherals' (their word) such as medical aid, special allowances and the conditions of a return to work (Blaine 2007). This was either very clever of or very lucky for those wanting to restore bargaining, because these issues allowed more wiggle room than the core wage demand: the consequences of moving a percent or two on medical aid or housing allowances were obviously much smaller because the absolute base-value was smaller, while allowances such as the Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD)[109] only applied to certain grades and occupations. Thus government negotiators could regain some good faith in their willingness to move without giving away nearly as much as moving a half percent on the basic wage. Moreover none of these issues had acquired a symbolic value like the 12% for strikers, so they were less susceptible to blanket rejection from the strikers.

By Monday, 18 June, while Vavi waxed militant about the strikers getting 'angrier', 'more united' and 'more resolved' at a Cosatu jobs and policy conference (Ngqiyaza 2007), Nehawu was showing 'the first concrete indication yet that some of the unions are considering lowering labour's 10 percent demand to 8 percent' (Ngqiyaza 2007). That same day, Madisha told the press: '"We think we can be able to move forward. We have narrowed the differences. The only major problem is around the percentage'" (Blaine 2007).

Negotiations over the conditions of the return to work gave government another arena in which to appear magnanimous by giving back with one hand what they had taken away with the other: a key movement at the weekend was that government negotiators had offered to withdraw the dismissals of the health workers fired the previous week - an apparently generous gesture but really a lot less trouble than replacing 2 000 experienced nurses and support workers. And while the conditions of a return to work were crucial for the union and the strikers, this area carried the added benefit for government of focussing the unions' minds very sharply on the 'real' task at hand – finding a way to end the strike. Nehawu chief negotiator Alastair Charles stated on the Monday that he hoped the strike would be resolved within 48 hours as 'government and union reps felt a need for "urgency" to end it' (Reuters 2007c).[110]

[109] Revised salary structures that were unique to each occupation in the public service.

[110] Of course we must assume heterogeneity of union employees, and it is not clear here at what level the strike's split personality in the last two weeks were generated. Mike Louw, Cosatu's Western Cape organiser, for example, later contradicted Charles' assertions.

(This unexpected identity across the very real and very deep gulf that had opened across that table in the past months reflected that negotiators from each side shared a deep sensibility of the intricacies of negotiations, a bond they could perhaps no longer imagine they shared with the strikers.)

It is difficult to judge how widespread Charles' views were amongst the union bureaucracy and what kind of arguments were going on at this level, but his urgency had infected union structures within a week. Several things may have contributed to the unions' growing resolve (Sadtu excepted) to secure a return to work. First, Madisha's statement on Tuesday 12 June that the Wednesday would be '"the pinnacle, the peak of the action",' (Sapa 2007h) suggests a view of the solidarity day as a rabbit to be pulled from a hat rather than the launch of an ongoing solidarity programme. For those who saw strikes as a tool of bargaining, an exercise of mere force rather than power, the solidarity day failed to force the employer's hand in one go and was therefore redundant, all the more so because it achieved something - the wiggling described above - which in turn produced an avenue out of the strike. Second, the next big card for escalating the strike was Popcru's threat to join the strike, but this threat evaporated repeatedly as the courts delayed and then rejected their application (Zigomo 2007). Even their plans to picket were scuppered by an interdict against the union's leaders which banned them from encouraging strikes. Third, for Alastair Charles, the urgency was that 'the strike [had] already collapsed in other provinces' (he was speaking from Cape Town) as workers were no longer turning up for daily pickets and meetings (*Reuters* 2007d).

It was of course true that it was increasingly difficult to sustain picket lines, and also that many workers had returned to work, some nurses on the advice of their unions. As no work no pay hit home, even people committed to the strike were not always able to make picketing anymore, sowing suspicion around who was still striking and deepening the striker vs scab identity which had begun to overtake the more expansive identities. My notebook records that at CHB on the Monday, 'people seem tired. Not singing enthusiastically' (Author's black notebook 2007: 18 June). With strike cultures happening less, sustaining a collective became more difficult, and likely exacerbated by physical tiredness and mental stress.

But rumours of the strike's death were still vastly overrated. Being tired of striking is not the same as being satisfied or ready to give up. Those still on strike had by now invested and risked very much.

The ‘fallback position’ would have allowed the negotiators to say they had settled for only half a percent less than their final demand if they settled for the government’s offer, but it was too far from the original demand to properly salve the many senses of injury strikers brought to and developed in the strike, and whose righteousness had now been affirmed several times by Vavi himself. One journalist quotes a teacher who was asked how she would deal with docked pay on the Friday explained that she had ‘consulted her family before striking and they had all agreed to cut down on living expenses until the strike [was] resolved’ (Keating 2007). This level of forethought shows a considerable commitment to the 12% strike even before the ‘hard feelings’ generated by ‘very serious incidents on both sides’, as the Health Director-General put it after the strike (Mkhwanazi 2007), even before ‘things became personal’, in the words of a striker from the Department of Water Affairs during a meeting after the strike (Author’s black notebook 2007: 25 August).

Therefore it was a struggle to bring the strike round to a settlement, and there were several more instances of militant action and solidarity before the strike’s end.

On Tuesday 20 June, CHB strikers howled down the 8% fallback at the meeting transcribed in Appendix A. Nehawu never succeeded in selling this position to the strikers, ending the strike still mandated for 9%. Sadtu never tried, officially refusing to go below 10%.

Meanwhile, the day after the solidarity action, the Soweto Strike Support Committee discussed a strike fund and a newsletter, amongst other things, and I noted that the strikers present were ‘very animated’ (Author’s black notebook 2007). On Friday 15 June, strikers marched to the health and housing department in Johannesburg (Author’s black notebook 2007: 15 June). Durban learners marched to city hall on Thursday 21 June demanding that the president intervene in wage negotiations (Mhlongo 2007b), and on the same day strikers in Johannesburg vowed to ‘sit on the necks’ of the union to get busses to the negotiating venue the following day ‘to make sure they don’t sell us out’ (Author’s black notebook 2007: 21 June), then marched on the high court (Author’s black notebook 2007: 21 June) and later stormed an education department building in Braamfontein before police dispersed them with rubber bullets (Mbanwa 2007). Meanwhile teachers had confronted police and a water cannon at a private school (Author’s black notebook 2007: 21 June). The following day strikers blocked the entrance to Phoenix hospital in Durban (Author’s black notebook 2007: 22 June). Union leaders in Kwazulu-Natal threatened that ‘”nothing moves in

the province for three days" from Monday [25 June] if the wage talks deadlock again' (Mhlongo 2007b). And Sadtu resisted ending the strike until the very end.

By the end of the third week, some union officials were experiencing the strikers as something of a drag. An unidentified union leader complained to a journalist: '"The leaders are in a sense not leading anymore. Nobody will sign anything out of fear they will lose their jobs and lose the next union elections",' (Schmidt, Ngqiyaza, and Mbanjwa 2007).

Every bit as important as striker fatigue in hurrying the strike to a conclusion must have been the fatigue of the union employees, most of whom would never have been through a long strike like this (unlike some of the hospital workers at CHB, who had been through a nine-month strike in the 1990) and with other commitments and other sectors pencilled in on their year planners, such as the Nehawu annual congress scheduled for the 26 June and the ANC policy conference on 24 June. Those who had set their sights on transforming the ANC must have been rather discouraged when Zuma clarified his initially ambiguous statement on the strike to blame both parties, as discussed near the end of the previous section.

The congress and the policy conference presented opportunities for the strike, but it is illustrative that the CHB strikers' meeting in Appendix A entertained the suggestion of disrupting the policy conference draw attention to the strike while unionists saw the opportunity to call on the conference to '"take a stand on the strike and the manner in which wage negotiations were conducted by the minister"' (Roelf 2007) and to call for a policy turnaround (Vavi quoted in Musgrave and Brown 2007). In fairness, the employers' intransigence was deeply related to dominant ANC policy, and it is not that the strikers were not also able to appreciate other roads for influencing the employer-as-government via the ruling party. Rather, it's that the policy conference offered alternate roads to the unionist, and indeed roads which might be disturbed by the strike's continuation, whereas the strikers' immediate demands needed the policy conference to be an additional road. Crudely, even the best policy for the future was not going to solve the striker's wage increase this month. In any case, by the end of the strike, Madisha had distanced the ruling-party-as-government, and hence the policy conference, from the government-as-employer in the wage dispute (Sapa 2007n).

The strike's fate was finally sealed, however, by the collapse of the bargaining alliance amongst the unions, precipitated by the government declaring that its Friday

22 June offer was 'final'. The core increase had crept up to 7.5% with greater improvements around some 'peripherals', a promise to convert the 2 025 dismissals to final warnings, and a commitment to negotiate an essential services agreement.[111] The unions were given 21 days to sign but Fraser-Moleketi warned that government would not return to negotiations and the agreement would be implemented with or without their signatures (Schmidt, Ngqiyaza, and Mbanjwa 2007). (The agreement would be binding on all in the bargaining chamber, even those who refused to sign, if fifty percent plus one of the unions signed).

This signal of the employer's future intransigence fragmented the strike initially on a part-sectoral, part-political fault line. The deal was substantially better for some workers than for others. For example, a thin layer of around 29 000 very low-paid workers – fewer than 3 percent of the public sector - got massive increases via raising the minimum wage. Meanwhile teachers would get increases in occupational allowances only in January the following year, six months later than nurses, while the extension of danger pay to new occupations threw a sweetener to immigration officials and psychiatric nurses (Cosatu NOB 2007, 5).

Hospersa, a non-Cosatu health workers' union, signed immediately, claiming this was '"the best agreement since 1990"' (Schmidt, Ngqiyaza, and Mbanjwa 2007) and complaining that the strike had '"been turned into a political game by the leadership of Cosatu and Sadtu'" (Roelf 2007). And apart for Sadtu, it seemed that the Cosatu unions were prepared to follow suit. On the Saturday, Vavi told a rally in Bushbuckridge that '"the general indication from the majority of Cosatu-affiliated unions is that they will accept [government's current wage offer]"' depending on the mandate from members (Webb 2007). However on the Sunday Denosa's membership refused to give a mandate to sign, Sadtu's members formally objected to the offer, and a week later Nehawu had not managed to win a mandate to sign (Cosatu NOB 2007). The teachers' union Naptosa announced its withdrawal from the strike on the Monday, not because it was happy with the deal but because school had to start again. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2007). By Monday 25 June 'the fire had gone out of the strike', as Trevor Ngwane put it in conversation - even strikers who did not want to settle could not continue without their unions - but it took until 29 June to wrap up the meetings

[111] By 2016, the negotiations had still not reached an agreement, according to informal discussion with a former Nehawu employee.

outside CHB and end the strike (Author's black notebook 2007: 25 June; 29 June). By 29 June, 17 unions had called off the strike (Ngqiyaza et al. 2007). Sadtu refused to sign and insisted that it had only 'suspended' the strike (although this amounted to the same thing in practice).

A Cosatu position paper circulated towards the end of the strike (Cosatu NOB 2007) is worth discussing at some length as it gives a window on at least one, very influential, strand of analysis amongst the union bureaucracy regarding the need to end the strike.

The position paper reproduced many parts of Vavi's recent speeches about the breadth of the strike, and declares it a victory even before its end insofar as it had:

> …transformed the relationship between government as the employer and its workers represented by the unions has been transformed. Never again will government treat bargaining in the public service as some form of collective begging process where it predetermines outcomes through the budget process (Cosatu NOB 2007, 1–2)

'Never' would turn out to be a mere three years in the future, as we shall see in Chapter 8, although it was true that these particular relationships would indeed never be the same again. However the transformation celebrated here involves not simply a vision of labour ascendant, but its ascendency through a restoration of 'proper' industrial relations: 'In future [government] will know that it must bargain to avoid a repeat of what it …experienced only for the first time in 2007,' and later it adds that the strike 'was historic because it [would] change the bargaining dynamics' (Cosatu NOB 2007, 2).

Its assessment of the strike, the revised offer and the way forward proceeds from and remains limited to this militant vision of collective bargaining. The government offer was taken as a reflection of the strike's power because the strike 'forced the employer to make real shifts from its initial position' (Cosatu NOB 2007, 2). This is true, but it was also of course true that the unions moved much further from their initial positions than government did over the course of the strike - 3 percent down and forced to settle at 4.5 percent less than the original demand, compared to 1.5 percent movement for the core wage demand. However the paper counsels its public sector affiliates to resist 'a one sided focus on failure to increase wages by 12%' and to thereby fail to 'take on board the other important victories' around the housing allowance and so forth. 'We must approach 12% not as a principal but as *a bargaining tool* [my emphasis] and moreover failure to achieve this goal should not overshadow

other gains' (Cosatu NOB 2007, 2). The paper asserts that 'Collective bargaining is about power: both physical and mental power' but then complains that 'the miniscule movements by government' in the wage offer projected it as 'more flexible than the unions' who 'for too long did not have a fallback position, turning 12% into a principle. This apparent inflexibility on our part saved government and projected the unions as intransigent' (Cosatu NOB 2007, 3). This 'one dimensional way of mobilising' (around the 12%) and the consequent lack of a fallback position is blamed for the feeling of betrayal of some members (Cosatu NOB 2007, 3). 'We do believe that this leadership is too weary [sic: wary] to ex[er]cise leadership hence we risk losing credibility *as a reliable negotiating partner'* (Cosatu NOB 2007, 4; my emphasis).

The paper began by fretting about the danger of 'a political defeat' of the strike (without explain what this is) or its 'fizzling out' now that Hospersa and Naptosa had pulled out, and ends by asserting that 'leadership has to be exercised' around the 'only two options' open to them, calling off or suspending the strike (Cosatu NOB 2007, 4). This paper – or rather, its writers – must have been as influential in bringing the strike to an end as they were in enabling its continuation up to the solidarity day.

6.6. Conclusion

The corralling of such a long, bitter strike back into the collective bargaining framework, and its deflection in favour of the policy conference, superficially confirms the predictions, outlined in the introduction, about the way collective bargaining (and the alliance) allows friction in order to absorb it. That analysis misses three things in this strike.

First, it lends itself to underestimating the actual eventfulness of this strike and its immediate predecessors (the security and cleaners' strikes) on collective bargaining, not for the reasons given by the Cosatu position paper but by reintroducing the concept of 'indefinite' strikes to the bargaining repertoire, along with (or because of) harsher confrontations as well as an expectation of membership activity beyond consultations and mandates. The size and coverage of the strike helped to reintroduce striking to the public sector and beyond. (We will see in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 that the second strike in 2010 damaged this revival in the public sector.) By embarking on an indefinite strike against 'their' government, the strike also helped to shatter the actually existing practice of the alliance. And added to this, it is unlikely that the ill

feelings which spilled from the policy sphere into the bargaining process and then back again did not permanently scar individual relations between many unionists and a particular faction of the ruling-party-as-government - helping in this case to secure support for Zuma.

Second, in the pressure cooker account, collective bargaining restores itself because, collective bargaining! There is no room, therefore, in this circular reasoning to account for the vacuums which allow a bitter, tumultuous and not very tightly controlled strike to be re-corralled. These will become clearer as I go along but we might wonder, for example, how things might have developed at least at the local level if more organisations in the APF had related more consistently to the strike.

Third, it does not take into account the 'hidden element', where the means of re-corralling stored up tensions for the future, such as the expectation that Zuma would treat public sector workers differently in 2010 than Mbeki's government had in 2007.

It is difficult to say whether things could have turned out differently. It is unlikely that holding out longer would have won more, as the money lost to no-work no-pay matched the money gained by the increase, but different strategies may have won more. It is more certain that, despite the union leaders' macro view of the R9 million budget forced up to R14.5 million dispensed irregularly across the workforce, there remained a psychological gulf for the strikers between the 12% and the settlement, to say nothing of the material gulf, alongside an intense learning curve in the practice of striking. It is to this hidden abode that we now turn to investigate the strike's effect on strikers' identities and world views.

Chapter 7. Close up: convergent and divergent identities in strike one

The previous chapter established some of the identity dynamics in the identity of the strike itself – that is, the externally visible identity projected by the strike collective. Most central of these for my purposes (identity rupture, the alliance, and classed and strike identities) was the 'power flip', which shaded from dependency – an image of children appealing to parents - through a sense of interdependency, to at last assert government's dependence on the strikers. We also saw that this expressed itself in a melange of workplace politics and state politics - not only via the minister's liver but also via the question of votes.

In this chapter, I zoom in on representations of the strike, themselves and other actors as they appear in strikers' responses to my prompts and questions

This chapter is organised more conceptually than chronologically. Nevertheless there are some correlations between phases of the strike and the development or salience of certain identities. In summary, the opening phase of the strike produced a convergent identity, 'all the public sector workers', around the iconic 12%, and implicit identification with 'the union' or 'the unions'. At the same time, the road to the strike was predicated on some degree of divergence in the strikers' identification from the employer (government), which has already been described in some detail in the previous chapter. The challenges of striking intensified this divergence but, at the same time, the identity 'all the public sector workers' receded under pressure of the essential services rulings and victimisation, and the identity 'scabs and strikers' hardened up and came to the fore. The strikers' instrumental identification with 'the public' – who were simultaneously the strikers' 'product' (and therefore presented as 'victims' of the strike), as well as part of the motivation for striking and key possible allies – foreshadowed a community of fate.

These identifications took place in the context of contradictions developing in the alliance (as in society), and not only reflected them but sometimes punctured the practice of the alliance. However rupture was deflected at the end of the strike (which

also solidified certain divisions amongst strikers, specifically teachers and health workers). Nevertheless the road to the strike and the strike itself produced experiences of the alliance and of government-the-employer which did not entirely demystify the relationship but intensified *ambiguities* towards government, without shattering the relationship outright, as strikers found different ways to accommodate to the end of the strike around different interpretations of its end and of striking itself, as detailed in the last part of the chapter. Such ambiguity is an essence of near-eventful identities (and precursor to eventful ones if the balance of power falls differently), although it's liminality makes it simultaneously a doorway back as well as a potential way out.

This discussion will also refract class imagery in this strike setting. When asked directly about class, most strikers drew on the same income and 'affordability' model which emerged in the non-conflictual setting of the township (See Phadi and Ceruti 2013), but these explicit definitions (like general strike-justifying imagery) were strongly tinged with an employer-striker comparative aspect; also, work featured differently, with its intrinsic usefulness emphasised rather than merely its income-generation.

In this chapter, unlike Chapter 9, I deal with identifications in a cohort fashion, characterising many strikers' views at a given time rather than zeroing in on how an individual's identifications unfold over time.

7.1. 'This is our government, we have to force them to bow down'

By way of further introduction, since this chapter is given to strikers' own words, I will begin by quoting the entirety of a three minute exchange with a striker during the demonstration on the first day of the strike, before I turn to detailing and adding to the themes mentioned. This is one of many similarly characteristic exchanges, one which is particularly good for the purpose but not unique. Its purpose here is, first, to give the reader a holistic feel for how themes appear in real life, as an antidote to the somewhat rarefied categorisation which will follow; second, it thereby illustrates the interconnectedness of some of the themes which are presented in a disconnected fashion later; and third, it makes evident, amongst other things, the ambiguity (from an orthodox or academic point of view) of real-life class self-identification. The person is a male teacher. The emphases are mine.

Striker: Moleketi[112] must give us the money. *It's not Moleketi's money,* its government's money. Why must Moleketi be afraid to give us money?

Me: Is it your first time on strike?

No.

Me: When were you on strike before?

Last week Wednesday in Pretoria.

Me: How do you feel about being on strike?

You know *we don't want to be here*. But the thing is, *we are professionals,* we need money, some of us are postgraduates, you see, but the amount of money we are getting is close to nothing, *we can't afford* houses, we can't afford cars, we can't afford a decent living, and *we're parents as well*, we've got children to look after, you see. So we definitely don't want to be here. But we have to force this government - *this is our government, we have to force them to bow down to our demands.* It becomes very much naïve - the economy of this country is doing well, there's an economic boom, but seemingly this economy does not favour others, it favours politicians. How do you give a person who is earning over 100 000 [Rands] 57%[113] and an ordinary teacher who is earning less than 10 000 with 15 years' experience only 12%? It's unfair.

Me: Who are the friends and enemies of the strike?

The enemies will obviously be the people who doesn't succumb to our demands

Me: And friends?

All public servants. We are united in struggle

Me: *What is your social class?*

Social class? [long pause]. Social?

Me: Yes, social class.

We are *supposed to be middle income earners but we're not* unfortunately, we are not. But we are supposed to be.

Me: What class would you call yourself then?

The poorest. The poorest of the poor.

Me: Can you call yourself working class?

[112] Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, then minister of Public Service and Administration.
[113] The proposed increase for members of the state cabinet

We are of course the working class. Yes.

Me: How do you know someone is working class?

The *person who is contributing towards the production of this country*, like now, as we speak, I mean there's no production in this country, because the working class are in the streets.

Me: What class is Frazer Moleketi, in your view?

Ah *she's a fat cat*, she's a fat cat! She is *one person* who is *heartless*, who *doesn't think of other* people. I mean how can so many people be wrong? We're more than two hundred thousand now. If you think that two hundred thousand people are wrong, then obviously you have to do some self-introspection. (Male teacher, 1 june 2007)

A number of wide-spread strike-enabling tropes are illustrated above. First, it seems that a powerful motivator of the strike was this sense that the trappings of the middle class identity attributed to public workers, as well as the professional identities they often assumed, remained unattainable ('We are supposed to be middle income earners but we're not – our class is the poorest of the poor'). A different male striker, on the same day, said, 'In sociology they'll tell us that we're middle class but if you compare our salaries we're not!'

Second, strike identities were not automatically or primarily classed, as is to be expected. A common example of this is the motif of being parents, and by implication responsible adults[114]. This motif frequently gave rise to contrasts with the un-parental, 'heartless' behaviour of Geraldine and other ministers, as we saw already in the previous chapter and will see again below. It implies the ministers' responsibilities to the strikers via a paternalistic metaphor. Their failure to 'think for other people' delineates the relation expected of government by delineating the relationship betrayed by government.

At the same time, however, his definition of working class was substantially different from the 'affordability' model's perception of working class. It was not unusual for teachers and nurses to call themselves poor or imply that they were or should be middle class while also calling themselves working class. What is notable is the content he gives to the label. A 2006 survey of perceptions of class in a residential, township context 'confirms that the working-class identity is primarily about being employed' (Phadi and Ceruti 2013, 158) and that 'Class identity in Soweto today is

[114] For many South Africans, a person only attains adulthood when they have children.

based strongly on comparison of the ability to consume. We saw that the working-class identity operates in parallel with more directly consumption based identities, but is linked to these via the "affordability" conferred by having an income' (Phadi and Ceruti 2013, 159). This was further supported by correlations between accepting the working class label and having employment[115]. People who 'felt close' to trade unions and who had been on strike were also more likely to call themselves working class, but the few union members we interviewed in the qualitative work did not break the mould. This teacher-striker, however, identified working class as *producers,* not in relation to employment, income derived from employment or affordability derived from that income. The single focus of this definition makes him a little bit special even amongst the strikers, but not at all unique, as we will see.

However his production-oriented definition of working class did not find a counterpart in his imagery of Fraser-Moleketi: she is a fat cat, yes, but literally 'one person', acting like government money is her own. If he thought she had a role in production, it was not high in his concept of her class.

Finally, we see an iconic ambiguity - it's 'our government' and *therefore* it must 'bow down' to its constituents – which is a pivot of the power flip. It's notable that this striker was further along the power flip than was reflected in the placards analysed above at this time, which could reflect a diffusion of certain ideas from some strikers to more strikers, or that certain notions became more widely salient for strategic reasons over time.

In the remainder of the chapter, I will further develop a picture of strike identities in three sections - a general overview, government and power, and strikers and non-strikers - and conclude by discussing how strikers accommodated the end of the strike.

[115] 'Fifty-eight per cent of people who self-identified as working class had steady employment, compared to 27 per cent of those who did not call themselves working class. Eighty-five per cent of the working class received a salary or a wage, compared to 67 per cent who did not call themselves working class. People who [called themselves] working class were more likely than the rest of the sample to have worked in the past seven days and less likely to be unemployed without other activities. Compared to those who rejected the identity, they were moderately more likely to be in full-time work, strongly less likely to have irregular hours and more likely to have their own income as their main means of support. They were also more likely to have savings accounts and the kind of debt that is possible only with a regular salary: insurance, loans, hire purchase agreements, bonds, shop accounts and credit cards' (Phadi and Ceruti 2013, 159)

7.2. 12% and other strike identities

This subsection is devoted to the identity of being a striker, as reflected in theorisations, reasons and metaphors which motivated the act of striking, and how the striker interpreted being a striker. From this general overview – which is important in itself as a more authentic baseline of strikers' subjectivities than would be painted by diving straight into my own interests – I tease out four entwined strands, two related to class identities in the strike context and two related to rupture in the alliance.

7.2.1. 'What brings you here today?'

Reasons and motivations were seldom classed and were most often anchored to the 12% or 'just money', such as these answers to the question, 'What brings you here today?'

> We want money. We are struggling about money. We want 12% percent and government says it wants to give us 6%, that's why we are here. (Older woman, 25 May)[116]

> There's no pay, no pay. There's no pay (Another woman, 25 May)

> The 6%, I want 12%, Inflation, everything is going high… everything is just up. 'Will you strike?' I hope they give us 12%. 'And if they don't?' I would rather stay without pay than stay with the peanuts I'm getting. (Department of Justice secretary, 25 May).

> Because all of us we need money. We got kids, we got houses. (Court cleaner, 1 June)

However, as the previous chapter already established through analysis of placards, it seldom was *just* about money. The 12% pulled a trailer and sometimes a whole train of grievances, including respect and recognition, fairness, inequality, dignity, workload and poor work conditions. For example (all emphasis is mine):

> [I'm here because of] Wage *gap*, better *working conditions!* (A man, 25 May)

> Everything is expensive man, everything is expensive, cost of living is high. We are working very hard, *we are dealing with people's lives*, So we can't afford this life. They want 57% *for themselves, we only want* 12%, is that hard? They use government cars, *everything they use is our tax*. What I

[116] I have not assigned pseudonyms to those strikers whose names I never learned.

want for myse lf is money, only 12%, it's not that much. (Another man, 25 May)

We believe *our rights* are not protected – the government is taking us back to apartheid. (Man, Naptosa, 1 June)

We want 12% *because government is ill-treating* the workers, Fraser-Moleketi is ill-treating the workers. (Man, red t-shirt, 1 June)

We want to achieve the 12% and we want to show government *that we really mean it when we demand it* and we don't just demand it *we deserve it* (Phophi, 1 June)

Moleketi is disrespectful! I'm here for my rights. We looking for *appreciation,* we demand *respect*, better wages and conditions and 6% is an *insult* (Doris, 1June)

All these years we didn't get anything, actually they were just taking us, Fraser Moleketi *she promised* she will give us money *each and every year* and yet up to so far we didn't get anything. Some of our comrades *can't even afford to buy houses* but *them, they stay in mansion houses*. (Woman, Gauteng Health t-shirt, 1 June)

He [government] must give us enough money so we can work and replace the posts [that are empty] because *we are doing five people's jobs*. I am not a sister in charge but I work as a sister in charge in the wards. That is why I can say he is abusing us because we are doing other people's jobs. And I am not getting that money for sister in charge. (Sarah, 6 June)

I'm 28 years in the field of teaching. You won't believe me when I tell you … I'm going home with less than R10,000 a month. With my degrees! We want to live. We want to *live like other people do*. We are not living. *We are taken for granted* by the government. We are residual citizens for government, *we are tired of it*. (Limpho, Sadtu, 13 June)

[Me: what person or group of people do you associate with the word responsible?] Responsible, it is us, because we as workers are *mothers and fathers* for our families, we are taking care of our children and foster children, that is why we need 12%. And *we are responsible for our patients and learners*. (Nomzamo, Department of Education clerk, 16 June)

Most of these quotes are from the earliest days of the strike, but these themes persisted throughout the strike with little modification, and beyond the strike for some, as we will see in the last section of this chapter. It was not uncommon for strikers to elaborate the themes already outlined, unprompted, at great length in second or subsequent interviews. For example I asked 'Xoli', a clerk, what she thought of the letters threatening health workers with dismissal and she spent almost a quarter of

that interview describing the backlog and queues in her department, and emphasising how these affect the public and workers.

What did change was, first, that some strikers started to substitute 10% and 7.5% (the unions' fallback demand and the government's new offer) for the initial 12% and 6%; even so, the 12% did not disappear. On 22 June, 'Anele', asked for her favourite placard during a march that I couldn't attend on that day, replied: 'It was the one that said, *We demand 12% nothing else'* – hardly a minute after insisting, 'Things are very terrible, the government offered 7.5, no butter and bread for us there. *We want only 10%,* what we need – we don't need that 7.5, *only 10%*' (Anele, 22 June). The interchangeability of the percentages illustrates that even when the specifics of the symbol changed, the symbolism did not. Second, later in the strike, more strikers linked their grievances to the problems experienced by the public and the 'community', as Xoli did – more about this in section 7.4 below.

The quotes from Limpho and the woman in the Gauteng Health t-shirt above, and Julia, quoted later, bring us to another recurrent theme: exhausted patience, also expressed below by 'Martha':

> *It's long* that these negotiations are taking place and *we are not listened to* so that is why we must take it to the streets. It's good what we are doing. They [unions] must try to *negotiate with government to listen* to the public workers because they [public workers] are doing a *spade work* – we really need 12% [nods]. (Martha, 1 June)

And later, by Nelisiwe:

> Me: What would you be willing to compromise?
>
> Nelisiwe: No compromise – because we are saying 15% *in [19]94, '95, '96, '97, '98.* We never reach even 6%. It's only offering us 6% today. If he doesn't want to give us we are not going back. (Nelisiwe, 6 June)

Exhausted patience is relevant to the breakdown of 'usual modes of self-regulation' (as I put it in Chapter 2) in 'internally contradictory social systems' such as the alliance and collective bargaining. Note that Martha ties this to wanting a government that listens. Whether she is referring to collective bargaining or the alliance specifically, it chimes with notions of 'righting' the alliance. (There's more about this in the subsection below, and it's a key theme for Florence in Chapter 9.)

Further, Martha refers to the value of their work when she asserts that public workers deserve the increase because they are doing the 'spade work'. I have already quoted 'We are working with people's lives' (another man, 25 May). A teacher said,

I'm on strike, I'm not gonna stop until 12%, *we taught everybody to write ABC* but today…!' (Woman teacher, 1 June). It's noteworthy that these rudiments of the power flip appear here at the beginning of the strike, if not yet generalised; it makes sense that withdrawing one's labour implies valuing one's labour. Later in the strike, the intrinsic value of the work was often expressed in relation to the victimisation of essential workers:

> [The threat to fire nurses is] unfair. Nurses are workers and they don't take care of nurses during the normal period … But when there are problem like strikes, always they will be saying nurses are essential …Even the ratio of nurses its unprofessional. *Now they are needing us*. … One day *if I don't give you my service it has impact.* (Nelisiwe, healthworker, 6 June)

Finally, Julia, late in the strike, evokes her bodily sacrifice to government service:

> [Me: please describe yourself in three words] I can say [I am] *a carpet* where government is concerned. I'm *being used* by government. I'm *a government slave*. Third, people are *using my blood, they are selling my blood* … [After several other questions] … *Me, I'm tired* of *being used.* (Julia, a ward assistant at Chris Hani Bara, 18 June)

It may be that Julia's idiom of the bloodsucker, as she calls government elsewhere in this same interview, draws on the *isi*Zulu word *umqashi*, which is related to the word for tenant and also means 'employer', as it was used in the Chris Hani Bara meetings - that is, a renter or hirer. Botsang Mmoepe drew my attention to the word during one such meeting. My outdated dictionary (Sikana et al. 1958) contains the same-rooted words *amaqashi* and *amaqashimba*, translated as 'cattle ticks', but I couldn't find these on the more contemporary *isiZulu.net.* In any case, the tenant-employer synonym alone adds a layer of potential class idiom which is less readily apparent in the narrowing of the English words 'employ' and 'employer' in practice to lose their meaning 'to use'. In any case, Julia's choice of words here leaves nothing to subtle etymology.

These last two themes – exhausted patience and the value of the strikers' work - form a backdrop to the later section on class and power, where we will see that the sense of being used and undervalued also had a political form.

But before that, I deal with how strikers' interpreted the act of striking and then draw out class precursors and punctures in the strike identities, to conclude Section 7.2.

7.2.2. Reluctant, effervescent and angry strikers

From the beginning of the strike, some experienced striking as a necessary evil, while others were energised by it. As the strike wore on, effervescence tended to take the form of anger, and in interviews, 'reluctant striking' was frequently expressed in response to the vilification of public sector workers.

On 25 May, the 'warning strike', some strikers remained hopeful that the march would be enough to bring the government around. When asked what she would do if government did not budge, the secretary mentioned in the previous subsection who would rather strike than live with 'peanuts', first answered:

> All of us [are] united and we hope that government will listen to our demands. Because *it is not our intention* to go on strike. Secretary of justice, 25 May)

Doris illustrated the message of reluctant striking when she said, angrily, on 1 June:

> *This strike was unnecessary*. It should have been avoided but the government did not respect us. (Doris, 1 June)

The implication is that government, not the strikers, chose to push things to a strike. Similarly 'Theinus', a white male teacher[117] who had never been on strike before, was on a cusp between reluctant and effervescent striking. When asked how he felt about being on strike, he replied:

> In the beginning *it felt humiliating* because it's not within my character to strike, but, uhhh, *we've been forced by government to strike* and it seems to me that nowadays if you would like something, if you want something badly, you get some people mobilised and then you strike. (Theinus, a white male teacher, 1 June)

For others, the excitement was unadulterated. I introduced effervescence in Chapter 6, where Pansy spoke of striking as stress relief (see page 142). Another striker referenced the past in a way suggestive of unfinished struggles:

> It's a great feeling because now I am reviving the spirit of 1976 and all those years, but now I'm fighting for what I know, I want money Moleketi! (Woman from PSA group, 1 June)

[117] I have only specified the 'race' of strikers when it becomes potentially relevant to their attitudes, as it does here because, during apartheid, white unions were recognized in industrial relations and included in political structures and an architecture of racism in ways which provided channels other than striking to express grievances and a position of actual privilege, both relative to Black workers and absolutely; as a minority of the workforce, it was possible to literally buy them off. Hence Martinus' comment that striking is not 'in his nature'. I have otherwise left the three White teachers I interviewed (two women and Martinus) out of the analysis of attitudes to government as it was not possible to ascertain whether these related to the mere fact of it being a *Black* government. The strikers quoted in the thesis are mostly Black, occasionally 'Coloured'.)

Much effervescence stemmed from the size and breadth of the marches:

> It feels nice, very nice! You know the unity here, the atmosphere is very nice in the strike. All the people come together, we have never known each other but we are standing as one today. From all angles of the country, we're standing as one. That's why it's very nice to be on strike. (Young man from Pawusa, 1 June).

> I mean she can't even live herself with 6% so we are here for 6% and it's nice to be here. This is my first time, I've never been on strike before. If feels good because every public servant is here today like we are from one union, we are fighting for one thing today. (Fourth man, 1 June)

Excitement was also expressive of determination:

> I am willing to go back on strike again. We are here to go back on strike. This is the road of going back to the strike. We don't care what is happening, we are going on strike [Others around her shout 'viva']. (Older woman, 25 May)

Determination was also expressed through boisterous anger:

> I will remain here because I want to survive. We are angry! [Others jump in repeating, 'We are angry'] I think you have got my message. (Man, Sadtu, 1 June)

Finally, there was a sense of a large, overdue confrontation which was not confined to the public sector workers. During the solidarity march, shopstewards from Numsa and Samwu said things such as:

> [Previous strikes] were all small. *This one is the mother of all strikes*. My head is heating up, *it came at the right time*. (Woman from Numsa Natalspruit, 13 June)

There was no obvious correlation between first-time striking and reluctant or excited striking.

As the strike wore on, positive representations of striking remained – such as Bonolo, who said that the best thing was 'being part of the people fighting for what is ours' – but these were accompanied by or replaced by expressions of the difficulty of striking:

> [What has been the best and worst thing?] Ntsakiso: I can't see any best at all, there was no best day. I didn't expect it would go this far. We feel sad, we feel government is not taking good care of us. We didn't even want it to start. [Do you regret it?] No, strike was the best solution to get what we want. […] [Please describe the strike in three words.] Dangerous. Risky. Intimidation [referring to dismissal letters]. (Ntsakiso, support staff in a hospital, 12 June)

> [The worst thing] has been that the *strike has been disappointed*, it hasn't had an impact. (Bonolo, 16 June)

> Nothing has changed. It's been *very tough* … [the worst thing] is that *you miss your office*. (Gontse, a Home Affairs administrator, 16 June)

The face-value of these expressions of difficulty were genuine, but the statements also expressed determination, defiance, disappointment with government and the strikers' commitment to their work (Gontse, above). So, on 6 June, a week into the strike, Nelisiwe, a health worker and 1992 striker, was keen to emphasise that the decision to strike was not taken lightly. After explaining that they were picketing far away from the wards in order not to disturb patients, she added:

> We don't just say we are going on strike. There is a process of negotiating, disputing [and so on] until what we are doing today … Strike, it's tough, it's tough. [She references the 1992 strike] Strike it impacts even on the family, because you don't bring something but as long as you are going to get what you want, it does not affect me a lot. (Nelisiwe, 6 June)

Nomzamo, a clerk and member of Nehawu, said on 16 June that things were 'not too bad – I must strike, it's an indefinite strike,' but that the worst moment was that '*the strike affects the public badly'*.

Assertions such as this and Gontse's above also served to rebut the accusations that strikers were uncaring and responsible for deaths and destroying learners' futures. This is best illustrated in the narratives in Chapter 9. For now, I will flag it through this excerpt from an interview with Busisiwe, a clinic nurse, about halfway through the strike, which also expresses several of the themes mentioned above:

> We are still on strike ... I got full pay yesterday … but *next month it's gonna be bad*. We are going to have to start selling oranges [laughs]. [On a rising tone] If she [minister of health] wants to kick us from our duties she can do that to all of us [referring to the dismissal letters to nurses]. *We are waiting for that* because an injury to one is an injury to all …
>
> [Me:] What has been the best and the worst moment in the strike for you?
>
> *The worst* moment is that *I am missing my duty*, but I can't just force myself to go and work as Fraser Moleketi she is doing that [to] us. The best moment was the time when Zwelinzima Vavi was talking about that *if anyone should die it's not our workers who have to be blamed, we have to blame our government*. The government who failed .... Everything that is going on now, the *workers are very angry and as they are angry*, some people are going to die, because she is busy forcing people to go and work. While she is busy boasting about her 57% wage increase. *We didn't think the strike is going to take so many days*, we thought it was just a thing of a few days just to shake the government. *But I don't care*, you remember in

> 1992 we took almost six months. But we were surviving. [..] And that one it was very much hectic, because people were dying, comrades were dying. Ok. (Busisiwe, nurse, 16 June)

Busisiwe's statement also illustrates the angry tone and explicit use of the words 'angry' and 'anger' which became more frequent as the strike wore on. Similarly, Xoli, the clerk, talking about the dismissal letters to healthworkers, makes anger definitional to striking: 'The nurses are trying to show their anger by staying away from work which is good, this is what strike means' (Xoli, 12 June). Tumi, a teacher, in a telephone interview on 16 June, said, 'The mood is not so good, it's a bad mood, people are getting angrier and angrier'. Julia, a ward assistant for 24 years, when asked the best and worst things in the strike, replied (very calmly):

> The worst is that in the first two weeks, everyone didn't understand *what the word strike means, what the word anger means* – you see people are angry, even myself I'm angry the way government is treating me. (Julia, 18 June)

Anele, when I asked about a march in Centurion (near Tshwane) on 22 June, replied: 'People were *very, very angry* there. People were marching, chanting and singing – it was *many* people' [her emphasis]. And William, on 25 June, started the interview with the following outburst: 'I feel very bad, *why doesn't government end the strike*? They have the powers!'

These assertions of anger worked first of all as rhetorical devices to signal alarm and determination. In the context of the actual strike, they finally can be said to have amounted to letting off steam. But they were not therefore façades. The anger encapsulated an emotional investment in a real question mark over the government-employer's failure to meet strikers' demands – alongside the largely unspoken question of why their giant show of power and determination wasn't winning.

7.2.3. Strike identities as puncture and as precursors of class identities

The indefinite strike was risky compared to the one day demonstrative strikes of the preceding years, and the preceding discussion demonstrates the strongly emotive nature of the experience of the 'indefinite strike' and thereby confirms the effervescence (not only joy but heightened emotion of all kinds) already associated with the strike in Chapter 6.

Before that, 7.2.1 confirmed that the 12% was much more than a monetary demand; it represented compensation for a wealth of other injuries experienced by public sector workers, ranging from overwork and understaffing to respect. Class as such was not on the tip of strikers' tongues; the identity of being a parent with responsibilities was more readily available (perfectly naturally, given the current organisation around the family of social demands on wages. (See for example Mosoetsa (2011); also Ceruti (2010b)).

However, two motivations in particular lean towards class identities, and it is evident why these would arise easily in the act of 'indefinite striking'. First, from the start of the strike, some strikers were explicitly asserting the value of their work - another pivot of the power flip, and not an unexpected precursor to withdrawing one's labour power, as I have already said. Second, the comparative element which readily entered into strikers' motivations went beyond noting inequality. Unlike the comparisons in a township context, that situated oneself in a hierarchy from deprived to wealthy or along a projected or actual life trajectory, this comparison implied a relational element – familiar to Marxist definitions of class – where those in control were consequently wealthy and were the same people pushing the strikers down.

Finally, the theme of exhausted patience coupled with the growing anger in the strike (subsection 7.2.2) are key to understanding the strike as not exactly a rupture but at least a *puncture* in the normal working of the alliance and collective bargaining, both at the strike's inception and in its aftermath.

The alliance and government will be the focus of the following subsection.

7.3. 'Government is ungovernable!' Class, power and accountability

> About Fraser-Moleketi, I feel very bad about her, because *we have striked for them to be in a parliament* - today she is in the *gravy train*, she has already forgotten about us [1992 strikers]. (Older woman, 25 May)
>
> We are not here to play! *We queued during election times* to vote for them *and now we need* really money! (Man, Sadtu, 1 June)
>
> Government is ungovernable! (Tumi, teacher, 16 June)

This section delves into strikers' attitudes to government, through the lens of prompted class identifications but more through images volunteered in response to other questions.

In the previous section, I mentioned that a sense of exhausted patience and of being used carried through to attitudes to government, heightening a sense of overdue payback not only regarding government as the employer, but also in relation to the alliance. In fact, the openly conflictual nature of the strike, even within the limits of collective bargaining, lent itself to *political* expressions of distance from the employer simply because it was also government and composed of alliance partners[118]. While such expressions may be predicated on wishing for a restoration of conciliatory relationships of mutual responsibility in the frame of collective bargaining as much as in relation to the alliance and government, strikers do not ordinarily expect to give employers mandates; in the context of the upheavals in the alliance, this entanglement of the unfinished business of collective bargaining with burgeoning questions around power, democracy and accountability brought expectations that government should be 'governable' into seemingly 'routine' collective bargaining, rendering it not at all routine. The power flip observed in Chapter 6 occurred powerfully in the intersection of these spheres in strikers' narratives (and suggests notions of class as being rooted in exploitation). As the strike wore on, strikers drew more strongly on metaphors for selfishness and described lifestyles contrasting with their own – which were often attributed to the efforts of the strikers, as in the 'gravy train' above.

7.3.1. Us and them: it's complicated

> [The enemies of the strike are] government and Moleketi – *she doesn't care for me!* (Doris, 1 June)

> [Are government and the ministers your comrades?] *No it's not my comrade*. No it won't be a comrade. She [Fraser-Moleketi] won't be. If you can take your mind back, this is *a first strike for this new democracy* and we understand that they know that they are dealing with the affiliates *and we are alliance* … We fought – even in the old regime we demonstrated to get our democracy, and workers were the forefront of that [in 1987]. (Nelisiwe, 6 June)

> [Who is us and them when you think about SA today?] *Them right now are those in the parliament*, those are them, the parliamentarians, the BEE and all those, they are them. Us is us the masses. … There's Sam Shilowa the premier of Gauteng, *he was the us* - he was in front chanting as a Cosatu leader. Right now he's the premier … telling the masses … that he was leading ten years ago, that you can't achieve anything through the strike … So there's a difference between the post-apartheid – *these were pushed*

[118] This last especially via the trade union full-timers.

> *up, they are them now. Those who were left down, it's us.* (Steve, Sadtu, 20 June)

When asked 'Who are the friends and enemies of the strike?' or 'Who is us and them?', strikers commonly placed government as 'them' or 'the enemy' (including Sarah: 'I'm not having friends and enemies. But the government' (Sarah, a professional nurse, 6 June). Such polarisation should not surprise in a dragging dispute which had at last reached open confrontation. It could be argued that those who nevertheless kept the faith are the interesting category, exemplary perhaps of the restraining influence of the alliance. I will indulge that possibility long enough to show that there was nevertheless a continuity from such strikers to those who were openly critical of government. Later, I will also show how allegiance to the alliance could also sharpen the polarisation.

'Junaid', a Sadtu member and a principal, said 'Government is refusing to see our point of view' and spoke freely about the working class. When I asked, 'Who are the friends and enemies of the strike?' he rejected the label enemy – but nevertheless framed his rejection *in relation to government:*

> I would like to look at it as a partnership, that the state that we've put into power, through the elections, that we've put into power, so we don't view them as an enemy. We feel that they can come on board, understand the point of view, we feel that there is enough money to be redistributed in terms of the concerns we have, it's just a matter of coming to a consensus agreement and cracking it out. So there's no enemy here, I think we need to work together. (Junaid, 1 June)

Then there was a man, interviewed by Mosa Phadi on 1 June, who described himself, towards the end of the interview, as 'a staunch member of the ANC' who thought that the ANC could be "captured from within … We need to focus on policy rather than run away'. Earlier in the interview, when asked about friends and enemies, he took care to soften the question – but his first thought was, obviously, 'the employer':

> I'm not sure if enemy is right word. The obstacle. It's the employer. We have severely opposite camps … my interest is better salary, so that I can deliver well. On the bosses – the other side of the fence, obviously its employers who's not willing to give me what I deserve. (Man, 1 June)

And, having softened the question, his next words nevertheless assert an adversarial model of 'the obstacle'. Using 'employer' rather than government is itself a deflection, but below, we will see that 'government' tended to stand in for 'employer' for many other strikers who spoke to me in English. On the other hand, this man's ambiguity to government was not unique. Many strikers were somewhere along the same a

spectrum of contradictory attitudes towards government-the-employer that these strikers also inhabited.

This 1 June interview with a group of five or six people from Pawusa (Public and Allied Workers' Union)[119] illustrates several shades in that spectrum. A young man answered my question like this: 'Them is the employer, government. Us is the workers, who are here today…' We talked further about strike unity, the public, and the demands. Then I asked the group, 'How do you feel about [Fraser-]Moleketi?'

> Younger man: for now?
> Second woman, shaking her head: *Eish!*[120]
> Younger man: Our hearts are closed for her.
> Others: *Ja* [Yes], closed.
> Younger man: *Although* she's a comrade our hearts are closed to her.
> Me: really, a comrade?
> Younger man: *She was,* but now…
> Older man: She took part in the liberation of the country and for that she will stay a comrade *although we are on the opposite ends today*, but she will stay a comrade.
> Second woman: No, the thing is that once they are *up there they forget about the people at the grassroot level*. *Ja*.
> Younger man: These guys will remain comrades, even if they die they will remain comrades.
> Older man nods: *Ja*.
> Second woman half smiles.
> Me: even if they give you bad wages?
> Young man. They still remain comrades, that's why *we engage them*.
> Second woman: *And they need to put themselves in our shoes*. Ja. [Pawusa group, 1 June. My emphases]

The younger man flip flops on whether Fraser Moleketi is a comrade, partly in response to the older; in itself, this small vacillation suggests having to rethink or think for the first time about their relationship with the minister. Although the older man 'corrects' the younger regarding Fraser-Moleketi's comradeship, he nevertheless asserts that they are today at 'opposite ends'. The woman's expression of government's distance places it more hierarchically ('up there/grassroots') than the 'closed hearts', which suggests a deeply felt betrayal of a close relationship. And she seems to be thinking more conditionally: when the younger man's heart turns out to be nevertheless open to 'engaging' comrades-by-history in government, she places a

[119] Pawusa was a relatively recent affiliate to Cosatu, descended from a union which organised mainly 'Coloured' administrators. This group all presented as 'Coloured', as Fraser-Moleketi too was identified.
[120] A multipurpose slang expression of surprise, annoyance, resignation, disapproval or disbelief.

mild demand on the engagement, that government needs to see their point of view ('think for others' as several strikers put it in other interviews).

Even Nelisiwe, who denied Fraser-Moleketi so readily (quoted above), and who suggests that government is exploiting the alliance for its own ends, nevertheless returned to an identification with government in the 6 June interview: 'You know government, it's our government and I'm a part of government.' She lays out some reasons she believes government is not doing what it should, but concludes: 'But I'm saying government is our government and I'm part of government.' And this persisted until late in the strike: Julia, who felt used like a carpet (see the earlier subsection) said in that same 18 June interview: 'Them - the government, the rest of the people are us, people on strike are us, the government is them', but ended the interview: 'My last words is that I want to tell the government if we're asking the government, it's our government, if we're asking anything from the government, please [they] must attend to us, *we're people like them*' (Julia, 18 June).

Julia's appeal for government to identify with the strikers makes it easy to see that the recurring antipathies are not, after all, deeply contradictory when viewed as having the character of a conflicted friendship or a strained relation with a patron or parent:

> [And enemies?] I think our government is. They returned R12 million from our department. I mean there is money, they don't want to pay. [Later, towards the end of the interview]… *Government must just take care of us* the workers here in SA. *Please* we are planning to go overseas[121]. (Secretary, 25 June)

But it also shows how the strain accreted around a kernel of *obligations* implied in such friendly relations being long *overdue*, even in the relatively mild expressions of the Pawusa group and Junaid's dream of partnership. These obligations had already proved tricky for the alliance's ability to bind workers, having helped to precipitate the strike; they had been the glue in the alliance, so cosily normalised for alliance partners in government that they had largely forgotten what those obligations bought them until the glue began to dry and flake. Some strikers were very plain, in the early part of the strike, about placing conditions on the relationship:

> *They promised us* a better life, this is not a better life. *Now we need that better life* they promised us … The enemy is Fraser-Moleketi. *If she gives*

[121] In other words, to leave the public service and take work in Europe.

> *us that 12% she is no longer going to be an enemy*, she is going to be a friend. (General worker from Nehawu, 25 May)

And, as we see here and below, as well as on page 186 above, it was not uncommon for strikers to render these obligations in broad political strokes as well as workplace-related forms:

> This strike is different … [it] shows us what is happening. It tells me that *workers are tired of taking a back seat and let the government decide* what they want about us, forgetting that *we as workers are the one who put them in place*. People are tired of always agreeing to things they don't want to. *The strike is how the recent government took power* … this started long before we go on strike …we really want them to understand and listen to us this time. (Pansy, a teacher,19 June)

> I'm here to inform *our* government which *we voted into power* that they must *fulfil the mandate* we gave them. Managers must provide better service to us. There's no way we can give proper service to the public if they, the managers, don't serve us properly. I've been on strike many times [he takes off his cap to show his white hair], since 1959 I've been struggle for better service, fighting the apartheid regime. *We put this government because we thought they would sing for us* as workers because we put them into power *but it's like they have forgotten*. In 20 years I don't know where will we be … (Man, 25 May)

Here, voting is an obligation on government, imagined in the extract directly above as popular command over government ('the mandate we gave them'), which, further, gains historic weight via the anti-apartheid struggle in all three quotes above. Votes and campaigning for the ruling party appeared in other strikers' schemas of the fulfilment of their side of the obligation; the passage directly above suggests, additionally, that government relies on public workers not only to get where they are but also to meet its obligations to the rest of society. Nelisiwe, similarly, answered the us-and-them question: 'Them – us *we are much important to them. Because without us, they won't move*. Us is workers. We is workers. Them is the employee' (Nelisiwe, 6 June). Throughout the strike, but more so as the strike wore on, the failure to fulfil these obligations translated into a sense of increasing distance.

In summary, then, distancing government tended to express injury to *an identity with* government; designating government or the ministers as 'them' often referenced that 'they' were once 'us' – and expected to act for 'us' because they *ascended by us*. Within this complicated identification/distancing, several strikers represented 'them' as dependent on 'us', introducing a mutuality which somewhat upsets the hitherto restraining influence of the alliance. Moreover, as we will see in the subsection

following, the expression of injury via distancing increasingly congealed around a variety of idioms for selfishness that encapsulated a sense, expressed by Steve (on page 187, above) of 'us' being left behind after pushing 'them' to the top.

7.3.2. 'They don't think for other people!' Deepening injury and classed distances

> I feel like really *she's being stubborn*, the talks, she's being stubborn, she doesn't want to listen to us, *she doesn't feel what we've been feeling*. [What class is Fraser Moleketi?] I think she's *that kind of person that likes to be alone. She doesn't understand how other people is.* That's how I see her, that's how I classify her. (Man number 4, 1 June)

> [Fraser Moleketi is also a woman. Are you the same?] *She don't think for people on the ground*. And *she knows very well* that us as women, we are suffering more than men because we are becoming single parents, even single grannies. We are living in an environment of suffering as women, *we are suffering* in this world. *I don't think FM is thinking about that*. If you can see the ratio here most are women. (Nelisiwe, 6 June)

> [What person or group do you associate with the following words: Stubborn?] The government. [Unreasonable?] Fraser Moleketi and the government. … [Three words for employer?] Not reasonable. *Don't think for other people. Don't want you to understand* the situation. (Ntsakiso, hospital stores, 12 June)

> [Three words for government?] Shoooooo! Government is the [pauses] *blood sucker, blood sucker*, ne? And then, *it's not thinking for other people*. *It's thinking for the best not the worst.* (Julia, 18 June)

> [Three words for government?] Selfish, self-centred and irresponsible. (Baruti, 19 June)

I suggested above that strikers who identified with government expected government to identify with them. However, as the strike wore on, more and more strikers represented the distance of missing reciprocity through variations of the motif 'They only think for themselves', and its emotional-conceptual synonyms, 'selfish', 'uncaring', 'irresponsible', 'arrogant' and 'stubborn'.

These motifs appeared in assertions such as Nelisiwe's, above, that the minister 'knows very well' what strikers faced; remember also the cleaner quoted in Chapter 6 who lost her cool: 'Why he don't with the money? *He know* we are suffering!' It is also

implied, more subtly, in Doris' three words – 'Autocratic, stubborn and *very uncaring*' (Doris, 19 June) – and Nomzamo's word associations:

> [What person or group do you associate with the word stubborn?] Moleketi. Because *she doesn't want to listen* to our demands. [The word caring?] The government we have now, the democratic government, actually *it's not a caring government* coz *he don't care* about the poorest of the poorest and the broader working class. (Nomzamo, 16 June)

But government was also castigated for *not* knowing: for being out of touch, as illustrated by the woman from the PSA group quoted earlier; the man who says 'She *doesn't feel* what we are feeling' in the opening extracts above; the woman who said 'I'm so sad because we are suffering in poverty and all that; *They only look after themselves'* in preface to her contrast between 'their' mansions and strikers' lack of housing benefits, quoted on page 179 above; the clerk who concluded a detailed description of backlogs at work with 'Fraser Moleketi does not know what is really happening', having launched her description: '[government] is unfair, unreasonable. I don't know, this person they *don't put themselves in these people's shoes*' (Xoli, 12 June); and Paul's two words for government - 'Arrogant. *Aloof'* (Paul, 16 June).

Not knowing and doing nothing despite knowing (that is, not *feeling* for others*)* signalled government's remoteness from strikers and also its distance from human compassion and similar virtues. From the beginning of the strike ('she's *that kind of person that likes to be alone'* in the opening extract), but especially widely near the end of the strike when the minister came back to the table but didn't move, strikers attributed government's actions and inactions to 'selfishness' and its kin. These sharpening accusations pointed to damage to any presumption of their opposite concept, a caring, sharing, consultative and accountable collective. The injury went deep enough for James, a teacher, to represent government in non-human terms late in the strike: 'Three words? For government? [Long pause.] D. O. G. Dog. Government is a dog, government is a pig, you know I come with all those words like pig and dog' (James, 19 June).

Naturally, the triple faces of the employer admitted political reasons to the sphere formally acknowledged for collective bargaining. Mohau, a teacher, attributed government's distance and consequent selfishness to material change for those who became government on the backs of 'the masses', as we have already glimpsed with other strikers in this chapter:

> [Why is the strike taking so long?] I think the fault is with the government. It was not supposed to be so long. *The government only think for themselves*, *they are selfish*…. They have to think for the workers first. … I have that fear now that it's *the beginning of the end for this government*. They are too hard these people, they are *too hard and heartless*. So now I have this fear of them being overthrown. [What makes them to be so hard?] The selfishness! *The selfishness* within the government. *They only think for themselves*, they don't think for other people, especially *those who voted for them*. *They only think for us when they want the vote* … [Us and them in South Africa today?] Us is the people of SA like the workers, learners, people who are not working, people who are poor. *Them I refer to those people who are fat. Those in our cabinet, our ministers our president. It's those people you know, the fat ones*[122]*.* Those people who have money. *They don't think of those who are suffering, of poverty. Like our president.* (Mohau male teacher 20 June)

Baruti launched from a betrayal of a Black identity, attributed to a failure of accountability which extended from politics to the economy, finally implying a parasitic political class reminiscent of Julia's 'bloodsuckers':

> [What has been the best and worst of the strike?] Unfortunate that our Black government is doing this to us and that *our Black brothers who are now in power are not actually looking to the needs of the masses*. It's very unfortunate that *they think that so many people can be wrong*. … we thought government would respond quickly to our demands. … [Three words for government?] *Selfish, self-centred* and irresponsible. [Any last words?] …. The government *must listen* to the masses, we can't have so many millions of people being wrong. So it's a time for them to do some serious introspection and *stop enriching themselves and think of other people as well.* The economy of this country is growing, *it must not grow only for politicians who embezzle funds* and give themselves 57% ... (Baruti, 19 June)

There was more than a hint of power expressed in the variety of ways, some noted earlier, in which strikers such as Petrus (below) reminded government of its dependence on workers:

> It's been terrible, I'm sorry for the kids who can't go back because of *government arrogance* … [How is this strike compared to other strikes?] …in other strikes we were easily intimidated by government but in this one we are feeling *strong*, because the thing is, *during election times* this politicians they do *come to us*, and *smile at us and promise us a lot of things, but when they get into the office they change*, and then they don't give us things which we need *whereas we are the ones who put them in those things*. And the other thing according to me *it is faaaar from us, it is far from us, they come to us when it is election time only, then from there*

[122] This may be an internal translation related to *labofuma*, those who have fat to spread on their bodies, an idiom for rich (See Phadi and Ceruti 2013).

then they go faaar from us now. *Ja* [yes] they are far from us. They don't want to listen to us because they are far from us. (Petrus 20 June)

In conclusion, then, this subsection showed that, as the strike progressed, accusations of 'selfishness' and related themes signalled widening distance and deepening injury, but in a way which specified the injury to be inflicted by an elite benefiting *at the expense of* others – others who, in the most explicit expressions, were left behind by those whom they had elevated. Towards the end of the strike, the obligations which built up in the alliance, mentioned in the previous subsection, were revealed to be remaining rather *one-sided*, and hence the slew of idioms for *acting alone* that we saw in this section. This represents a tiny and very subtle, but crucial, buckling of the wounded identifications of reciprocal obligation which I discussed in the previous subsection, with a sense of being used seeping deeper into the desire to restore mutuality. However because of the government's overlapping roles, the third phase of the power flip – from mutuality to elite dependency - often flipped from the workplace clear into the electoral sphere, as illustrated by Mohau, Baruti and Petrus directly above.

By dissolving the formal division of politics from economics, these admitted political explanations of workplace grievances in highly charged ways, and in the next subsection I suggest that the tropes related to selfishness foreshadowed exploitation-based-class imagery, even while explicit class imagery remained more instrumental and less relational. But in the closing section of this chapter I will also show how, when the power flip shaded into the electoral sphere as it did for Baruti and Mohau above, the shadow wavered and became a bridge *out* of the strike.

7.3.3. Class, individual and institutional explanations

As an individual, I say FM must resign because she is not fit for that position. She is not fit. Because always we must come to the street to demand what we want. She's not fit, I must say it again. (Man, 25 May)

He's [government is] only favouring the capitalists, because even now, if you see in the media, he's quiet, not saying anything about 12% increase … but when it comes to business, he talks so very quickly if something's wrong with the business. He's not a government that is caring for us, the people of this country. (Nomzamo, 16 June)

To me it's more of while they are down with us they're alright, maybe they are up there they forget the masses, it's more of the capitalist things you

> know, those who are up there they forget about the interests of the masses and they protect their own interests. I mean that's how I think about the government. So for example we are busy fighting for the 12%, on the other hand they are giving themselves whatever percentages up there. (Steve, teacher, 20 June)

This subsection doubles as a conclusion to Section 7.3 by gathering together earlier threads regarding prefigurations of class (and their limits) in strikers' images of government. It ties the bow through an exploration of whether strikers situated the problem of government's intransigence in individuals or institutions. Although it is not an exact proxy, the second exercise hints at whether strikers recognised interest groups or were only classifying individuals in a static hierarchy not out of the ordinary in renditions of 'class structure' outside a strike. Here, I will show that many strikers situated individual minsters in a way that lent itself to more relational models by recognising *conflictual communities of fate*, although falling short of recognising antagonism. Additionally, I will weave in a few strands about identity damage in the striker-government relation and the alliance.

I have already noted elsewhere in this chapter that, when asked explicitly to class government or ministers, strikers deployed the question instrumentally to imply or explicate contrasts with themselves in ways salient to some element of the strike. Very often this was framed in static, hierarchical models of class borrowed into the strike from everyday life. Sarah, for example, used basic consumption imagery salient to her pay demand to signal distance from government:

> [What class is government?] The *higher* class. You can see they are working, fancy cars, and they are well nourished, to show that they are having money. (Sarah, professional nurse, 6 June)

But relational elements sometimes poked through such models: 'FM falls under the *highest* class. Because she's just *taking our money* and spending it' [my emphases], said Phophi (1 June). Late in the strike, George represented class as a widening gulf:

> Government's class? Government, I think they are the capitalists. Because those who are poor *remain* poor and those who are rich *become more* rich. I think this is the end now, we can take socialism. (George, 25 June; *my emphasis*)

He went on to explain: 'By socialism I mean the people who can sit down to talk with them and try to solve things. The capitalists is these people who are rich and will remain richer and if you are poor you will remain poor.'

This points to at a relation between the riches of the rich and the poverty of the poor by repeatedly juxtaposing them, although it cannot be said to lay out a concept of class based on exploitation. This should not be surprising even to determinist models of class consciousness, because public workers are in a less direct and explicit relationship to profit extraction than most private sector workers.[123] Nevertheless, we saw in previous sections, most bluntly in Julia's prose (page 181), a variety of evocations of exploitation in declarations of *being used* in one way or another in their relations with government. Strikers often volunteered a causal connection with ministers' and the ruling party's positions via the theme 'We put them where they are.' Moreover, they often framed their descriptions of government in terms of injury to mutual obligation. These ranged from mild electoral obligations (voting) and deeper electoral investment (campaigning or declaring for them as an organisation) to versions which hinged on the value of the strikers' work to society, and sometimes thereby to the political ambitions of the ruling party, such as the striker we heard above saying that public sector workers are the ones who do service delivery.

We saw, however, that it was particularly easy to locate the nexus of government dependency on strikers outside the workplace and thus to shift the sense of injury – and hence the terrain on which the power flip unfurls – to a political (or more precisely, *electoral)* field[124].

That made for a contradictory movement in the strikers' sense of mutual obligations. On one hand, the sense of injury developed into *identity damage* in the later part of the strike when the sense of obligation was revealed to be one-sided, producing another set of themes around the concept 'selfish' which were also highly suggestive of models of class derived from exploitative relations. This identity damage illustrated the tendency of the alliance, in binding together contradictory class interests, to thereby store up discontent. On the other hand, the (accurate) diagnosis that elements of the problem lay on the political terrain intensified the strikers' search for political solutions, but without easily suggesting accurate remedies, because that very terrain was overgrown with compromise ideology, voting booths and the white

[123] Although certainly in a relation to exploitation – see 5.3. Who went into the strikes? on page 109

[124] One striker understood this terrain to be directly influencing the strike. Petrus, the teacher, said: 'Why it [the strike] has dragged on? You know I think there are complicating issues here, practically, yes we need money, but behind the scenes some people may start thinking about this issue of the ANC, they may think that maybe we are used to fight for certain individuals who want to take over from Mr. Mbeki' (Petrus, 20 June).

marquees of policy conferences. This, I argue, helped the possibility of the 'Zuma deflection' of the strike's demands.

It is tempting to attribute the Zuma deflection to strikers' tendency to single out individuals, suggesting an absence of even a group-interest model, let alone a class model. Only a few strikers, such as Petrus, explicitly rejected individualised explanations: '*I can't blame Moleketi alone*, *because she is taking the mandate from some individual within the government* and if the government really wanted to give us the money they were going to give her the go ahead to give us the money. I think the problem is with the government, not to say individuals within there' (Petrus, 20 June, *my emphasis*). Many more, such as George, focused on Fraser-Moleketi when asked why government was not moving:

> There is money, they did allocate budget. We don't know what is wrong with Moleketi. The unions are trying to expose her to the regime. [Moleketi alone?] I think she's the problem now, she's hiding something. At the conference if they find corruption they will fire her because the big guns of the ANC are going to lose. If there's no money we will understand, if it's the truth the unions will back off. (George, CHB, 25 June)

But few of the strikers presented crude individualisations. True, strikers routinely singled out individuals, as we've seen throughout this chapter and the previous one. But they singled out (naturally enough) those deemed to be 'in charge' (and therefore able, but failing, to meet the strikers demands). This implies something to be in charge of, and many strikers fitted the failure of individuals into some kind of *institutional* dysfunction. 'James', the teacher whose three words for government were 'D.O.G', preceded that assertion with a far less individuated, though not depersonalised[125], explanation for why government was not acceding to their demands:

> I'm not sure really why government is not willing to give us the money civil servants need. But I hear that they are saying that the country has no money, if they give us that money the economy of the country will be shaken. They forget that we are aware of the huge amounts of money they use, you know building stadiums … how the country becomes a country through civil servants. They are liars, these people are liars to be honest with you. ('James', teacher, 19 June)

'Nelisiwe', earlier in the strike, began with an intensely individualised explanation:

> Let me compare Fraser with previous admin Skweyiya. [Fraser] is unreasonable. She's unreasonable. Because even if …I'm requesting 20c,

[125] Here I am distinguishing seeing powerful individuals as solitary agents (individuation) from a view that allows for recognizing individuals' roles in (their own) group interests (personalization).

> then she [Skweyiya] says let me give you 10c … Now Fraser doesn't meet us somewhere half way. ('Nelisiwe', CHB, 6 June)

But she went on to locate Fraser's unreasonableness in a failure of *structured* constraints on these individuals:

> … But you know there's *this individuals*, *they want to run the government as their own government*, not our government. Three [she was listing points], let me say in our government – let me say government – there is *no strong monitoring, no superior for Moleketi* to tell her talk to the workers. ('Nelisiwe', CHB, 6 June)

In fact, targeting powerful individuals in no way ruled out a classed view of the conflict. Moss, another health worker and a Nehawu branch chair who declared his independence from the ANC, related a view similar to Nelisiwe's, in which individuals had hijacked the ruling party to transform policy *for the advantage of a class*:

> What I can tell you is that our … leading party, they have changed our policy, especially the Freedom Charter, *it's a capitalist party* which, they think for themselves, not other people. So as you can see many people that are on strike today, they believe in socialist life… everything belongs to everybody. Freedom Charter was everyone will share. But according to the government, especially the leading party, the ANC, they have changed the policy … All the former SACP members, they failed to produce or to cover the needs of the people … We are going to make sure that all these people like Fraser Moleketi and Tokyo Sexwale are not part of this [proposed] socialist party. As you can see what informs Tokyo to stand for the elections, they are worried as the capitalists that a socialist is going to take the lead in government. …come 2009 you will see the surprise. We are very angry and hungry at the same time. We are the ones that pushed them to where they are today. … For now we don't have a government. Instead we have a capitalist government, they think for themselves … the direction they have took – I don't think it's a right direction. ('Moss', 21 June)

Much could be said about where these diagnoses fall short, but what is important here is to note that the locus of the strikers' misdiagnoses was not that that they overlooked structure by singling out individuals, but that they misdiagnosed the *nature* of the structure (specifically, the class character of government and ANC *politics*[126]).

I will wrap up this contradictory movement in the power flip in the last section of this chapter, which deals with the aftermath of the strike. Before that, I briefly sketch the other side of conflictual-relational models of class in strikers' imagery: how the strikers situated themselves.

[126] See Ceruti (1995) for my detailed characterization before and immediately after 1994.

7.4. Who is 'we'? Strikers' class and communities of fate

> Class? I'm still a working class. Because I'm still struggling for what I've struggled before – living wage and better conditions. (Manaka, correctional officer, 1 June)

Until now, the chapter has considered both sides of 'us/them' but with the focus on strikers' attitudes to government and the alliance. This section is devoted to refocusing some previous observations and tying up a few loose end on the 'us' side. How did the strikers locate themselves socially and how did they delimitate 'us'? This rounds out the preceding discussion about the strikers' perceptions of class, as well as speaking to some of the limits of this particular strike, specifically the division amongst strikers and the missed possibility of mobilising broader support. I consider the former not only through the strikers' eyes but also via five partial strikers and non-strikers. It also shows that strikers often perceived a community of fate beyond the strike at a time when the official position of the alliance did not welcome people organising outside it. First, I will recap and round out how strikers classed themselves when asked directly 'What class are you?' or 'What is your social class?' which shows that performative (loosely speaking) and instrumentalist elements introduced by the strike subtly change conventional views of class in strikers' views of themselves too.

7.4.1. 'Performative' and instrumentalist self-classing

When strikers answered 'What is your social class?' literally, they generally defined themselves as middle class or low class according to their occupation, and universally accepted the term working class. A few union members started with working class. Most frequently, middle class was defined by consumption, and working class by being employed:

> Class … ummm, in the middle class. Because I *can afford some of the stuff*. But I'm married, so me and my husband are going to buy a car. Better food on the table. [Are you working class?] Yes! Because I wake up early in the morning and *go to work*. (Secretary of Justice department, 25 May)

> [What class are you?] Working class because *I'm getting a salary*. (Xoli 12 June)

These ways of divining one's own class closely matched research into class labels in Soweto two years before the strike, including the frequent congruence, via

'affordability', of labelling oneself middle and working class at the same time (Phadi 2011; 2010; Phadi and Ceruti 2013; 2012).

But the context of the strike often changed these ordinary representations of class by intensifying particular performative and instrumental[127] elements in how strikers labelled themselves (as well as analytical, emotive and other elements).

One of the most significant of these, centring the value of labour and inviting the power flip, was discussed at length in 7.3.2; I won't repeat it here. Another example, appropriate to a newly white-collar stratum, was the toyi-toyi song 'My mother was kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy'[128], which implies generational inheritance of disadvantage and identity. I have also already illustrated that strikers frequently replied to the question 'What class are you?' in ways that made claims for the strike. Both 'middle class' and 'poor' or 'lower class' were mobilised in this way. In 7.1., for example, I related how some strikers said that they were supposed to be middle class but their pay did not allow it. (Remember that nurses, teachers and government administrators had long been considered definitional of middle class in a township context.) Other strikers mobilised 'poor' and 'lower class' to contrast themselves with government and emphasise their needs. Alongside these semi-metaphorical uses of class labels, people also used other meanings of class which were not political-economic in similar ways: Limpho from Sadtu said, 'The way I regard myself, I am supposed to be a first class citizen, but the way the government takes us is the lowest of the low.' Sarah, a professional nurse, illustrated how deeply professional identities had been affected by shortages in the workplace when she interpreted class in relation to how nurses are seen by the public: 'We are lower class, we are lower class. Because even the public, if they come in here they don't care how they talk to us, they talk how they like, even on the taxi when they see nurses they are talking bad about us' (Sarah, professional nurse, 6 June).

In academic literature as well as activist analysis, middle class and professional identities are most often considered *conservative* identities which encourage a striving for stability, resist collectivity or arise from its destruction, and supplant working class

[127] Here I am using instrumental to mean narratives mobilised intentionally for a purpose, such as saying I am lower class *in order* to signal that I am not paid enough (with or without believing that I am literally lower class); performative involves projecting a (claim-making) narrative about what you believe yourself to be (which may be, but is not necessarily, simultaneously instrumentalist).

[128] In full: 'My mother was kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy, that's why! That's why I'm a communist, I'm a communist, I'm a communist.' I first encountered it elsewhere from SACP youth. The song is in English, which is interesting as English is often considered a marker of being 'Model C' or middle class.

identities (Gerteis and Savage 1998; Kelley and Evans 1995). In the strike, however, a mismatch between the perception and the experience – the inability to secure the trappings associated with the middle class identity or the respect of having a profession – transmogrified to motivate a distinctly working class form of action.

Apart from this transmogrification of middle class and professional identities, the category 'the workers' (specifically in the plural, distinct from working class) became a salient identity in the strike, popping up in answer to questions that were not about class. Baruti defined 'us' as '… obviously, *the workers*' (Baruti, teacher, 19 June, *my emphasis*); Mohau, quoted in 7.3.2, appealed to government to think 'for the workers'; Pansy, quoted in 7.3.2, said '*the workers* are tired', and Nomzamo spoke of discrimination between 'cabinet members and *us workers*'.

Older strikers with a longer history in unions or other organisations seemed more likely to volunteer the label working class, both casually when describing their demands and conditions and for themselves when asked, pointing to the role of movements in shaping how we define the world. They also modified its meaning: for example, Manaka, the correctional officer and long-standing union member whose quote opens this section, defined working class through the constant *struggle* over the workplace and consumption (work conditions and wages); this is not an antagonistic model of class, but the endlessness of the struggle-condition of the working class bulges in that direction.

This was how strikers located themselves as individuals. But who did they perceive to be included in their collective, their 'us' and their community of fate (Levi and Olson 2000; Silver 2003)?

7.4.2. Strikers, partial strikers and non-strikers: it's also complicated

One take on identity and social movements is that people mobilise in social movements as a result of a shared identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001). This does not fit the public sector strike, which pulled together people with divergent identities into common action (marching together, demanding the same things). This process gave rise to a shallow and temporary but emotively powerful convergent identity, 'all the public sector workers', which briefly netted diverse occupational categories (from

teachers to ward cleaners), race classifications and union federations.[129] The shared identity, in other words, was created in the process of mobilising, rather than preceding or motivating the mobilisation.

Additionally, the deepening identity 'striker' became available (see 7.2.2, 7.2.3); shared strike practices such as picketing, toyi-toying and meetings helped to sustain this positionality and this collective (see 6.4), while highly charged experiences such as being attacked by police, getting handed a dismissal letter, or not getting paid both intensified it and sometimes splintered it (recall my discussion of Fanatasia and Langford (1994)). Remember also that as the strike wore on, the dominant identity 'all the public workers' was increasingly supplanted by 'strikers vs. scabs', which was there from the beginning of the strike but subordinate to the former. This reflected the combined pressures of the government-employer's essential services and other interdicts, the fact that some unions folded in the face of the interdicts, and the strike's failure to find practical means to increase its power. I have also noted in the previous chapter that the settlement at the end of the strike drove another wedge into those still striking; this was facilitated by the persistence of meeting and mandating separately by union despite striking and picketing together.

On the first days of the strike, people volunteered the theme of unity in relation to other questions, such as: 'It feels good because every public servant is here today like we are from one union, we are fighting for one thing today' (Fourth man, already quoted earlier, 1 June). The sense of the collective was primarily delineated by being on strike, though frequently presented as a sectoral delineation. 'Who is us?' most often elicited the answer 'All the *public sector* workers!'

But note that in the context of 'us and them', even on this first day of the strike, 'all the public workers' was sometimes delineated by those still working, who were associated with Fraser-Moleketi: 'Us is the public servants who are out on the streets and them is those who are (with) Moleketi in parliament and those who are not on strike, at work' (PSA group, 1 June).

Also present from the beginning of the strike were partial strikers, first noted in 6.4. At the beginning of the strike, partial strikers attended the big demos but did not

[129] This produced some awkward identities: a white teacher stressed that 'we [Black and White] are all here for one thing, money… so we can look after our kids' (Theunis, 1 June), but in a later interview, he expounded a conspiracy theory about the government's intransigence in the strike in which he consistently referred to both government, negatively, and more positively to other strikers as 'them'.

join the indefinite strike. Some were following the lead of their more-conservative unions, or were professional nurses. Another type of partial striker stopped work *at* work: recall Tebza's workplace in Pretoria where staff attended big demos but on other days, they turned up for work, signed the register, and then didn't do any work (Tebza,16 June). A clinic nurse reported similar tactics; many nurses became reluctant non-strikers when Denosa decided to respect the essential services interdicts. At CHB, people also complained about people working and then attending the strike meetings (the complaint was based on the fear that they would relay plans back to management).

Partial strikers and reluctant non-strikers that I interviewed continued to identify with the strike, although ambivalently as strikers increasingly identified non-strikers as a key blockage to winning the demands (see 6.5).

The partially striking nurse whose narrative is related in detail in 9.2.2, below, felt betrayed by her 'boring' union for returning them to work and was worried about being attacked by 'someone pretending to be a striker'. She felt trapped between the strikers and the management's interdict, but continued to identify with the strike.

Doris, who I met on one of the big marches and who was 'still working' as a 'breadwinner for two babies' on 19 June, chose 'scared, intimidated and used' when asked to give three words for non-strikers; 'They feel used because they wanted to strike', she explained. Asked for three words for strikers, she replied 'confident and brave'.

Inside the Johannesburg offices of the health and housing departments, I interviewed a woman working there. On her wall was a photocopy of a photo-shopped picture of a kitten with a machine gun, captioned: 'When I compare my workload with my pay packet…' (Author's black notebook 2007: 15 June). She said she was 'sure she was working class because I have responsibilities at work and I feel demanded by the job', She described Fraser-Moleketi as selfish and the letters to the nurses as 'unfair, so unfair, they work really hard' and said they should be reinstated. When asked to describe the strike in three words, she said the strike showed that the government employees had been 'pushed to the edge' and the strike was a way of showing anger and 'showing government how serious are *we'*, and that the government should 'at least give *us* a better offer' (Handwritten interview notes, non-striking woman, 15 June). In short, she spoke much like a striker, and said she was not on strike only because she too was delivering a service essential to hospitals.

Another non-striker I interviewed half way through the strike, a 'very senior nursing sister' at CHB who described herself as middle class on that basis, supported 12% because she 'needed the money' but wished 'they could negotiate without striking'. She said she did 'not like striking, particularly in hospitals' because it was 'patients' lives, not objects'. She also recalled that people were dismissed in the 1992 strike. Her words for the strike were 'destructive and scary'. She preferred 'other avenues' such as negotiating. If there had been an essential services agreement, she said, she would still not be comfortable striking but she would then 'show my face to that crowd' (the strikers picketing outside). She said she didn't like the insults there, such as calling Fraser-Moleketi a whore. However her three words for government were 'selfish, inconsiderate and stubborn' and when I asked how she felt about government she volunteered that it was 'not fair to public servants', as evidenced by the 6%. She felt the dismissal letters were 'very unfair, a very big threat' and complained that there was already a shortage of nurses. Like Limpho, she felt caught between the strike and the management: management said anyone who didn't come to work out of fear of being noted by the strikers would be marked by management as being on strike.

A second anti-striker I interviewed, a man from the department of housing who said he 'supports ANC although it surprises those who supported it', called the strike 'ridiculous' and said he didn't 'believe in striking, boycotting etc'. His union 'should bargain on my behalf. What is the use of running around? Some of them (strikers) maybe don't have work to do and I do, for me it's a waste of time.' He then suggested that government should fast-track benefits for those not striking and when asked about Fraser-Moleketi, he excused her by saying 'Remember things are informed by macro economy. There is a reason for not granting 12%, we cannot take it personally.' He complained, though, that employers and government 'don't give increases without a fight' in South Africa (Handwritten interview notes, non-striking man, 15 June).

What is notable in these profiles is, first, the variety of non-strikers and, second, how much the non-strikers shared strikers' attitudes to government and the demands, including one of the anti-strikers; only the last was *completely* divergent.

The point here is not to judge whether any of these non-strikers could have been brought round to striking if the strikers were less or more acrimonious towards them; it must be assumed that any strike, in order to confront the employer, also involves a

battle within the class reflected in the existence of tactics such as picketing[130]. The point is rather to illustrate how the employer's interdicts (forcing 'essential' workers back to work and preventing strikers from entering workplaces even to provide a skeleton service) disrupted inclusive-identity processes in the early part of the strike by forcing some strikers back to work and by disrupting the physical possibility of meeting the identity-collective if you were not actively part of it. The interdicts erased literal common ground on which strikers and others could encounter each other by banning strikers from the workplace and distancing the pickets. There was thus a genuine polarisation (strikers vs. anti-strikers) and an artificial one (strikers vs. partial strikers). The unions, for their part, vowed to oppose the interdicts legally but in practice accepted the polarisation; lacking even the habit of bringing *strikers* together from different sectors, they failed to imagine ways of continuing to involve those forced back to work.

Strikers generally represented non-strikers as 'uninformed about their rights' (Tumi, teacher, in several interviews) or cowardly, selfish, lazy and part of 'them' not 'us':

> …like the babies. They don't have a backbone. They don't know what they want, they don't know what is life. They go with the wind. Actually they are cowards. They are not people that you can call them comrades you know. (Moss, Nehawu, 21 June)

> They are the people who doesn't want to lose a cent. They want money but they don't want to work for that money. Because by going to the strike you are working for money. I can say they are cowards. [long thought] Selfish.(Trueman, 20 June)

> Those people they are sellouts! … we are all going to benefit, they are going to go to Shoprite with our energy! [second word?] They are rats! We cannot be happy of those people who are working. Because they are selling us out. (Mohau, male teacher, 20 June)

> Backstabbers who don't know actually what they want. Because we are all going to benefit. They want money but they are not prepared to go out and show their anger. So they are cowards as well. (Baruti, teacher, 19 June)

Their anger stemmed from feeling they were making a sacrifice which would benefit those who continued to work, a free rider problem:

> *Eish,* people who are going to work. According to our constitution it is their right, but I have a little problem with them, even though I won't fight them

[130] This is not my own insight; I picked it up long ago in one or other socialist meeting whose details I don't remember.

> or intimidate them… for example you know people are going to strike and you don't go to strike. And then when government is talking percentages, they include those people. In the end of the day we are fighting for them, they are going to benefit. (Petrus, teacher, 16 June)

> But if a person … is not striking I think its failing the masses, unless that person can say when we get the money I don't want the increase. They are riders, they just ride. Everywhere there are that kind of people who will just ride. I think most of them they are sellouts, I don't understand this things. They are them, they are them. They are not part of us. (Steve, teacher, 20 June)

Some strikers, such as Pansy, tried to explain: 'They are obliged. They are fearful. I don't know where do they fall [in them and us]. Some are still going to work because of the obligations. You know' (Pansy, teacher, 19 June).

James, amongst others, included non-strikers amongst 'us' although he thought they were mistaken:

> They are us, *ja*, they are us, but they have that problem of what if I am fired from work, what if? They are stopped by these what ifs, which are not applicable at this juncture … they are also part of us. (James, teacher, 19 June)

Finally, a housing administrator initially explained non-strikers in free rider terms but concluded on the thought that *no-one* would get the 12% if the workers were not united. This observation moved beyond both free rider complaints and sympathy to conceive of a bitter *community of fate* binding strikers and non-strikers.

The preceding discussion confirms the broad arc described in Chapter 6 from an inclusive identity encompassing (almost) 'all the public workers' to its fragmentation across the striking/non-striking gulf, but additionally it reveals continued if increasingly ambivalent identification of partial strikers and some non-strikers with the strike, a one-sided identification which persisted past the *physical* separation of the collective which generated the collective identity. It also uncovered points of commonality between strikers and some types of non-strikers. Finally, it showed that a handful of strikers had perceived a 'community of fate' of strikers and non-strikers, a possible basis for a relatively sophisticated class analysis.

A greater number of strikers implied a community of fate when thinking beyond the workers in their own sector. The next section discusses strikers' identities with regard to people who were neither public sector workers nor the employer.

7.4.3. Community, patients and other strikers

This section shows, first, that even an instrumentalist identification with 'the public' nevertheless invited strikers to posit a rudimentary community of fate beyond themselves. This appeared in responses to 'Who are the friends of the strike?' and 'Who is us?', and strikers volunteered connections between their demands and the public good in other discussions, not unnaturally, given that they work with people and are well aware of the quotidian emphasis that their professional pride should lie in helping people, among other prompts.

> [And who are the friends of the strike?] On our side our families and everyone who is here [at the Pretoria march], they support us. [What about people who are not workers?] *They have to support us because we are working for the public. They know the queues because we serve them*. They have to support us because they are the ones who suffer, the public. (Xoli, Secretary of justice department, 25 May)

> [Do you mean other public sector workers?] Not only workers, but workers and including the public at large, *what we are saying here is for the benefit of the public as a whole*. You as the taxpayers are paying for that post but they don't want to hire permanent workers, [hiring casuals] then when [there is] no work they dismiss them. And hire new people. So no proper service, no proper production. (Man, 25 May)

> Of course the general public must be friends, because *what we are doing, it's not only for the workers*. Service delivery is actually going to the general public. [Another adds] It affects them as well. (PSA group, 1 June)

> *It's not us who are causing the problem to the patient*, it's the government who is causing it. [Should patients support?] Yes they must because *if we get increase then we are going to work in harmony*. (Sarah professional nurse, 6 June CHB)

These are not, clearly, purely selfless pleas. These particular examples all articulated a key workers' grievance, vacant posts. But the fact that they were instrumental to the strike doesn't mean that they did not also constitute a genuine recognition of the connection between workers' problems and the public's (which the workers are perhaps better placed to see). There are many reasons a public sector strike would summon such recognition: it helps, for example, to internally and externally resolve the contradiction of going on strike when your 'product' is the public.

Second, no striker to whom I posed a question about the delivery protests condemned them, even when mildly criticising very specific tactics such as burning a libraries (See 9.2.5.). One striker, when asked about the delivery protests in front of a

shop steward, cautioned that she 'was not sure because she was not part of them' (See 9.2.4) but generally, strikers spontaneously connected their own issues with the delivery protestors' (such as housing) when asked this question (see 9.2.4) – not totally surprising when we remember that some of the strikers shared the delivery protestors conditions, but strikers who were not living with the bucket system also expressed such sentiments. one striker volunteered the example of Khutsong[131] when asked to describe 'us', thus including in his own identity all those on the receiving end of negative government actions. After the strike, some used the delivery protests to illustrate government's failures (see 7.5). At the time, what impressed itself most upon me was that shop stewards and strikers actually in alliance organisations did not demur to official rhetoric on this. And some, such as 'Slovo', unhesitatingly added the 'social movements':

> I think the friend of strikers are those who understand why we are striking and understand the agenda of the working class, all the social movements and the civic movement will be our friends because they understand our condition and understand without the working class they won't go nowhere ('Slovo', 25 May)

Of course Slovo is also saying that social movements need 'us', the strikers, but remember that previously, the wish was that they *should* go nowhere; Cosatu unions had refused to organise with these movements for nearly a decade and the SACP expelled members for working with them. It is likely that such sentiments were both brought into the strike and formed within it, and may even have helped to motivate it.

Third, the strike also summoned a striker identity-community broader than the strike (a strike-wave identity, perhaps). I sometimes asked about the security strike which took place the previous year. The strike had been marked by violence and skewed media coverage of the violence, and some strikers deflected the question by claiming not to know anything about it; one seemed offended by the question, perhaps thinking I meant to discredit striking. Others happily talked about their commonality:

> I'm not familiar [with the security strike] but what I can tell you, management there, they only came to their senses when the public started to suffer. They only listen when there is a problem. (Man, 25 May)

> Security? At the time I felt like people ..,. they are like the police, without the security other institutions won't survive. So they had to give them what

[131] Khutsong is a township on the border of Gauteng, South Africa's richest province, and North West, one of the poorest. It erupted into riots in 2006 when the government decided to alter the provincial boundaries so that Khutsong would become part of Northwest.

> they needed, they had to give them the increase. So that's why they fought and fought and fought and stayed away for a long time. (Man number four, 1 June)

Several spoke about it as a dropped ball in terms of solidarity:

> It was painful, it was painful to say the least, because one of the mistake we did as workers we did not support the strike, the solidarity part of it, we were not there. We must not make that mistake again … and the police were brutal … our government did not understand the history of security companies, I still feel strong our government didn't know much to intervene to ensure that the strike did not take long. (Housing administrator, 25 May).

> No they were right, *ja* [yes]. No at the time, no unfortunately we did not support them. (Phophi, 1 June)

This is perhaps a retroactive regret motivated by their own need for support, but, as with the attitude to the public, this does not make the recognition false.

Fourth, and finally, the strike also summoned a consciousness of community of fate from *outside* itself. The labour movement itself was able to imagine and briefly, if shallowly, enact cross-sector solidarity on the 13 June solidarity march. I already mentioned some patients in 6.4 who sympathised with the demands if not with the strike itself. Bystanders interviewed during the Pretoria march were most often supportive of the strike:

> *Ja* [yes], I think this one [strike], its fine because so many people are struggling and that's why we have to stand up and talk. (Bystander one, 25 May)

> It's very right because you know the politicians are giving themselves more money than the workers … I think it's their right to strike, they have to you know – things are very expensive. (Bystander two, 25 May)

> My teacher, she needs money! (Student bystander, 25 May)

> The strike is good, keep it up guys, keep it up. We are students but we are actually participating with you guys, we are encouraging it, good luck. [Another interrupts] I'm striking because he didn't pitch up for class! [Everyone laughs]

So the strike facilitated the notion of a bigger unit beyond the workplace, and was one of several events in which the same broad societal and economic forces may have been 'corralling' people together from what Olin-Wright (2005) calls different class locations into a community of fate roughly equivalent to 'proletariat'. However the strikers' representations of 'the public' were usually of a *passive* force (patients and pupils), expected to support and benefit from the strike but never called to *act* in

support of the strike. Very little was done in the strike to mobilise such sympathies, which could have overcome the sense of isolation and attack by the press barrage as the strike dragged on as well as added to pressure on the employer-government.

In summary, then, this sub-section has demonstrated that the strike enabled out-of-the-ordinary identities also with regard to how strikers identified *themselves* and who they identified with, in which even traditionally prudent and temperate identities played different roles. The needs of the strike encouraged recognition of broader communities of fate. This was not a concept like 'the proletariat' but could provide a precursor to such a concept, in that it suggests collective *interests* which are not based on identical occupations but on somehow being in the same boat. On the other hand the pressures of striking and the essential services interdict drove a wedge into the strike-collective identity and the strike collective itself; here too there was identity damage, polarising strikers and non-strikers.

Thus far, the chapter has considered identities in the strike. The next and final section of this chapter will consider how strikers dealt with the end of the strike as it wraps up the chapter.

7.5. The aftermath of the strike and of the chapter

This chapter and the previous one detailed several ways in which strikers' identities with the alliance and their senses of a collective were stretched, nipped, damaged, reconstituted or otherwise affected by the strike, as well as some nascent identities that may have gone into the strike. The chapter illustrates how the alliance was a machine for containment but only insofar as it was also a repository of receipts. It demonstrated the role of contradiction in destabilising identities which previously worked for containment, making the strike a test, if not a fully conscious one, of the class contours of the alliance and showing how the strike began to pervert the hitherto domesticating theme of 'our government'. It also demonstrated that the strike summoned ideas of class and precursors of class differently than for similar people in non-striking positions, substantiating Chapter 3's contention that strikes may offer special possibilities for class identities and that static and purely quotidian studies of working class identity miss powerful forces for class formation, as discussed in 3.1 (among others, Barker 2008; Callinicos 2006b; Fantasia 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Snow 2001).

Centrally, the chapter showed that attitudes to government, as the employer, entered a state of ambiguity; this was more or less a condition of striking, even for those who 'hoped' that the 25 May demonstration would bring government to its senses. Moreover the strikers' initial expectation of reciprocal loyalty underwent identity *damage* (introduced in 3.2.2), as actually divergent class interests were forced into the open by the strike. Idioms of dependency on government flipped to emphasising government's dependence on the strikers, sometimes in a workplace context, presaging exploitation-related senses of class. These did not rupture the alliance, but challenged it's actually existing practice in ways that sometimes then suggested relational-antagonistic, exploitation-based models of class. This again illustrates the role of contradiction (as I argued in Chapter 2), within people's identities and between identities and materiality, in identity rupture (eventful identities).

The strike collective also developed expansive identities and recognised communities of fate, but was at the same time fractured by the employees' interdicts and union division; more damage followed the settlement. The identity of collectives in the strike was shaped partly by how public workers collected physically. Strikers assumed but did not mobilise a physical collectivity or connection[132] with 'the public' of any kind.

The preceding explanation also shows that identities do not always change through a process of new identities simply supplanting old ones, whether suddenly, gradually, piecemeal or entire, or through shifting contextual salience. (Mis)identities under threat (or shocked – see 3.3) may enter a kind twilight zone, an interregnum where the old identity is suspended, if you like, because it no longer fits, but the question of how to re-identify that agent and if necessary yourself is not yet settled. This is why a concept such as identity damage is necessary for identity studies. These identities were eventful (as I propose in Chapter 2), insofar as the breakdown of their existing models of identity restructured the way strikers saw the alliance, albeit temporarily, in potentially rupturous ways, opened space for new identities (a new structure of identification). However the spaces were not necessarily filled (re-identification was not necessarily completed), and eventful identities summoned by

[132] Which might take many forms from joint action and public meetings down accepting a leaflet or giving a donation. Virtual meetings, thinking of the in-pandemic Clover strike playing out as I write, would probably count too as at least quasi-physical. Real time face to face or voice to voice might be the right phrase.

the strike context often receded or were truncated by the end of the strike – but not necessarily all extinguished, as we will see shortly.

This was first of all because the strike was no great event in strikers' work conditions and pay, and while it had an effect in a broader arena, the senses in which it did shape the course of history had a delayed effect (and sometimes outcomes of questionable use to the public workers, but that was not to be revealed until later). These included swelling the wave that reintroduced the indefinite strike to the industrial arena in South Africa and expressions of open discontent to the alliance; bulging the skin of existing alliance practice and almost certainly helped to speed, via union officials, the shake-up of the ANC which was to come at the end of that year in Polokwane, when the ANC's factional battles burst into the open and the Zuma camp displaced the Mbeki camp.

The objective limits of the strike were not, of course, completely fixed: they reflected the unions' strategic imagination and political frameworks, the strength and level of organisation of the class as a whole, and in small measure the decision of the social movements to stand aside from it.

Identity events were deflected or suppressed at the end of this strike in three ways at a macro level: first, I expect, to the extent that the salience of identities such as striker recede in 'normal' situations when people are no longer actually on strike – although this would not have happened overnight, as skirmishes continued over the return to work. Second, the unions deferred the strike's outstanding business back to the political project of influencing the ANC in government by backing Zuma – that is, through a temporary *restoration* of the alliance achieved by temporarily overturning elements of its existing practice - which was facilitated by, third, and paradoxically, an under-theorised overlap of *different senses of power* involved in the 'power flip' described above. By this I mean that the accurate observation that workplace power and political power are linked – encouraged here by the fact that government was the employee – enabled the less satisfactory conclusion that strikers could punish the employer by voting, within the ANC or nationally.

Let me stress, however, *restoration* of the alliance. Things were not simply patched up and papered over; they had to break apart a little before something could be restored, and neither the ruling party nor its allied unions have ever quite returned to the outwardly placid containment of the pre-Zuma days, although there was

certainly still containment in the period of quiet expectation after Polokwane. (Moreover the unions left in the alliance today are currently very, very quiet).

Also note that this deflection did not necessarily arise from strikers accepting Zuma as their saviour where the strike fell short (although some did); rather, the Zuma option reopened a less risky avenue inside the alliance for the union bureaucracy, whether strikers went along with it or not. After a long and costly strike, this would easily appear a less risky option for strikers too.

The next section shows that accommodation to the end of the strike, while sedating eventful identities, did not resolve their contradictions. The way that both truncated identity damage and identity restoration were crammed back into line stored up tensions for the future. It may seem odd introducing more interviews after what seemed to be a conclusion, but this is right where it belongs, being the actual conclusion – the wrapping up – of the identity processes in the last two chapters, summarised above. As such it is also the prequel to Chapter 8.

7.5.1. Disintegration

One shallow inkling of the sense of suspended reality during the state of striking was how strikers opened interviews after the strike with the words 'Things are/everything is back to normal' (Busisiwe, a clinic worker; Trueman from CHB; Tumi from Sadtu). Despite the possibly transcendent experience of those on strike, the strike nevertheless reached a bureaucratically-controlled end, as might have been predicted by Lehulere (2005), Habib and Valodia (2006) or Pillay (2006), discussed in 1.1. To the naked eye, those faint rebellious flashes sparked by the strike were now extinguished and the state of suspense was perhaps thus unmasked as a state of merely transitory excitement. Interviews in the month after the strike showed that some fires for striking by the arduous and costly experience, and while the mostly disappointing settlement stoked other fires, these often fuelled new damage to the strike collective and the 'public workers' identity. On the terrain of damage to strikers' identities with government, much was still smouldering.

Strikers were divided on whether the strike had won or lost, as illustrated by these typical answers from the interviews conducted after the strike, by Lawrence Ntuli, over the telephone.

> Right now I'm at work and the strike now is over, *I am so happy* about the strike. All of us are at work, Denosa, Hospersa, and Nehawu, *all workers*

> *are happy* about the final settlement. We are happy about 7.5%, it is an improvement from 5% and includes many things such as housing subsidy and medical aid. (Tefelo, Nehawu, August)
>
> The struggle *won something*. The struggle pushed the government from 6 to 7.5%. *It was not in vain*. The problem is that the government is greedy. (Trueman, August)
>
> *All teachers are not happy* about the results of the strike. Other unions outvoted Sadtu, it was the only union which did not sign. (Ruby)
>
> The majority of *teachers are not happy* about the final wage issue … we feel that the government undermines teachers, it does not think we deserve a better life (Tisetso, Sadtu, teacher).

As we can see, the settlement itself partly explains this divide. Remember that the biggest concessions in the settlement were made to a relatively narrow band of the poorest workers, mostly in health, which were claimed to be reducing the wage gap. That allowed some health workers to feel victorious. But most were disappointed. Strikers were generally ambivalent about the outcome: not satisfied but noting that what the strike did achieve:

> It is 50/50. *We won and lost.* We did not get 12%. We won because we moved the government from 5% to 7.5%. (Baruti)
>
> We are not happy about the outcome, *we lost*, and we did not get what we wanted. *But there was political gain*, the strike brought all teachers together and united all workers in the public sector. (Tshepang, Sadtu)
>
> The strike was *a failure, but we won something*, for example housing subsidy. (Kedibone, August)
>
> *I think we won*, *even though we did not get what we initially wanted*, but if we look at the benefits flowing from a strike, I think we won something. This strike won something *compared to previous strikes*. One gain of the struggle was the promotion of workers from level 1 and 2. (Busisiwe, August)

Half-half claims were a way of not wasting the strike, claiming some progress from the month of sacrifice. Most strikers, whether 'winners' or 'losers', said they would strike again.

But the identities 'striker' and 'public workers' were fragmented by the settlement. For a few strikers, losing pay equivalent to what the increase would add in a year discredited 'the indefinite strike' altogether and they vowed never to strike again. The strike seemed to have been most especially not worth it to those who felt left out of the deal:

> *The struggle was a failure, it was a real waste of time*. We struggle for more than two weeks but we gain nothing… this struggle represented a defeat to general assistants… they are not featured in this agreement. It seems as if this struggle was waged for other workers, Nehawu workers ... the outcome of this strike, without doubt, *disillusioned workers*. At the end of the strike they became more disillusioned, hopeless and powerless. This is because the strike benefited some workers and not all workers. (Margaret, Pawusa)

The teachers felt peculiarly victimised as their union alone had resisted signing the deal. They felt betrayed, abandoned and isolated:

> Other unions are selfish, no longer support teachers. Because they won something, they decide to pull out. (Unidentified, August)

The locus of teachers' grievance-collective thus shifted from 'all the public workers' to 'teachers'. Ruby, for example, repeated familiar themes: 'The government is hostile to *teachers*. There is a huge wage gap between government and *teachers...'* (Ruby, August) and so on. The flow was now against broader class identities:

> In future I think if teachers can *struggle separately* from other workers they can win something. This is because in the *public sector workers do not share the same interests*: for example the interests of a cleaner are not identical with a teacher. That is why 7.5% was good for Nehawu workers and bad for teachers. (Tshepang, Sadtu, August)

> It benefitted other workers, for example Nehawu workers. This is because they do not have many responsibilities. The majority of them do not own bond houses. They reside in RDP houses or backyard dwellings. Added to that they do not pay services such as electricity, water, etc. Teachers on the other hand pay bond, rent and other services. This means our lives are more expensive as compared to other workers. (Steve, Sadtu, August)

In fact, very many of the strikers felt left out of the deal, as this health worker illustrates:

> The R500 that we obtained as a result of our struggle is not enough. In other words, *we lost* this strike. (Sarah, CHB, August)

It was not actually the case that most Nehawu workers all benefitted from or were satisfied with the deal. But because strikers met separately according to their union, rather than jointly, this was not self-evident to the teachers.

A third form of identity damaged at the end of the strike was the earlier convergence of union leaders and strikers. We already encountered some such damage with strikers whose unions caved to the interdicts, and now several strikers complained that the deal was signed above their heads:

> We are not happy because we did not get 10%. *The unions signed* 7.5% agreement *without consulting workers*. They did not get a mandate from workers. (Sarah, CHB Nehawu, August)

> …but I do know that people are not quite happy about the final settlement. They feel betrayed because *unions shifted* from 12% to 7.5%. (James)

> We lost… *the union leadership betrayed us.* It failed to consult workers on a regular basis… from the start, I knew we will be defeated because the government is the ANC, Sadtu belong to Cosatu, and Cosatu is part of the ANC. Our leadership belong to the ANC, and is biased to the government. The same union leadership eye positions in government (Karabo, teacher and APF member)

Sometimes this damage was hidden, and only came to light late in the second strike (as we will see in 9.2.4); perhaps it developed only retroactively, by which I do not mean that it wasn't there at the end of the first strike, but that it only comes to light much later, even for the individual experiencing it.

Whatever a striker's interpretation of the end of the strike, all strikers had to accept the end of the strike. How did strikers deal with that?

7.5.2. Three types of adaption to the end of the strike

Among strikers dissatisfied with the end of the strike, the interviews revealed three broad, sometimes overlapping tendencies in how that strikers adapted to the end of the strike.

The first was pragmatic accommodation with things as they were. The pragmatic reasons seemed to mirror the union negotiator's script:

> In bargaining you have to give something in order to get something. In history the workers never won everything, they compromise. *Anyone who thinks workers can get whatever they want is a dreamer.* (Sipho)

> The government would have given us 12% but it did not know there was going to be a strike and *did not budget for it*. (Luli, Naptosa)

> ..but in negotiations comrade there is *nothing like a win-win* situation, it's a *matter of trading*. (Nehawu official)

What appears as an accommodation to the collective bargaining framework (as the some analyses of the time might understand it - see 1.1) can better be understood as *an accommodation to the partial defeat of the strike.* In the hard cold light of the return to work, as you wearily face the backlog after the strike, it might easily seem that 12% was indeed a fever dream rather than the achievable reality it appeared to be during the early, daring days of the revival of the indefinite strike. It seems obvious as soon

as its stated, but they would have been accommodating to a quite different reality had the strike won more. Accommodation to compromise follow accommodation to defeat.

A second group of strikers, however, came out of the strike still arguing the justice of their cause, doggedly repeating the reasons they should have got 12% and thereby absolutely resisting the reality of the settlement even while forced to accept it. Their reasons for the strike's failure ranged from the strategic:

> As the strike progressed we felt powerless. Because you cannot strike without an income (John, August)

to the intensely politicized:

> This strike demonstrated that the government is not prepared to accelerate service delivery. When it came to power we were told that there will be a better life for all and decent job for all. But it has failed to give workers at least 10% and improve working conditions. This is not amazing because in other areas, this government perform badly as well. For example, backlog in housing delivery. That is why there are service delivery protests. (Teacher, interview, 2007)

Strikers who said the strike won 'something' also sometimes proffered structural and quasi-structural explanations for its limits:

> The problem is that the government is greedy. This explains why it failed to give us 12%. The minister used this strike to score points, showing her bosses that she is capable of dealing with workers. She attempted to show workers that she is a real boss, is having a final say. She also wanted to impress her bosses, so that in future she can be considered for promotion. (Trueman, August)

> It was impossible for government to have enough money for workers because it gave the MPs 57% increment. They spend more money building stadiums for the 2010. This means more money is pocketed by construction companies, and some of these companies are owned by politicians who are connected to government. (Busisiwe, August)

A third attitude to the end of the strike, intersecting both tendencies described above, allowed strikers to accept the end of the strike by treating it as a suspension of unfinished business (more about this in Chapter 9). This adaption was not blatant at the end of the first strike, but Karabo, for example, when asked in the abstract if they would strike again, replied concretely: 'If conditions don't improve, if conditions are not proper, we will definitely strike' (Karabo, teacher, August).

Another arena in which the settlement of the strike was storing up discontent for later was with regard to the relationship with government. Damage to the strikers' identities with government was not repaired by the settlement.

7.5.3. ‘We learned some lessons’: not quite bouncing back

> We *learned some lessons during this strike* – that government does not have the poor people interest at heart. It does not care about poor people. This means that the government is not part of the workers. But the ANC because it is part of the alliance is part of worker struggles. (Tumi, Sadtu, August)

> The struggle *taught* us that the government does not appreciate workers contribution to the society (Sarah, Nehawu CHB, August)

> The same strike *revealed* that our government is more committed to make few people more richer and poor people poorer (Sigidi, Nehawu)

It is interesting that these strikers presented the strike explicitly as a learning or revelatory process (‘It shows that…’), and that the lessons were largely about government. Bitterness towards government persisted and traversed ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ strikers.

> The government is selfish and capitalist; do not care about its workers. On the other hand, the service delivery is not improving, but it creates millionaires each year. It is busy creating millionaires out of taxpayer’s money, but fails to eradicate the bucket system. (Manaka, correctional services, 1 July)

Of course some strikers still insisted that government was part of workers, but more were like this striker, who enthused about victory in the strike then continued:

> The government acts like a thug. It encourages public sector to be more helpful to the public but the government is not prepared to be helpful to the public workers (Tefelo, Nehawu, August)

Julia, from CHB, likewise felt vindicated but had no need to revise her metaphor for the employer:

> The strike brought some changes in our lives. We gained the following: [itemises the settlement]. That is why for me the strike represents a victory. … for me the *government is a bloodsucker*. It wants us to work harder but it does not pay us enough money. (Julia, CHB, August)

Others added:

> The ANC government also does not support workers. Its role is to blame workers whenever they embark on strike. (Zebedee)

> The government or the ANC are not part of us, but serve the interests of the few elites. This government care about the elites, not poor workers. (Steve, Teacher)

> *The strike made me to dislike the government more*. I think the ANC exploits workers. I used to be a supporter of the ANC but I have realised that ANC

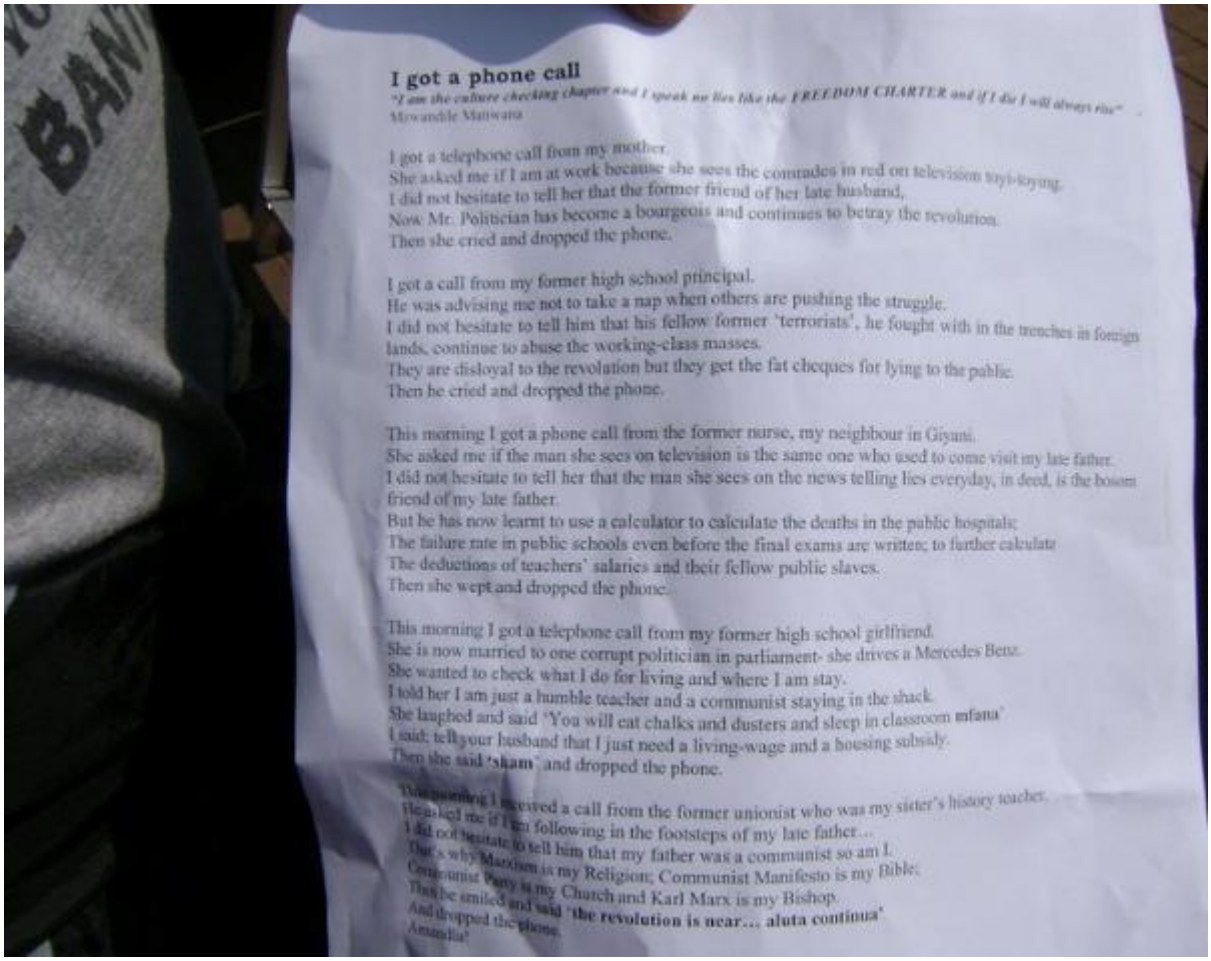
> is only interested in our votes, nothing else. I told myself that next time I will not vote for the ANC and I will not vote for any party. Because even if we vote for another party, there will be no changes, things will remain the same. … I will strike again (Busisiwe, August)

Even amongst those wanting to rehabilitate government, there remained demands for accountability, ranging from this damaged identity, 'We don't need someone to be friends with us, we need someone who will listen to us' (Neliswe, hospital worker), which is somehow redolent of the parental idiom mentioned in 7.1 and 7.3.1, to this striker's insistence on actualising the mythology of the alliance as a *two*-way street:

> You see there is a government, it means for me the government I have today is not the same government of yesterday (apartheid), reason being we don't fight we negotiate. But *it shows that before we get things we need to fight first*, you see, and I think it was not our aim that when we take our government to power we are going to fight. I was thinking that we are going to negotiate with good faith – but we need to fight. *I was thinking we are having a government that is going to listen to the people, not this government that want us to listen. Then they must listen to us first.* (Neliswe)

So the alliance had not simply been restored, in strikers' minds, even if its gears were once again grinding behind the scenes to deflect the strike. Identity damage persisted beneath the surface restoration of relations at the end of the strike.

Chapter 8. Strike two: receipts and blank cheques



I got a phone call

"I am the culture checking chapter and I speak no lies like the FREEDOM CHARTER and if I die I will always rise"
Mzwandile Maliwata

I got a telephone call from my mother.
She asked me if I am at work because she sees the comrades in red on television toyi-toying.
I did not hesitate to tell her that the former friend of her late husband,
Now Mr. Politician has become a bourgeois and continues to betray the revolution.
Then she cried and dropped the phone.

I got a call from my former high school principal.
He was advising me not to take a nap when others are pushing the struggle.
I did not hesitate to tell him that his fellow former 'terrorists', he fought with in the trenches in foreign lands, continue to abuse the working-class masses.
They are disloyal to the revolution but they get the fat cheques for lying to the public.
Then he cried and dropped the phone.

This morning I got a phone call from the former nurse, my neighbour in Giyani.
She asked me if the man she sees on television is the same one who used to come visit my late father.
I did not hesitate to tell her that the man she sees on the news telling lies everyday, in deed, is the bosom friend of my late father.
But he has now learnt to use a calculator to calculate the deaths in the public hospitals;
The failure rate in public schools even before the final exams are written; to further calculate
The deductions of teachers' salaries and their fellow public slaves.
Then she wept and dropped the phone.

This morning I got a telephone call from my former high school girlfriend.
She is now married to one corrupt politician in parliament- she drives a Mercedes Benz.
She wanted to check what I do for living and where I am stay.
I told her I am just a humble teacher and a communist staying in the shack.
She laughed and said 'You will eat chalks and dusters and sleep in classroom **mfana**'
I said; tell your husband that I just need a living-wage and a housing subsidy.
Then she said '**shame**' and dropped the phone.

This morning I received a call from the former unionist who was my sister's history teacher.
He asked me if I am following in the footsteps of my late father…
I did not hesitate to tell him that my father was a communist so am I.
That's why Marxism is my Religion; Communist Manifesto is my Bible;
Communist Party is my Church and Karl Marx is my Bishop.
Then he smiled and said '**the revolution is near… aluta continua**'
And dropped the phone.
Amandla!

Photo 2: A striker's poem about erstwhile comrades divided in an unfinished struggle. It was read out at a rally during the second strike in Johannesburg. Photo by Dhiraj Nite

While the previous strike was part of the turmoil that deposed Mbeki, the 2010 strike was the first large strike during Zuma's administration, constituting a test of the reconstitution of the alliance – both of the Zuma administration itself, and of the unions' strategy to influence policy through this restoration. If the 2007 strike was born from the union bureaucracy being thrown together with the members by the repeated snubs of their partners in government in a context of squeezed salaries, 2010 was the strike that no-one expected in the context of an alliance reconstituted around Zuma.

Government did not expect it, because they thought renewed cooperation with union leaders would sell the deal to union members. Union leaders did not expect it, because they thought government would be sensitive to their needs. And the members did not expect it, because they expected that the Zuma administration would resolve the issues left unsolved in 2007.

The very existence of the 2010 strike therefore illustrated that the deflection of the demands of the first strike to the 'Zuma solution' had stored up expectation by the time of the second strike. It not only stored up contradiction for later but intensified it. Yet at the same time, the strike was a 'classic case of containment', where the federation COSATU intervened as 'both conflict manager and strikers' interlocutor in collective bargaining' (Ceruti 2011, 152); it was 'the story of the contortions of union leaders caught between betraying their comrades in government and betraying their members, as well as the strategic contradictions involved in attempting a more assertive role in the alliance' (Ceruti 2012, 113)[133].

This chapter examines a maturation of these contradictions, as well as a maturation of *deflections* of these particular contradictions, in the second strike. The molecular damage incurred during the first strike, possibly dormant since then, was firmly implicated in the beginning of the second strike. To the extent that public workers had written out a new cheque for the ANC when the alliance was rehabilitated after Polokwane, the exact amount was now clearly specified in rands, percentages and respect. However the explosive possibilities of this second stressor on molecular change was dissipated *materially* by Cosatu's 'management' of the crisis according to the logic of collective bargaining at a political level, or social policy unionism, *in the context of* the limits of strikers' power (which were not purely objective).

The material limits on the strikes (self-imposed and externally imposed), and the consequent failure to win rewards to match the sacrifice made, were at least as great a limit on the further development of the strikers' identities as the bonds of a now twice-tested alliance enforced by top-down unions, and perhaps the greater limit, because it left the strikers with no actually existing alternative when the strike itself did not

[133] A number of short publications such as these (as well as unpublished conference presentations) worked in the broader research process as sketches of initial hypotheses from preliminary analysis of the data. I will reproduce some of their choicest phrases in this chapter, sometimes to recall a subtle air of how things felt at the time and sometimes because I have not since improved on intuitive phrases. However readers familiar with these pieces should remember that they give only the faintest inkling of the present concerns with rupture and eventfulness, skipped discussions of class imagery, and were written before I systematized the archival detail and without the depth of analysis or longitudinal sensitivities to the interviews in these closing chapters.

leverage enough power. This is perhaps the most crucial element differentiating my analysis of the containment of this reckoning with the alliance from the analyses sketched in Section 1.1., where Lehulere (2005), Pillay (2008b) and others treat the alliance's potential to contain struggle to have been achieved by the bond itself, and therefore overlook hidden wear and tear and subjective strain to its working. My analysis, by contrast, presents the alliance as an increasingly worn machine, which survived shocks because workers in these instances were unable to go past it.

The end of this strike (which was ill-prepared from the beginning because it 'took everyone by surprise'), when taken together with the last (which had deferred major issues to this second show of strength), failed to discredit striking but took matters out of the strikers' hands; yet strikers still fantasised about something different, as I will show in the chapter following this, specifically in Section 9.2.

The chapter is structured similarly to the chapters about the 2007 strike: a background, a long-view analytical timeline, then strikers' analyses of events, and, briefly, the aftermath. This only means that I'm using the same sort of analysis for both strikes, and is not meant to facilitate a side-by-side comparison with those chapters, because this strike must be understood as an episode *flowing from* the previous strike, a second 'moment' in the unfolding dynamics which connected the two strikes (explained in the methodology chapter). So even when themes reappear – as many do – they are no longer themselves but now also, or instead, represent continuities from before in the form of persistences or things incompleted. I will assume here that readers already know the earlier incarnation of such themes. This chapter also narrows its scope of analysis to focus primarily on the Alliance. I don't closely examine class imagery again in this chapter[134]. But I do introduce a new level of detail about strike practices, by way of photostories.

The next section begins by sketching the period bridging the previous strike and the beginning of the 2010 strike.

8.1. Between the strikes

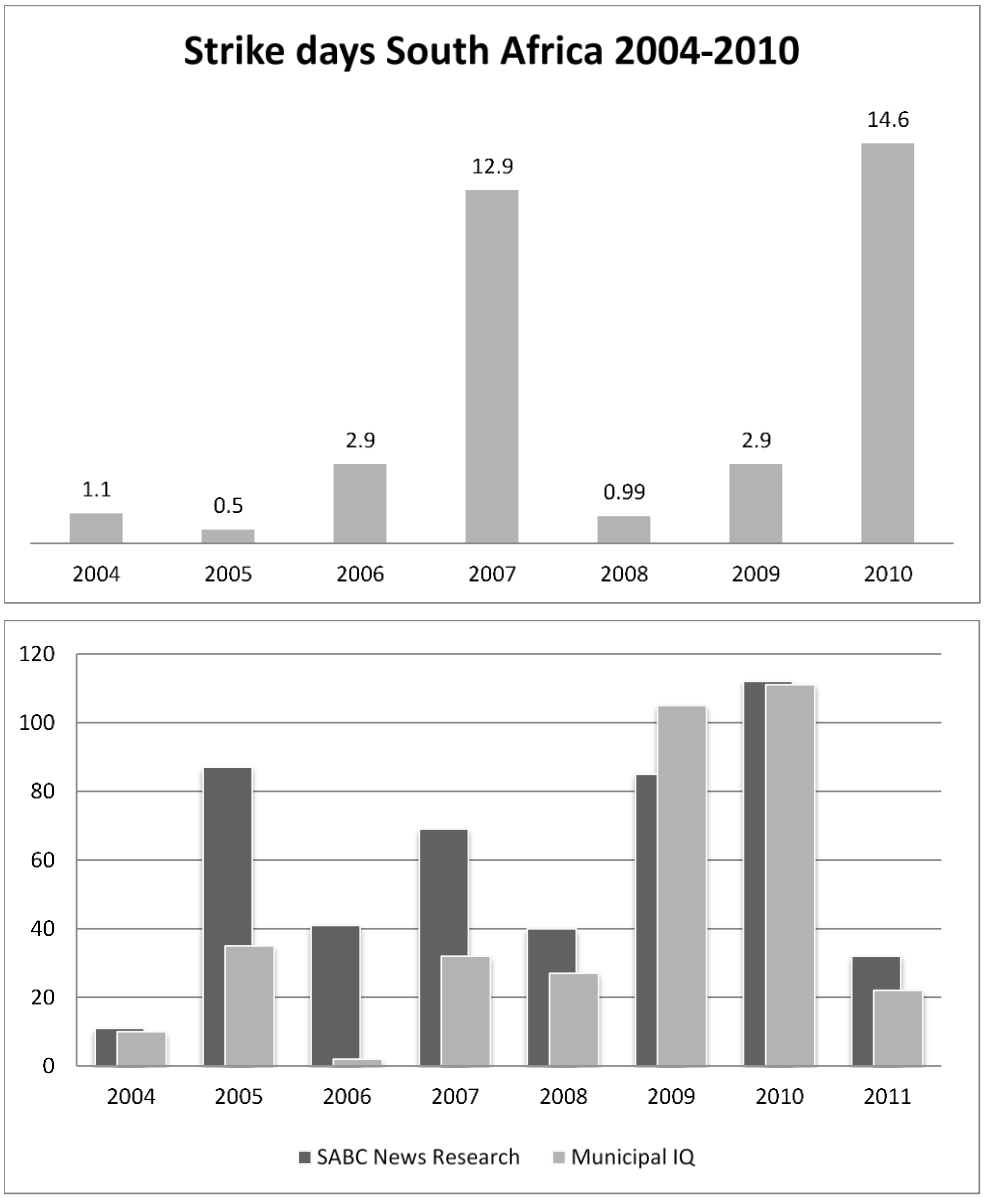
The previous strike ended with the union bureaucracy drawing strikers' eyes to the 52nd ANC conference in Polokwane, a few months after the strike in December 2007.

[134] Which is not to say that class imagery remained stable from one strike to the next, only that I did not focus on it in the same way.

Public unions' discontents were among those aired at the fractious gathering (my notebook, December 2007). The conference is remembered primarily for the fact that Zuma replaced Mbeki as president of the ANC, setting him on the road to becoming president of the country too. Significant sections of Cosatu backed his ascendency (Tabane and Robinson 2007; BDLive 2015); but it did not signify the jump to the economic left some analysts feared and Cosatu desired. Some minor satisfaction for the public sector unions did come quickly: Fraser-Moleketi failed to survive the subsequent reshuffles and left government for the private sector (de Lange 2010). But the unions' rewards for backing Zuma had been otherwise slim by 2010. Key policies that the unions wanted, such as banning labour brokers, had not materialised. Cosatu, along with other elements of the alliance, was increasingly publicly assertive, but on the defensive with its alliance partner. The day before the strike, Vavi's address at the Ruth First memorial lecture said it was 'scandalous' that there was no new growth path from government yet; that 'No amount of political freedom will satisfy the hungry masses', according to Lenin; that Ruth First would have joined service delivery protests, and that some leaders who were with her were now reassuring capital, and that the youth movement was at war with itself for the wrong reasons (my notebook, 17 August 2010). The alliance had been reconstituted, but not exactly as before; it was more argumentative and critical than before (though not necessarily any more effective as a tool for affecting state policy, as we will see).

In general, the new administration was handling 'increasingly fractious allies' (Plaut 2010, 210), to the extent that Zuma famously scolded Julius Malema, then still a Youth League leader, for not respecting 'seniors'. The level of protest was rising again, shooting up from the year of the elections, 2009 (see the bottom Figure 6 below, repeating Figure 2 and Figure *3* from p. 114 for readers' convenience), necessitating several presidential visits to townships to quell delivery protests. The level of strikes (top of Figure 6 below) did not track expectation and demand for the 'Zuma dividend' in the same way that delivery protests did, because strikes' specific timing was determined by the three-year rhythms of collective bargaining.

Figure 6: Repeat: Strike days in South Africa, Protests in South Africa



(Repeated from p. 114 for the reader's convenience.) Top source: Andrew Levy Employment; Bottom source: SABC News Research and Municipal IQ). The 2011 figures include the periods until May (SABC) and April (Municipal IQ).

However, at the very least, the figures show that collective bargaining was now more often leading to strikes – that is, adversarial bargaining had not been extinguished or re-domesticated by the Zuma reconstitution. Rising strike levels could not be understood outside the context of a dragging economy whose problems were intensified by the 2008 global crisis, significantly increasing the threat to public workers' buying power and stability since the last strike. Since the 2007 strike, food inflation had been severely aggravated by the global crash in 2008, increasing 17% from May 2007 to May 2008, leading respondents in Joynt's 2010 study to reduce

meal sizes and cut out ‘luxuries’ such as vegetables, toothpaste, tomatoes and oil; 41% of Johannesburg’s population were ‘severely food insecure’ and only 27% had access to enough food (Joynt 2010, 34, 36). Since the 2008 crisis, 1.5 million workers had lost jobs and consumer debt had risen to ‘nearly 80% of income by 2009’, wrote Gentle (2010). It was significant in itself that people should revive strikes amidst a job crisis, and more so that, as Andrew Levy later reported, settlements in the private sector in 2010 came in well above the inflation rate of 4.5%, and many above 10%, while workers at the parastatal Eskom won 8% (Levy 2010).

Meanwhile conditions in the public sector remained, frankly, dire. By March 2010 there were *officially* 254 029 vacancies in the public sector, 20% of the desired number of jobs (Hassen 2017 cited in IEJ 2019, 10).

Nevertheless, when public sector bargaining began, the three key collective actors – government-employer negotiators, union negotiators and the negotiated themselves - did not seem to expect that all would soon contribute, in their own special ways, to a rising strike curve. That was partly because the 2009 mid-term salary adjustment had been relatively generous, as Hassen (2010b, 4) points out; indeed, above budget. What was probably intended by the government team to head off confrontation during their showcase soccer world cup hosting the following year, 2010, could easily appear to public workers and their unions as a signal of changed government practice which, along with the high settlements in the parastatals, created expectation and, at first, confidence for the coming bargaining round.

We will see in the next section how the world cup was itself an object in the battle to come. But first, it provided an occasion for co-operation between comrades in government and the unions, when they agreed benevolently to suspend the bargaining process during the tournament. After that, the world cup was wielded by the employer to signify empty coffers, but for strikers it seemed to indicate that government was not, as it always claimed, strapped for cash.

And indeed, as Bekker and van der Walt argue, government’s ‘resource constraints’ owed much to conscious policy in which wage restraint was a principle:

> South Africa has the largest economy and largest tax base in Africa; it is also one of the two most unequal societies in the world … Since the end of the 1970s, South Africa has been following a neoliberal macroeconomic policy [from apartheid through to the ANC]. … Fiscal austerity is a centrepiece of this project. Thus, the state has resisted an increase in the state sector wage bill on principle and in the context of a drive to cut spending and taxes. … In contrast, the state is quite willing to spend large

> amounts of money on projects designed to promote nationalism and foreign investment. In mid-2010, South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup, building (or upgrading) a large number of stadiums and significantly upgrading commercial infrastructure. Costs spiralled to perhaps half a trillion rand (around USD 71,400 million). (Bekker and van der Walt 2010, 142)

The world cup was therefore not the only love-fest hardening into a hangover in the context brewing the strike. An antagonism between the state and the public sector workers was taking root - antagonism in that the state *really had* overspent on the world cup, while the fact that they had *really did* prove that they could have helped the public workers, if they had different priorities.

8.2. A brief anatomy of the strike

In the first strike, doing things as they had always been done produced unexpected friction, and likewise in this second strike, performing the 'new normal' of the restored alliance produced results quite contrary to the various actors' intentions. The 2010 round of bargaining exposed that the Zuma solution, rather than repair the injuries leading to the first strike, intended to discipline the second strike just as harshly as their predecessors. The union leaders were looking two ways: although reluctant to strike, they had a heightened sensitivity to alienating their base, and at the same time, their federation had big plans for their new relations in government. With the ghostly channels of imagined influence apparently renewed, social policy unionism absorbed Cosatu's focus, but with little to show for their efforts. The strike was double edged in this context: a possible lever for social policy, and a possible source of ill feeling in the alliance. The 2010 strike would eventually be reduced to an unsuccessful skirmish in that bigger strategy. For strikers, identities with *both* government and union leaders were strained and tested in the second strike. In this strike, the strikers were the 'surprise element', surprising even themselves, as my interviews revealed (see also Gentle 2010; Hassen 2010b). The second strike was again characterised by damage to identities with government, but this time, there was also a divergence between union leaders' and members' interests.

In this chapter, the timeline of the strike is discussed in three broad phrases: the start of the strike, being on strike and the stitch up.

8.2.1. The strike bursts forth

By the time the strike was declared, the unions' and the employer's percentages were not as far apart as at the start of the 2007 strike. I have already noted that bargaining in the 2010 round dragged on longer than usual, partly because the unions agreed not to disturb the world cup. A dispute was declared in May 2010 but it was not until August that the strike became a serious eventuality. The unions had by then been worn down from their opening demand of 11% to 8.6% wage increase and a R1000 a month housing allowance. The state offer, by 30 July, was 6.5% and R650 housing allowance (Baloyi 2010).

Public Service and Administration minister Richard Baloyi's briefing document, published on that date, usefully encapsulates government's position. The similarities with the previous administration's arguments were conspicuous. Baloyi's briefing declared that he was ready to carry out the 'political intervention … to find a resolution to the dispute' by tabling a final offer; the briefing insisted that government's offer was 'reasonable and fair' compared to inflation and 'given the varied obligations by the state to the entire nation' (Baloyi 2010). '*Government should not*', he continued, '*have to* stop increasing the number of … public servants in order to reroute the money … *to pay for the salary increment for existing public servants*' [my italics]; the same italicised phrases were then used four more times to bracket the public services themselves, medicines and textbooks, clinic infrastructure and school buildings, and various public needs (Baloyi 2010). Next, some tricksy maths claimed that the gap between the offer and the union demands was narrower than it seemed, by adding the percentage increase in the *total* budget for the housing allowance (0.5%) together with the proposed percentage increase in the *total* budget for wages (6.5%), to claim that the government offer was therefore in fact 7%, and reached 8.5% when the 1.5% pay progression[135] agreed in 2007 was included (Baloyi 2010). This was smoke and mirrors[136] of a sort that makes one wonder if the ministry's writing team had changed since 2007. There is also a substantial list of outstanding issues which, the briefing says, government negotiators had promised to deal with 'as early as September', as

[135] An amount designed specifically to close the gap between the lowest and the highest grades

[136] First of all because a percentage increase in the wage budget is not equivalent to a percentage increase in the individual pay packet, because not all grades were being promised the same percentage, and second because union demands specifically separated out the percentage wage demand from the R1000 demanded for the housing allowance.

if the unions were being unreasonably anxious about these; the list included the minimum services agreement, which had already been long overdue before the 2007 strike.

Hassen (2010a; See also 2010b) saw the deadlock as resulting primarily from a failure to connect the bargaining process directly to the budgeting process, despite the parties' expectations to 'find each other'. By contrast, Gentle (2010) thought that the willingness of the parties to cooperate allowed the government-employer's negotiating team to dig in early because, being 'party to the feelings of the trade union leaders and [knowing] of their reluctance to strike', they expected the union leaders to 'simply back down'. The state, Gentle argued further, 'deliberately sought confrontation' to discipline or, in the event of a strike, to 'break the unions decisively through a failed strike' (Gentle 2010). This is plausible, since Zuma's government was desperate to stamp its authority against the new clamour of public critique and protest. It is also true, however, that unions' expected some reward for their restraint during the world cup, which heightened tensions when nothing was forthcoming: in mid-July, Sadtu's regional secretary, Ronald Nyathi, complained: 'The world cup is over and the government must start taking us seriously. If they don't we will go on strike' (Makhafola 2010).

The briefing itself gives credence to Bekker and van der Walt's (2010) argument in the previous section: although the briefing did indeed intimate that the public service negotiating team had gone cap in hand to bargain with Treasury in order to offer such meagre movements as they had made in bargaining with unions, but nevertheless asserted government's right to give austerity policy precedence over public servant's wages, suggesting that government remained content with separating budgeting from bargaining:

> While the principle of granting wage adjustments based on inflation plus a moderate real wage is the ideal, it is posited that this should not pose any serious knock-on inflationary effects and will be dependent on affordability of the state. (Baloyi 2010)

What is not in doubt is that the Cosatu unions were, indeed, dragging their heels on a strike, perhaps intent on making the reconciliation work but not yet getting a deal they could sell to members. Cosatu's recommitment to social policy unionism was now facing government's commitment to austerity and to restoring a top-down, disciplinary version of the alliance (one that respected 'seniors', to paraphrase Zuma), but they

had set themselves up again by situating the centre of gravity of their strategy within the corridors of government. They had made themselves need these government individuals – perhaps more than the reverse, although Baloyi's briefing, near the end, gave 'thanks to the leadership of the Cosatu-affiliated unions, who are not only recognising that the environment is conducive to finding a solution amicably, but … also provide leadership to the members to give a chance to negotiations in an unpolluted environment', and went on to scold the PSA, which had marched that week.

Nevertheless things were inching toward the possibility of a strike, insofar as the parties were not just failing to find each other, but *unable* to find each other (See my point about antagonism at the end of the last section).

The 10 August pre-strike day in Tshwane city (then still called Pretoria) looked well attended, judging from Photo 119. (This footnote reminds the reader of convenient ways to navigate the photos[137]). This photo was taken at the Union Buildings, which was the destination of the demonstration. More people were sitting scattered across the grounds. Botsang Mmoepe and Tabitha Nong did this fieldwork for me because I was away. The mood appears upbeat and effervescent (Photo 120) in the photos and footage collected, with a variety of unions represented, including Nehawu, the mainly nurses' union Hospersa, the white collar PSA, the police union Popcru, and a strong showing by Sadtu branches, one from as far afield as Limpopo (Photo 121, Photo 122, composite Photo 123). (Now is a good time to look at Photo 119 to Photo 123.)

Official placards often simply stated the demands, as before, but the teachers' union Sadtu brought in the broad concept of poverty wages (Composite Photo 124) and the PSA contrasted the government's offer and the unions' demands as the difference between a shack and a house (Photo 125). Strikers, too, sometimes captured these demands without frills on placards, as if they spoke for themselves (Photo 126), but frequently couched them in rhyme and reasons. The placard in Photo 127 called into question the budgeting excuse, reminding us that that government budgeted for a high speed train between Johannesburg and Tshwane. The placard in

[137] Again, I recommend that readers who prefer to see the photos alongside the text use the Powerpoint or browse photos in batches, using my recommendations in the form (Now is a good time to look at photo x to photo y). Ctrl-click (in Word) or click (in PDF) on the photo number to be transported to the photo; ctrl-click or click on the page number when you reach the return link [Return to page z] at the end of the batch to be transported back to the same place in the text. Readers who prefer to browse the photos one by one alongside the text can find them in a Powerpoint here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1aJw1HX4ATwqrczIAuO3ktf8Hu5Svm-yssiiX-gilUQ0/edit?usp=sharing_eil_m&ts=622afecb . (Note that this powerpoint may be slow to load.)Those lucky enough to have a printed copy can simply keep their place with a finger.

Photo 128 similarly advises government to stop wasting money on 'ever changing policies' to pay the public workers. (Now is a good time to look at Photo 124 to Photo 137.) There are themes you may remember from the previous strike, such as the placard emphasising what ministers get (Photo 129), a variety of warnings (Photo 130, Photo 131), and the familiar *gatvol* [fed up], signalling frustration (Photo 132, Photo 133). Significantly for my purposes, there were explicit references to the previous strike, such as Photo 134 (which also resurrects the theme of paying peanuts), where the reference to Moleketi was a warning to the extant administration, and Photo 135, which likened Baloyi to Moleketi and both to puppets. At this stage, personalisation or individualisation, when it occurred, was directed largely at Baloyi – along with a hint of sexist innuendo in Photo 136, which implies that Baloyi is merely withholding something which he intends to do. There were, however, oblique digs at Zuma, such as Photo 137, which names Baloyi but describes the president. On the whole, however, the placards were still comparatively mild.

Government's belligerence to the unions' demands was demonstrated in their provocative announcement, on 11 August, the very next day, of a final offer of 7 per cent and R700 housing allowance, not backdated to April. Final meant that they would sign and unilaterally implement the offer in 21 days, with or without the unions. Hassen argues that this precipitated the strike it intended to head off:

> Government was reluctant to admit early on that there was a dispute, keeping unions hopes alive by continuously asking for more time. Yet, when strike action was initiated, it moved quickly to finalise its offer. Government negotiators will argue that they have tried to avert a strike; however, what they inadvertently did was to provide the impetus for worker militancy. (Hassen 2010a)

Sadtu's Thobile Ntola said that 'The government went on strike first by refusing to give in to the demands of the workers' (SAPA 2010b). Vavi later wrote that he believed their provocative move was a miscalculation arising from an honest belief that the unions could sell the deal to their members (Vavi 2010a). In any case, the members rejected the offer, surprising even themselves, according to one interview quoted in the next chapter. The unions then announced the strike on television. The indefinite strike was called for 18 August 'until such time as the state comes to its senses', said Ntola (quoted in SAPA 2010b).

Naturally this meant that the strike was not well prepared, as Gentle, amongst others, wrote. This shows both that indeed, no-one expected the strike, and that strikes

still, or once again, featured low in the unions' strategic toolbox (when the wiser course in collective bargaining may be to always prepare a strike from the beginning and then you may not have to use it). Having said that, to attribute the strike's fate to ill-preparedness *per se* somehow traps one's perspective within a collective bargaining frame, where there is an expected strike season to prepare for, given that some strikes succeed without warning or preparation, where the strike is prepared within the act of striking. The unpreparedness of the 2010 strike must be considered against the questions, what may be learned and what is invented in the act of striking? What repositories of strike experience exist outside official union structures and how are these transmitted? The next section will cast a little light on some of these questions with regard to the 2010 strike through attention to strike practices – the invented-inherited body of a strike – as well as discussing how the strike presented itself, through discussions of placards and toyi-toyis.

8.2.2. Strike practices: shutdowns or solidarity?

With the giant unions Nehawu and Sadtu rejecting the offer, the strike began on Wednesday, 18 August, with its broader political charge explained in a Sadtu statement released on that day: 'It must be clear that wages cannot be separated from service delivery … the current macro-economic policy, which is a political matter, is responsible for low wages in the public sector' and concluded that the strike program would 'include a total shut down of institutions'. The fact that other formations also saw the strike as part of a larger battle was to be demonstrated over the coming days by a string of statements on the strike released by organisations outside the sector. On this first day of the strike, the South African Students' Congress, Sasco, based in tertiary institutions and therefore allied to but not directly affected by the strike, issued a statement which advised 'demand more pay, demand an end to capitalism', suggested decreasing ministers' salaries and increasing corporate tax, berated 'mischievous' and 'irresponsible' government and demanded that the ministers must 'stop behaving like CEO of a profit-thirsty company'. Sasco had initially identified as independent of the alliance in the days after apartheid but was increasingly dominated by ANC supporters.

In these first days of the strike, the mood was buoyant, defiant and militant even though police were active against strikers from day one, turning a water cannon on

Helen Joseph strikers on this first day, for example. Strikers from various unions, of various ages and including first time and repeat strikers, formed a collective via strike practices.

Strike practices differed for teachers and health workers. Schools are dispersed compared to hospitals, but they were closed comparatively quickly; parents tended to keep children home as a result of the strike. Soweto teachers' strike practices included marches around Soweto, sometimes going to a school where teachers were still reporting (and not working) but otherwise concentrated on roads, joining the hospitals, or playing sports, interspersed with large meetings dominated by Sadtu. These reported back, made political inputs and announced coming action.

By contrast the state did everything possible to keep hospitals open, from high-profile volunteers to water cannons, except for reaching an essential services agreement with the unions (which would have been effective but would have removed the possibility of broadly interdicting whole categories of workers and therefore had been deferred by the state to negotiations in October). The unions proposed shutdowns as a lever of power and therefore health strikers concentrated on controlling the entrances to Helen Joseph hospital in the first days of the strike, holding meetings as required on the spot, as at Chris Hani Baragwanath (CHB) hospital, where strikers alternated picketing at the main and secondary gates with marching along the main road between the gates.

On day one of the strike (Photo 138 through Photo 152), I observed Soweto teachers meeting at the Orlando hall. The meeting started relatively late in the day, after 10am, to give strikers time to visit various schools and gather teachers to the strike. The hall was packed (Photo 138) and the spirit was high: note how happy people look in Photo 139. Placards took up now-familiar themes, most implying or stating explicitly the value of teachers' work. Some borrowed the theme of deserving better (Photo 140) from the Sadtu t-shirt (Photo 141). This was further emphasised through appeals for respect, placing teachers as wards of the future (Photo 142 and Photo 140 again), a report card contrasting teachers' reward with Zuma's (Photo 143), and a placard (not reproduced here because the photo was, ironically, too blurry): 'If you can read this, then thank the teacher and pay them decent wages.' The dissonance of professional pride vs actual circumstances was expressed in the double-sided 'noble salary' (Photo 144) and 'a call to poverty' (Photo 139). The notion of an unfinished struggle appeared in Photo 145 (echoing the notion of an unfinished

democratic revolution on the back of another Sadtu t-shirt, Photo 146). Two placards employed insult: one basic expression of anger telling Baloyi where to stick 7% (Photo 147), and another admonishing the minister of Basic Education to be quiet - Motshekga was on the government negotiating team in the last round just before the strike - then mocking her teeth, or rather, *reducing* her to her teeth (Photo 148). We saw a lot of this kind of caricature of the ministers in the previous strike; here, the social belittling or diminishment of the minister in 'mazinyo.com' is perhaps also making the figure metaphorically *smaller,* and thereby less powerful, by 'shrinking' her to one aspect of her appearance. After the meeting, before dispersing, a group of strikers toyi-toyied up and down the road, adapting what was once a praise song to liken the ministers to testicles (Photo 149). They sat in the road briefly (Photo 150), stopping cars. Reminders of the world cup were everywhere – in the form of busses and stadiums as well as the strikers' vuvuzelas and football hats (Photo 151, Photo 152). It is interesting in itself that some strikers dressed for striking as if for a football match, which reinforces the interpretation that strikers were feeling a form of effervescence.

Day 2 of the strike, 19 August, was a busy day in politics. Kenny Govender went ahead and signed the offer on behalf of government (BuaNews 2010). It was also the start of the ANCYL's week-long National General Council (NGC). Vavi stated that Cosatu would 'push for a range of economic policies, including state-owned bank for the poor, nationalising vital sectors, and abolishing inflation targeting' at the ANC's NGC, planned for September (SAPA 2010c). Zuma's speech to the ANC's fundraising gala dinner assured 'there is nothing wrong' with business investing in a political party, and 'Wise business sense tells you that investing in the ANC, which is supported by more than 65% of the population, is good value for your money' (SAPA 2010c). Separately, Zuma claimed to respect the right to strike but called on strikers to 'desist from violence' and respect 'people who don't want to strike, kids who want to go to school' (SAPA 2010a). This must have stung for Soweto teachers: TV news that night reported on the 'Battle of Ormonde', where teachers were attacked by Metro police when they tried to move onto a highway near Soweto, perhaps inspired by the delivery protests which had, in several instances, tried to block main roads such as the N2 (My notebook, 19 August), Popcru, the police union, was moved to produce a media statement 'condemn[ing] the improper acts of shooting by police on a protected strike' and '..deplor[ing] the erosion of settling labour disputes through engagement at the

collective bargaining table by the employers'. Sadtu and the YCLSA also condemned the metro police. Various formations were taking the strike as a part of a bigger fight. Even the SACP weighed in, weakly, on the strike: 'There can be no justification for an assault on workers' rights. The SACP calls on all parties to immediately settle these strikes… for too long we have allowed capital to run scot free. The time is now to deepen our anticapitalist offensive'. The ANCYL in Gauteng noted government's decision to sign with concern, criticised Nyathi, and called for 'all parties' to negotiate in good faith. Zuma, when questioned further by journalists, went on to say that he reserved the right to fire strikers: 'Of course! That's the law!' (TV news, My notebooks, 19 August). This statement probably explains the flurry of anti-Zuma placards in Soweto the following day, 20 August, as we will see shortly.

On days two and three, 19 August and 20 August, I observed picketing focussed on shutting down Helen Joseph hospital, as well as protest at Chris Hani Bara and another Soweto teachers' meeting. I have captured the Helen Joseph picketing in two photostories, which ease a great deal of description. I will indicate the best place to read the photostories in the text.

When I arrived on day 2, strikers were distributed at different gates and monitored by police. Most of the gates had been closed by the hospital itself and there was a little action around the east gate, which remained open and where City Power trucks entered to park in the hospital grounds. Strikers from all the gates then gathered at that gate to meet; note the size of the contingent. Then, hearing that the main gate had now been opened, they went through that gate into the hospital grounds. A few went inside, though not directly into the hospital itself, while others toyi-toyied at the entrance, singing *hoya rona* (roughly translated, cowards must go to the back, those with firm hearts are going forward). They then withdrew from the grounds and met again outside the main gate, under a water cannon. Note that strikers were cooperative with police on this day; remember that they had been water cannoned the day before. Strikers were also not interfering with people coming and going through a hole in the fence near the east gate; in fact they used it themselves. The trappings of forging a collective included the fact that someone had organised a large container of water which strikers shared. This indicated an intent to spend time there, and is one of the kinds of shared endeavour less visible from the outside that help to forge as well as *outline* a collective, both in the sense of who used the water and in the sense of suggesting cooperative principles; recall Fantasia's (1989) cultures of solidarity.

Now is a good time to read Photostory 1 (Photo 153 to Photo 169).

Presumably, the picketing continued for the rest of the day after I had left: there was debris from burned tyres the following day. Day 3, 20 August, began with strikers gathering at the main gate, then marching around to the east gate. The large placard opening Photostory 2 ('Away with reckless, stupid, irresponsible statement from any leaders', with five stick figures and what seems to be an ejaculating penis) was almost certainly a reference to Zuma's statement the previous day.

The strikers' intent was to close access to the hospital, although without tangling too much with the police. Photostory 2 will illustrate a tussle between police and strikers to control the gate through placement of bodies, vehicles and debris in space[138]. During the time captured in the photos, the strikers sang in Tswana, 'Comrade Shit [alternating with Comrade Farter], leave that anus of yours ('Comrade *Masepa/*com-com *Msuzi, tsamayang mesono ya lona*'), using the tune of praise song to Nelson Mandela; siyenz'nje masefuna mali (isiZulu, 'We do it like this when we want money'); *Ubufebe lento uyenzayo…* (isiZulu, 'This is sluttery, what you are doing), '*Siyaya iPitoli… noma be sedubula… be seshaya'* (isiZulu, 'We are going to Pretoria, even though they may shoot us, even they they are beating us'; Pretoria signified the seat of government in the past); and a local pop song by Mafikizolo, *Amapoyisa* (the police). Now is a good time to read Photostory 2 (Photo 170 to Photo 185). Note that the strikers again did not in fact prevent entry and exit, and that they behaved differently towards the individuals in the beat-up green car compared to the City Power vehicles and the newer *bakkie*.

What you cannot see in the photostory is the extremely concentrated timing – 16 minutes. The photo where strikers close the gate was taken at 8:51am and the last of the series was taken at 9:07am. This speaks to Lenin's observation that there are years when nothing happens and weeks when years happen. Thereby it also speaks to the possibility of eventful identities in the absence of events. I can testify to the lingering suspension of normality in such episodes, even when the structures and power in society mean that the suspension must eventually fall back to earth. They concentrate fear, anger, joy and pride, hate, hope, humour, shame, all kinds of love but most especially 'comradeship', exhilaration and sorrow into minutes with crucial,

[138] Once again I am reminded of Fantasia's description of movements through space as workers pull together a wildcat strike.

but often severely localised, consequences. You are left blinking, as if emerging from an all-night party into the sun, when you find an ordinary day, now seeming surreal, going on a few hundred meters beyond the zone of disruption.

Note for now that the strike collective was being forged, at this time, around the practice of shutdowns, and second, that the suspended normality was extremely localised in terms of actual power, but less so in ideological terms. I will come back to these later.

At Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in Soweto, later that morning (look at Photo 186 to Photo 205), strikers gathered around a secondary gate that remained open (Photo 186, Photo 187, Photo 188, Photo 189). Another group marched down the main road between the main gate and this gate, past the main taxi rank. Then the sizeable crowed gathered at the secondary entrance where they obstructed it without actually blocking it while a police helicopter circled overhead (Photo 190).

Placards restated the demands and rejected the 7% (Photo 191, Photo 192), sometimes by inviting the minister to trade places with the strikers: one told Baloyi to do the work (Photo 193) and another suggested that Baloyi should try maintaining his mother's house with the R700 (Photo 201). Another placard directed at Baloyi, who is from Giyani and has a Xitsonga surname, drew on pre-existing prejudice against Xitsonga speakers and referenced Baloyi's presumed culture to imply that the salary could only afford small things (Photo 202).

The power flip described in the previous strike was muted in relation to work itself here (except for Photo 193 above), but reminders of government's *political* dependency on the strikers matured fast this time, as in a placard complaining: 'ANC thinks it owns us' (Photo 203). In response to the president's statement the previous day, a number of placards recalled Zuma's promises and called in receipts: 'Zuma has forgotten us… futsek!' (Photo 196), 'Zuma, we were ready to bail you out…', referencing Zuma's appeal for funds for his defence when charged with rape (Photo 198), and 'We voted for you to give us decent salary, not this…' (Photo 195). Photo 194 ('Corrupt government, give us a share') references Zuma's corruption charges and Photo 199 implies the president was being unfaithful to the strikers with 'MaNtuli' (Ntuli was then the minister of Social Development).

Finally two placards speak to non-strikers, *amaGundwan'.* One was a detailed bald threat (Photo 200), but the other one put forward a free-rider or community-of-fate argument, or a mix of these (Photo 197).

Teachers meanwhile were gathering at Elke stadium for another meeting (See Photo 206 to Photo 221). These meetings mainly involved speakers from the union, but the audience were still very engaged and buoyant, expressing approval and displeasure by clapping, shouting and blowing vuvuzelas (Photo 206). Here too, Zuma's statement and broken mutual obligations between strikers and Zuma were a favoured theme for placards (Photo 207, Photo 208, Photo 209, and Photo 210). A placard about the importance of education which concludes 'At the end of broken dreams…' (Photo 211) carried a similar sentiment in a less political tone, along with the obligatory '*gat-vol'* (Photo 212). The placard in Photo 213 still has hope in the president, but the report card for Baloyi in Photo 214 clearly places him in Zuma's camp ('Grade Jayzee'). Photo 215 subtly counters government claims that public strikers demands were eating into service delivery with the suggestion to borrow money from FIFA. The remaining placards focused mainly on the demands and the offer: Photo 216 contrasted the person's earnings with their qualifications, Photo 217 stretched the metaphor that 7% was peanuts to 'counter-insult' Baloyi by likening him to a monkey, and Photo 218 was set out in the form of an official form. Finally Photo 219 projected militancy in reference to the 'battle of Ormonde'. The number of cars at every teachers' meeting make it easy to see why teachers are considered middle class in Soweto, but of course those with newer cars would also be carrying the debt, and many teachers had no cars or modest second hand ones (Photo 220, Photo 221).

Back at the hospital in Soweto, the union heard that a minister was visiting the hospital and was determined to confront her (see Photo 222 to Photo 235). I waited with strikers at the main gate, which was still closed by the hospital. Strike studies seldom mention that a great deal of 'indefinite' striking involves sitting or standing around waiting, not very comfortably, even without a minister's visit. Strikers stood around chatting, or perched on the kerb or other ledges; some had brought small snacks to sell (Photo 222, Photo 223, and Photo 224 and Photo 225). On a highly charged day, waiting is less peaceful than these scenes appear: one waits in a half-adrenalised, half-exhausted daze. A small group toyi-toyied around the gate whenever an expensive car was spotted moving inside (Photo 226); when the minister was spotted inside the gate, strikers sang '*Voetsek'man*… *bana ba chelete'* [get lost, we want pay].

Placards denounced Zuma directly and indirectly: directly in Photo 224 (which includes a version of a power flip in the assertion that wages were not 'a handout', and

called him ‘shower head’, at the time a popular portmanteau insult which mocked the shape of Zuma’s head and his answer during his rape trial to a question about AIDS by saying he had taken a shower); indirectly in Photo 227, which references allegations that that Zuma and his administration were corrupt but also hints at a sort of power flip in ‘our *share’,* implying workers’ part in elevating Zuma. Baloyi was called crazy in Photo 228, as was Fraser Moleketi in 2007, but here, the widely-used Xitsonga phrase likely carried additional layers; likewise, in the placard in Photo 225, Baloyi was insulted both by being called a ‘boy’ and a rural unsophisticate (‘Don’t behave like a *boy* from *homelands*’), with the latter probably implicating his assigned ethnicity and certainly his birthplace, Giyani. This placard also references the Eskom wage increases, which led public workers to believe that double-digit percentage increases were reasonable. One placard reiterated housing grievances (Photo 223). Another claimed their remuneration was worse than a sex worker’s (Photo 229). This is doubtless in part a feature of the curious magnetism of sexualising insult witnessed in both strikes, but this particular case hints at a sense of giving one’s whole self to the job. Hospital and educational work too involve emotional labour. The placard in Photo 230 hints at corruption (‘wrong hands’) while implying that money could have been found for strikers. The placard in Photo 232 refers to the drawn-out negotiations and perhaps to the unfinished business of the previous strike (‘When will this endless thing get finished?’); on day three of the strike, it is unlikely that she meant the strike itself. And one striker represented the conflict by mimicking a gun while toyi-toying (Photo 233). The minister was able to sneak out of another gate without confrontation, no doubt with the help of platoons of security; strikers ended the day with a meeting, with the same unionist again addressing the strikers via the police van loudspeaker (Photo 234, Photo 235).

That day, *Independent* in the UK quoted Sakhela Buhlungu on the strike: ‘More than an industrial dispute, it is a political test of strength in which Zuma cannot be seen to be weak’ (in Howden 2010); the government spokesperson, Themba Maseko, delineated their line in the sand: ‘The days of spending money as if it was essentially unlimited are essential over’ (Staff reporter 2010). And the following day, a Saturday and day four of the strike, the employer drew the next line in the sand, publicising an interdict obtained against essential workers, against ‘intimidation or assaulting non strikers’ and preventing damage to property or ‘erecting obstructions’ and the unions were to pay costs.

The continuity with the previous administration under Mbeki should be plain; just as before, the response was repressive, authoritarian and intimidatory, with a good dose of anti-striker propaganda. The government spin machine was in full swing that weekend, with the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal organising hospital volunteers (My notebooks, Sunday 22 August) and the then-health minister, Aaron Motsoeledi[139], conspicuously doing an all-night shift at CHB hospital (TV news, my notebooks 23 August); Motsoeledi had last worked as a doctor 16 years before (*Sunday Times* Staff Reporters 2010). The *Sunday Times* that weekend quoted Baloyi warning strikers and nurses that 'they are volunteering themselves out of a job' after the labour courts granted an interdict to force nurses and other medical staff back to work; in the same interview, Baloyi berated unions for comparing their pay to ministers' by means of a bizarre comparison to apartheid: 'Do they want ministers to ride on scooters?... Even during apartheid times, ministers used vehicles such as Mercedes – it's a tool of the trade' (*Sunday Times* Staff Reporters 2010); government repeated its intention to implement the deal without the unions; and Sadtu's Ntola called on 'every public servant', including police, doctors and soldiers, to join the strike (*Sunday Times* Staff Reporters 2010).

On Monday, 23 August, day 6 of the strike, SABC3 TV news and the major newspapers were again packed with strike related stories: it reported on workers arrested at Helen Joseph hospital, with one becoming briefly iconic when she resisted being manhandled by police and was eventually supressed by several of them. Look at Photo 236, where a teacher pinned a photo of this incident to their chest, suggesting a continued identity amongst different sectors of the strike or at least a sense of shared grievance about police attacks. Also the minister 'promised safety' for volunteers working at hospitals (no word about the lack of an essential services agreement, of course), threatening 'zero tolerance' and promising to deploy security forces to 'prevent disruption' (Ensor and Hudleston 2010); the Department of Education declared that teachers' salaries had doubled since 2007, while unions and teachers contested that; Jacob Zuma was in China; and Nehawu reiterated its rejection of the government offer (My notebooks, 23 August). Importantly, Naptosa, a teachers' union with a more professional than worker-based image, joined the strike (Tshisela 2010) and the nurses' union, Denosa, which had withdrawn early from the previous strike

[139] Overseeing Home Affairs at the time of writing, where he has been fanning the fires of xenophobia.

under pressure of the interdicts, vowed to stay on strike this time and threatened to call a solidarity strike in private hospitals. By 24 August, military teams had been dispatched to 37 hospitals to fill in for strikers, indicating the breadth of the health workers' stoppage (AFP 2010). (All otherwise unattributed sources are from my notebook for that day).

The demonization of strikers gathered pace. This time, there was no period of ambiguity when the press asked strikers their motives. The *Sowetan* carried a headline: 'The nurses were busy singing while my unborn baby was dying' (Pongoma 2010). Zuma was quoted in the *Cosatu Media Monitor* and the *Sunday Tribune* condemning the 'disruption of essential services' as a 'taint' which was 'foreign to the culture of the ANC and the alliance' even during 'the dark days of the liberation struggle' (Bowman and Olifant 2010). The SACP 'from the outset' declared its support for 'a legitimate struggle' but 'the abandonment of new-borns in ICUs are [echoing Zuma] completely alien to our struggle', and went on to complain that 'the revolution is in serious trouble' when relations between government and public sector 'is reduced to employer-employee' (Maleka 2010).

Neither, of course, mentioned government's refusal to agree an essential services agreement, nor the 54 babies whose deaths in an Eastern Cape hospital at the beginning of that year revealed that the hospital's oxygen compressor had stopped working altogether after malfunctioning for more than a year (Department of Health, Eastern Cape Provincial government 2010), nor the investigation into the deaths of eleven babies in Natalspruit hospital in Gauteng and six in Charlotte Maxeke hospital in Johannesburg during an 'outbreak' of diarrhoea, amid admissions that the neo-natal unit was badly overcrowded, which led Nehawu to comment, 'The reality is that our hospitals are understaffed, poorly equipped, under-resourced and overburdened' (Jadoo 2010). However *Business Report,* in an article noting government's threat to take action against 'illegal strikers', noted that five workers in Nehawu t-shirts who continued to blockade King Edward Hospital in Durban were nevertheless allowing people through to collect antiretrovirals (SAPA 2010d).

Neither, unfortunately, did the unions make much noise about these key hypocrisies. Indeed, there was again no campaign direct to the public except for those limited opportunities afforded to spokespeople by the mainstream media. The disappointment of heightened expectations heightened strikers' militancy, but militancy, as we see from the preceding description of strike practices, was generally

understood in terms of greater resolve to shut down. In the case of schools, this was achieved quickly, leaving teachers, once again, with no additional leverage on that front; the harsh response to teachers walking on the highway near Soweto derailed that sort of escalation. For the health workers, once again locked out as much as shutting down the hospitals, any potential leverage gained from the consequent disruption to patient care assumed more concern for patients than the administration had hitherto demonstrated through its fiscal neglect of the public health system. Patients themselves had, if anything, less leverage than health workers within the public health system.

Struggles often borrow pre-existing repertoires of militancy (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Shorter and Tilly 1971; Tarrow 2005; Tilly 1978), allowing people to employ tried and tested strategies without having to invent them anew each time. But in this case, where the product was people not platinum, and already neglected proletarian people to boot, the repertoire of the shutdown by itself was effective in achieving the strike but less so in achieving the power required to win the demands[140], and moreover, in the absence of a direct campaign from the strikers to the public, the government-employer turned strikers' militancy against them in the public eye. This is not to say that the strikers should not have embarked on a shutdown, but to note that this inherited way of expressing strike militancy, like the focus on scabs in the previous strike, substituted for creativity in developing strategies fitted to the peculiarities of the situation.

Was there an alternative? This is, of course, easy to answer in the abstract after the fact, harder to think of in the heat of the moment, and almost impossible to reliably evaluate in retrospect having never been tried. Nevertheless, I will offer two suggestions, if only to illustrate that other possibilities could have been explored. Thinking big, could strikers have occupied the hospitals or made their own essential services roster and attempted to collectively deliver that team to the wards at each shift change? (In the next chapter, we will hear one of the strikers relate how strikers were escorted to their wards when the strike was over). Given the interdicts, this would most likely have resulted in considerable conflict, but could the clash at least have highlighted the lack of an essential services agreement? Thinking more modestly, a

[140] And, even in the case of platinum, the effectiveness of simply withdrawing labour can be moderated by, for example, stockpiling, as in the case of the five month strike in 2013.

concerted campaign to reach out to the public, through leafletting, public meetings and calls for the public to demonstrate support, could have begun to balance the increasingly one-sided press coverage, and may have brought additional pressure to bear. Teachers might have organised teach-ins to discuss the reasons for the state of the public sector. A public campaign would not necessarily have been easy to build but it would have been easy enough to link strikers' wage demands to the deterioration of public services via austerity. In this regard, a survey of attitudes to the 2007 strike, published in 2009 just as the public sector mid-term adjustment was being tabled, is instructive. The survey revealed that:

> 48% of all South Africans supported the strike (43% were "neutral" with only 9% opposing it); while 69% of government employees backed it. At least two-thirds of the public felt government workers' salaries were "unfair" … only 18% of the public and 12% of civil servants felt government's initial offer was fair; nearly 30% of the public and 27% of civil servants felt the final settlement was fair, with the majority believing that the unions['] demand of 12% was justified. (Naidu 2009)

While it is not given that these attitudes persisted three years later, this survey suggested that there was an untapped reservoir of public support that the unions could have mobilised in 2007, and once again overlooked in 2010.

But for the big, Cosatu-affiliated unions, in particular for their leaders, power was understood to lie with government, not the public, and the strike was just one element in a policy reckoning within the alliance. As I wrote soon after the strike, 'The course of the strike was heavily influenced by the way that the restoration of the Alliance locked the union leaders back into the logic of collective bargaining with a political edge. They were influenced by strategic considerations related to the Alliance and social policy unionism' (Ceruti 2012, 117). This would lead the strike to, in effect, defeat.

8.2.3. The stalemate and the stitch-up: caught between the comrades and the comrades

The drawn-out end of the strike 'exposed the differences in how the union leaders and the members experience[d] and respond[ed] to conflict in the "renewed" alliance', as I wrote a year or so after the strike (Ceruti 2012, 113). This emerged most dramatically in the top-down truncation of the strike, described in the second part of this subsection. This aborted the maturation, at least visibly, of a sharply pointed reckoning that was

afoot, which I will illustrate first by reference to the placards on a big demonstration in Johannesburg on day nine of the strike, 26 August, a day of action across the country. An emblematic placard on the Johannesburg demonstration encapsulated the developing moment: 'Comrades stay together like buttocks, when buttocks separate 7% (shit) comes out' (See Photo 237 now).

The demonstration was not enormous, but respectably large and lively. Multiple unions were represented there, including Denosa, which had pulled out of the strike early in 2007, as well as branch banners from hospitals and branches around and outside Johannesburg (See Photo 238, Photo 239, Photo 240, Photo 241 and others below). Placards covered expected themes (Have a look at Photo 242 to Photo 258) such as dignity and respect (Photo 242), a living wage (Photo 243), angry, amusing, threatening and vulgar comments on the percentage offer and the demands (Photo 244, Photo 245, Photo 246, Photo 247, Photo 248), determination (Photo 249, Photo 250), where to get the money (Photo 251) and the value of striking, borrowing an ANC election slogan (Photo 252) and the commercial competition tagline (Photo 253). Another borrowed an advertising catch line to reference the drawn out negotiations (Photo 254) and there was the perennial expression of overstretched patience, '*gatvol'* (Photo 255). Contrasts were drawn and implied (Photo 256, Photo 257, possibly referring to the recent arrest of the intelligence minister's wife, and Photo 254 above). The placard in Photo 258 not only implies a contrast with various ministers' expenditure in a missive to 'Richie Rich', but also compares the percentage increases at all the part-privatised and commercialised state enterprises.

Expressions of the value of the work appeared occasionally (Look at Photo 259 to Photo 264): there was an 'essential services deserve essential salaries' placard (which also expressed exhausted patience) in Photo 259, 'Hard work and commitment equals …' (Photo 260), 'We produce all…' (alongside 'Peanuts are for monkeys') in Photo 261, and in Photo 262, which castigated the 'disgrace to this noble profession' in, again, a peculiarly sexualised comparison (to sex work, already seen at CHB above, but this time carried by a man); on its reverse, the familiar device of the textbook lesson contrasts government's offer with the needs of the public service. Note the subtle persistence of 'all the public sector workers' in the mention of teachers as well as various health workers in the second lesson. But these placards rarely reached the power flip seen in the previous strike, only approaching it in 'You are a product of a teacher…' (Photo 263) and, in a more complicated way, in the injunction in Photo

264, 'Care for us', which links strike demands to a broader and deeper valuing, of life and the worker herself. But politicized and highly personalised versions of the power flip were more common. More about these accountabilities shortly.

The specificity of some of these placards implies the presence of people who witnessed the previous strike first hand or otherwise, but the 'peanuts/monkeys' theme most likely emerged from quotidian office culture; other devices, such as the text book and the report card as well as the 'mother of all professions' theme, could flow readily from specificities of the work in the circumstances of a strike, as I have argued before.

Some themes emerge and re-emerge set, naturally enough, in the World Cup conjuncture. (Look at Photo 265 to Photo 269). Several placards adapted the World Cup catch line, 'Feel it, it is here', to signal determination, exasperation, and a wish to enforce empathy (Photo 265, Photo 266). In Photo 267, a placard warned that 'World cup is over, strike is not'. Photo 268 and Photo 269 highlight the hypocrisy of denying public servants' increases after the expenditure on the World Cup.

The inevitable politicisation of a strike where government is the employer appeared Photo 270, which cast ministers as, significantly, 'traitors' to the 'right to education', in the politicizing of strikers' grievances in Photo 271, and the 'fat MP' baiting a rat with a low number on its mind in Photo 272. It is no surprise that Baloyi's name appeared alongside themes familiar from the first strike, for example in Photo 273, Photo 274, Photo 275 and Photo 276, amongst others that we have seen already (Look at Photo 270 to Photo 281). With regard to insulting placards, I saw two which repeated the theme of the *xibelani* ('shipelani') seen already at CHB (Photo 277, Photo 278), one calling him mad (in the film footage, not shown here), one calling him a menstrual rag (Photo 279) and one likening the offer to Baloyi's penis (Photo 280)[141]. A suggestion of booting the minister appears in Photo 281. It is also no surprise that themes of accountability re-emerged here, as in 2007. Photo 252, mentioned above,

[141] I found this placard somewhat mystifying. It makes plain that the insult is a reply to an insult, as I have already observed in relation to insulting placards in the previous strike. But the particular insult here is curious because it seems unrelated to the person, physique or proclivities of Baloyi, who was not notorious for putting his penis where it wasn't wanted, nor to broader social prejudice specific to Baloyi. The insulting placard purposely reached for the bottom of the barrel, and therefore often exposed the prevalence of sexism (in relation to Fraser Moleketi) or 'ethnic' prejudice (in relation to Baloyi) in society, and amongst strikers (who are, after all, also members of society). I guess that a penis here represents the dirtiest thing the placard maker could think of, akin to the menstrual rag in the previous photo. However there is a clearly a question for further research here about the sexualisation of insult. It would be less curious if it had only occurred in the second strike where Zuma's sexual behaviour had been foregrounded in the public eye, or only in relation to Fraser-Moleketi, where prevalent sexism would provide an explanation. Perhaps this had by the second strike become a repertoire.

for example, threatens the employer by the device of the next elections. One toyi-toyi ran 'Zuma's government, we chose you, when you do shit we'll change you'[142]. Old favourites from 2007 reappeared: '*Yini Baloyi'* and '*Voetsaki* man'*.* '*Uskebereshe*' (slut) was more than insulting, carrying the message that government had sold itself to the highest bidder and thus conveying a demand for accountability, as Nomancotsho Pakade pointed out in relation to *Yini Moleketi'*. Both Zuma and Baloyi were named in this song; this brings us to a difference in how the theme of accountability played out this time, namely its tendency towards a more pointed focus.

Among the placards and songs aimed at individuals, Zuma was an equal, if not a bigger, target than any of the ministers. Recall that Mbeki, although entirely complicit in austerity in 2007, was rarely featured in placards in that strike. Moreover, some placards mentioned Zuma and Baloyi together (for example in Photo 282), along with other ministers, suggesting a growing sense that ministers acted collectively.

Zuma's person and behaviour frequently featured in these placards, but seldom in arbitrary ways; the intense personalisation constantly evoked accountability and disloyalty. (Look at Photo 282 to Photo 284). The placard in Photo 282 recalled allegations of corruption against Zuma ('J.Z.') as well as his trial for rape (and also calls him lower class), then concludes 'one term and go'. Recall that Cosatu rallied around Zuma when he was thrown out of cabinet after the arms deal allegations; therefore these are not simply taking any stick to beat him, but reminders of Zuma's indebtedness, as is the placard in Photo 283. (The question in this placard, 'Zuma for *which people*?' is somewhat suggestive of a proto-class model). Another references a trial statement that Zuma gave taxi fare to the person he raped (Photo 284). Zuma's wives and children featured prominently. (Look at Photo 285 to Photo 291). A scandal around one of his son's business interests appeared in the placard in Photo 285, contrasting strikers' demands with the consumption of new elite. Zuma, who had recently apologised for fathering his twentieth child with a friend's daughter, was on a state visit to China; Chinese women were warned against 'the babymaker' (Photo 286, Photo 287) to suggest that Zuma should rather be concentrating on 'workers' and South Africa. In Photo 288, a woman striker evoked by betrayed loyalty by referencing allegations that one of Zuma's wives had an affair with a bodyguard: the placard called

[142] *Musa waZuma khekhile ... hao etsamasepa rah o tjanja.* Translated by Nomancotsho Pakade. Any wrong spelling is my responsibility.

on Zuma to 'fire MaNtuli [Mother Ntuli] first'. In Photo 289, Zuma's wives were 'depleting state funds'. Photo 290 and Photo 291 play on the wives to convey the message that Zuma should be recalled after his first term. In Photo 292, the 'one term' meme was linked to tender corruption. (Look at Photo 292 to Photo 299). The theme appeared again in Photo 293 and indirectly in threats to elect other people to the presidency (Photo 294, Photo 295). There are multiple references to broken promises and betrayed expectations (Photo 296, Photo 297, Photo 298, Photo 299).

Finally, three placards implied an unfinished struggle by explicitly referencing the liberation struggle or key figures in it (Photo 300, Photo 301, and Photo 302), as did the poem opening this chapter (Photo 2 above).

The no-holds-barred attitude to Zuma in these placards clearly illustrates both the impermanence of deflecting the previous strike to a political solution and how that deflection stored up greater expectation, but that is not all: it also indicated a *development* in the arc, not just the same story repeated with Zuma in place of Mbeki, and this is clear in the fact that as much, if not more, invective was devoted to Zuma than to any of the ministers, whereas Mbeki was rarely implicated in the previous strike. Hence this represented a test of the political solution, not mere repetition.

The political solution, then, had not truncated but merely deflected the development of the dissatisfaction with the ruling party among the strikers, and the twice-broken promise had, if anything, intensified it. The effective truncation of that development depended on the defeat of the second strike, and that, in turn, was sealed[143] by the failure of strategic imagination, on the one hand, and the active intervention of Cosatu, on the other hand; in both cases, it was at the level of the union bureaucracy that the 'renewal' of the alliance truncated any visible break with the governing party. This became patent in the way the strike ended. As I wrote elsewhere:

> Vavi [and Cosatu] had backed Zuma expecting to change things *through* the Alliance, and in this strategy the next crucial step was getting the ANC to adopt elements of Cosatu's growth document. This agenda could not afford for the strike to lose outright, but neither did it need an all-or-nothing showdown with those expected to consider the document sympathetically at the upcoming ANC national general council. The safest action then from Vavi's strategic viewpoint may well then be seen to be a short, sharp strike and a quick victory before tensions grew beyond repair. He therefore played

[143] I say sealed rather than caused because there is, of course, no guarantee that the strike would have been powerful enough to win decisively even without Cosatu's dampening hand. For example, it is not at all certain that other unions and civic organisations would have been able to step up to offer practical support, especially in a climate of high unemployment.

> a contradictory role, militant on the streets, but pragmatic mediator at the negotiating table. (Ceruti 2012, 117)

So, on the morning of the 26 August national demonstration, Cosatu's CEC issued a strongly worded statement warning that 'the alliance is once again dysfunctional', and noting:

> …despite some important gains, we are far from achieving the bold vision set out by the ANC delegates in the 52nd conference, and we run the risk of moving even further away from that vision in some areas… if we don't act decisively, we are heading rapidly in the direction of a full-blown predator state in which a powerful … elite of political hyenas … control the state as a vehicle for accumulation (Craven 2010a)

which caused Themba Maseko, the government spokesperson, to grumble, '[w]e are beginning to see and hear too many statements that are taking the strike beyond labour relations. It worries us' (Ensor, Johwa, and Anderson 2010). And the federation announced at the same time that it had filed a seven-day notice for a general solidarity strike which would bring mining and manufacturing out in support of the public sector. In the abstract, this was exactly what was needed, but it's doubtful that such a strike could have been conjured up on command with no previous worker-to-worker campaign within a week.

But, when Zuma gave a mandate on Sunday 29 August (day 12 of the strike) for government negotiators to return to the table, the notice was withdrawn, before the unions had heard what was on the table; Cosatu simultaneously condemned the 'personal attacks' made on the president, saying that 'the federation apologises to him and his family … for the hurt these have caused' (*Business Report* 2010). The federation's climb-down was not inconsistent with a collective bargaining logic where strikes were seen more as a way to jumpstart stalled negotiations than as a means to force demands. Even so, had there been any conviction that the notice was more than grandstanding, withdrawing it was a strategic blunder. On one hand, although the propaganda war was on the employer's side, government must have been sweating to back down on Baloyi's insistence that the pre-strike offer was final, with the government spokesperson lamenting that 'it is ordinary poor people who are suffering. We can't allow the strike to go on unabated' (*Business Report* 2010). On the other hand, however, it should have been clear that the point of reopening negotiations was to end the strike, not to meet workers' demands: as in 2007, Zuma 'urged all parties to put the interests of the country first' (*Business Report* 2010).

Strikers' jubilation at the return to negotiations was soon dashed. After days of negotiating, government offered just 0.5 percent more on 1 September, infuriating the strikers. But that was not all: strikers were also confused and demoralised when Vavi announced the offer on the radio before the offer had been taken back to members for discussion, and recommending that unions should accept it because it was the best they could do.

In the month after the strike, Vavi candidly described his role in the end of the strike in a letter to the Mthatha branch of Sadtu, which had accused its national leaders of 'selling out'. In that letter, he wrote that the union's negotiators were 'acutely aware how difficult it was for government to move' from its original offer to the 7% (Vavi 2010a), and that government negotiators had rejected a number of un-mandated compromises suggested by union officials. Eventually, Vavi explained, Cosatu drafted an agreement that 'came to be known as the Cosatu draft agreement for settling the strike, which was for 7.5% and R800' (Vavi 2010b) and government was prepared to present this on 1 September, but 'even before the government could present this, [Vavi*], realising that chances were high that this would be rejected by members [*my emphasis], opened a parallel discussion with the Minister of Finance, urging him to move further to 8% and R850' (Vavi 2010b), until 'in the early hours of 3 September … the ministers received a call from someone more senior than them. At that moment negotiations stopped, never to be continued again' (Vavi 2010b) as the government's representatives 'folded their folders and went home' (Vavi 2010a). Vavi attributed this first of all to government feeling 'betrayed by their union comrades who had twice promised compromise they thought they could sell to members, only to be told the members had rejected it' (Ceruti 2012, 118), or, in Vavi's own words:

> The government was accusing unions of tricking them into believing that the strike would end after they improved the offer from 6.5% to 7% … now the unions were saying that is not good enough … our integrity was in tatters. They were ordered to stop engaging with us as it was a waste of time. We were seen as not being honest or even informed by other political motives. (Vavi 2010b)

This passage encapsulates the Cosatu bureaucracy's problem in the reconstituted alliance, caught between the comrades and the comrades, each with their contradictory expectations – government expecting the unions to bring their members into line, the strikers expecting the unions to bring government into line.

The radio announcement was an intensely 'unsettling moment for strikers. Vavi's loyalties became unclear – was he representing strikers to the government, or vice versa?' (Ceruti 2012, 118). I will return to this in the next section. Picket lines and Sadtu meetings shrank after the radio announcement (See Photo 303). Vavi's letter then went on to explain the premature radio announcement. Only now did the letter turn from government's imputed experience of the negotiations to workers and the balance of power:

> Faced with this situation, all unions … decided to allow government to formally present the improved offer… Aware of all of this, the Cosatu general secretary [Vavi] again participated in the SABC's morning live and made the statement that the unions had pushed as far as they could and that there was no possibility of government improving its offer unless members push them in a strike of the same scale for another 2 to 3 weeks… (Vavi 2010b)

Because 'there were no more negotiations taking place', 'every hour and every day workers' sacrifices were in vain … [and] the unions started to calculate that workers were now losing' more than they would have gained from winning the additional 1% (Vavi 2010b); 'only Sadtu and Nehawu were effectively out on strike across all nine provinces' (Vavi 2010b). 'It was at this point that all unions convened their national executive committees which eventually decided to suspend the strike', he continued; 'the only mistake the leaders committed was to twice propose a settlement without properly canvassing their provincial structures' (Vavi 2010b).

This, however, was no tiny oversight in a purportedly democratic union federation, and it proved potentially explosive from a tactical point of view, as I will show in the conclusion to this chapter. The balance of power is an important determinant of a strike's possible success as well as a non-wage/non-benefit, but still material, outcome of a strike[144]. What is in question here is not Vavi's and Cosatu's attempt to, necessarily, evaluate the relative power of the strike, but why no attempt was made to hammer that issue out with the strikers. Note that, throughout this analysis, the strikers themselves were portrayed as possibly sabotaging a settlement,

[144] For example the three-month Sibanye Stillwater strike in 2022, finally settled at the time I was writing this after strikers camped in a stadium in Tshwane city for several weeks in the winter, was not a clear victory from a purely mathematical point of view, counting wages lost against the increases gained. However 'workers do not do the maths like that', Lawrence Ntuli observed in informal discussion after a Keep Left meeting; the union and strikers themselves clearly regarded the settlement as an unadulterated victory, which I attributed largely to the way the strike settlement materially shifted the balance of confidence between management and workers by forcing management to move. The material victory therefore was not only for this strike but for the future.

and later as possible victims of continuing the strike, but never as the ones who should have been deciding on agreements. The top-down nature of the post-apartheid union bureaucracy (Buhlungu 1999; 2009; Buhlungu and Tshoaedi 2013; Desai and Habib 1995; 1997) is of course part of the explanation, but an insufficient one in the context where unions had recognised and were struggling with an increasingly alienated membership. It was not that Cosatu did not badly want a victory in the strike, nor that they did not fight for one, but that they gave themselves the role of delivering a settlement not only to their members but also to their alliance allies; and, because they believed they had restored other avenues to seek victory, therefore sought to massage a deal, over the heads of the strikers, that they could sell to *both* sides. In the context of the restored alliance, the strikers themselves were a threat to reaching a settlement.

And indeed, the majority of Sadtu regions and all the hospitals in Gauteng rejected the settlement. In some cases the vote against it was unanimous. Nevertheless, the strike was suspended a few days later. Sadtu refused to sign the deal, and never did, keeping open, in theory, the possibility of resuming the strike. Ronald Nyathi of Sadtu (See Photo 304), at a 1 September teachers meeting, made an impassioned and well received speech:

> We are demanding 8.6% and nothing else [the hall goes wild with vuvuzelas and cheering]. We did not say our leaders must go and check if government has money or not. We remind our leaders, the salary that they are getting is not ours. We said go and bring 8.6% ... when they have negotiated and there is an offer, as a leader, they cannot comment on the offer, they must take the offer and go to those who sent you to get a mandate … Good leaders, good leaders can never talk on behalf of the government, good leaders talk of behalf of those who elected them…. Don't go to the media and spread your personal view

For the agreement to go through, unions representing more than half of the workforce had to sign. Sadtu had 22% and the Independent Labour Caucus (ILC)[145], with another 42%, was still unsure if it would sign by 5 October (Anderson 2010a). However,

> despite rejecting the deal, the strikers had once again not built an alternative to Vavi's logic. … The strike was weakened by the fact that there was no meeting that brought together strikers from different sectors and unions with communities to strategise together or to discuss the offers on the table. Officials and office bearers met across the union divide, but members did not except sometime during picketing. Gauteng teachers

[145] The ILC was an informal coalition of 12 public sector unions outside the Cosatu fold, which came together during bargaining.

> were resolutely against the suspension of the strike, but were unable to give courage to the dejected and confused groups of hospital workers contemplating the deal, nor to strategise together. This meant that the leadership of [Nehawu] could blame the non-COSATU unions for accepting the deal and leaving them stranded, in turn leaving Sadtu, the teachers' union, high and dry. As in the last strike, strikers were extremely militant, but lacked a strategy to go beyond the leaders' focus on the negotiating table … The left outside the Alliance … was invisible in the strike, while the left inside the Alliance was not independently organised. (Ceruti 2012, 119)

Eventually, by 19 October, 66% of the unions had signed, and the deal was implemented. Here the logics of collective bargaining kicked in for Sadtu, too: instead of resuming the strike, Sadtu decided to '"focus on wage negotiations for 2011" [Nomusa Cembi, Sadtu spokesperson] said. SA's public sector unions have said that they are expected to hold preparation meetings for the negotiations by the end of this month [October]' (Anderson 2010b).

This subsection, then, which also concludes Section 8.2, has uncovered a second strand of identity damage emerging in this strike. Section 8.2 has shown that the strike emerged from heightened expectation in the restored alliance, which tested the Zuma administration and found it wanting, resulting in severe damage and even severance of alliance identities, illustrated most clearly above in the politicised versions of the power flip and discussed further below and in Chapter 9. The conclusion of the strike, however, revealed the divergence in the positionality of the union leaders and their members, which had been present from the beginning of this second strike. The unions' unpreparedness for the second strike, the attendant failure to draw lessons regarding the need for a public campaign from the first strike and Cosatu's hard intervention to settle the 2010 strike illustrated how 'the restoration of the alliance [had] locked the union leaders back into the logics of collective bargaining with a political edge' (Ceruti 2012, 117), albeit in a very contradictory way; the consequent identity damage will be elaborated in the next section and the following chapter. One might have expected an additional layer of identity damage between teachers and other public sector workers to emerge from the end of the strike, formed around which unions signed and which held out, but this proved rare in the interviews discussed below. There was also some damage to workers' identities as 'strikers', via the damage to strikes as a viable tactic, but this too was muted.

Although the material eventfulness of the strike was not patently obvious, the fallout from its top-heavy, rushed end was far more visible, and not small. I will return

to this in the chapter conclusion (Section 8.4), and touch on it in the next section, which turns to strikers' interpretations of events.

8.3. Expectant and betrayed identities

This section explores strikers' interpretations throughout the unfolding strike. It broadly confirms but also refines and complicates the arc described above concerning Zuma. Additionally, it details strikers' varied but usually conflicted responses to the deal and Cosatu's role in it, which had exposed a differentiation in leaders' and strikers' positionality towards the rehabilitated alliance. The section also briefly touches on the broader community of fate evoked in this strike with the delivery protests, most often through the question of housing. These insights go beyond the previous section not only by being interactional and not merely observational, but also in that they extend beyond the end of the strike. In exploring strikers' interpretations, I will note some of the specific devices by which the internal logic of the alliance was able to delay or deflect its own collapse, as well as damage to its logic. Broadly, I note that strikers were initially confident that Zuma would return the favour, and then confused or angered by his statements, although some strikers still found ways to excuse him. However Zuma's loyalties or lack of them were, in the end, somewhat eclipsed by the bewildering end of the strike, where the union leaders' loyalties took centre stage.

This discussion is organised mostly chronologically, rather than thematically as in Chapter 7. It is also very much shorter, partly to avoid repeating too much of Chapter 9's finer but narrower, detail, and partly because some themes from the previous chapter remained stable, were muted or did not emerge at all. Let me begin by noting no-show and muted themes.

The first notable silence is that the theme 'all the public sector workers' emerged only obliquely in 2010. That is not surprising, as broad unity now seemed both practical and essential so as to have become routine; it is possible that the theme was muted by the divided settlement in 2007 but this was not reflected in any interview or meeting, so the former explanation is more likely. At the other end of that spectrum, little was said about non-strikers in this strike; I did not regularly ask about it, but that was because it did not come up in meetings as it had in 2007. This may have been related to the relatively strong shutdowns in the hospitals that I observed, noted by Vavi in the letter mentioned above.

Second, while there was plenty of effervescence in 2010 strike practices, it was seldom verbalised this time: a giant strike was no longer remarkable, and strikers may have been more aware of the difficulties ahead. (Reluctant striking and determination, however, were present from the start of the strike; one striker said that the difference between 2007 and 2010 was that, in 2007, strikers accepted the government's deal and in 2010 they would not.)

Third, class labels and definitions remained broadly stable: again, strikers defined themselves as middle class or lower class and sometimes as working class, again largely instrumentally in relation to their demands, and government was defined as upper class (or 'obviously… bourgeoisie' by Nobuhle, a Nehawu national officer) because of their 'lavish' lifestyles (Jacob, teacher, 10 August).

Finally, while the 8.6% was an ever-present detail in strikers' reasons, alongside R1000 housing allowance, it did feature in the same effervescent symbolic way that the 12% had. By the time this strike began, the generic 'money' or *'chelete'* [pay] seems to have occupied the symbolic space previously occupied by '12%'. This was most likely because 8.6% was calculated to be 'reasonable' during the drawn out prelude to the strike, and was very far from the opening demand of 11%.

The remainder of the discussion considers strikers' interpretations before and during a process of disillusionment in Zuma and, for some, in Cosatu and striking.

8.3.1. Expectant identities

> *I so like the new government [of Zuma], but now they must give us something, they must provide (Susan, teacher, 10 August)*

In the opening days of the strike, there was a mostly tolerant attitude towards Zuma alongside impatience with government as employer, but the tolerance was generally built around the expectation that Zuma would bring government negotiators into line with strikers demands.

On the opening day of the strike, 10 August, the most common answer to 'Why are you here?' went along the lines: 'It's simple, for the money' (Firoz, school HOD, as well as Barlow, Lisbeth and Matla), 'I need my money from Mr. Baloyi' (Patricia, health worker) or, more lyrically, 'I am here crying for this money that they are not giving us, it's totally unacceptable' (Kennet). (These 10 August interviews were conducted by Botsang Mmoepe and Tabitha Nong). Edgar, KG and Patricia all used the phrase 'We

are paid peanuts'. Susan, an educator, added 'Our wages is so low, we can't even buy anything' and described how quickly her bank account emptied. Cleopatra, a hospital switch board operator, said she was there because of 'poverty, because I'm working but I don't see any progress'. Patricia illustrated her situation with the words 'I'm just a pedestrian'. Most strikers interviewed also mentioned the housing demand, difficulties with paying rent and 'living in somebody's backyard as a teacher (Kefilwe, teacher). Later in the strike, the same demands were conveyed in increasingly evocative ways, such as Tsela, a Nehawu shopsteward, speaking of 'cut and paste borrowing' (borrowing from one person to pay back another you had borrowed from earlier to make ends meet).

As before, the demands on 10 August were sometimes couched in themes such as 'We should be deserving more than this' (Barlow) and '…the unfairness in the whole situation' (Firoz), sometimes situated politically: 'As long as when government says to us we must tighten up the belt, it applies to everyone… It shouldn't be 6.5% for teachers and 13% for parliamentarians… It's extremely unfair because we all worked for this freedom, which we deserve, all of us' (Jacob, teacher) and in terms of accountability: 'government was mandated to do something right but they do wrong, they don't even consider our demands as genuine' (Man from correctional services).

When asked what they thought of Zuma, Susan's response, which opened this section, was not representative, but nevertheless quintessential of the expectant identifications expressed. Strikers interviewed were frequently generous to Zuma, but invariably critical regarding their own demands.

'Slow' was the key word for both Matla – 'I can't say much but there is some change, things are coming up, but slowly' - and Lisbeth, who extrapolated from Zuma to government as a whole, was more critical: 'I can say it [government] is being slow because at the moment we are complaining about money and with the subsidy, they are failing to increase and that is why we are here.'

Barlow, like Nobuhle, a Nehawu official, was more explicit:

> He's doing very fine, there are a lot of departments that have been created to take care of the service issues. I think he's doing very well, the only problem is that the employees need money, that's the only problem. (Barlow)

> I think there is so many positive things that the government has done, but when it comes to quality public services, that is where they are lacking. (Nobulhe)

KG was sympathetic to Zuma, but invoked accountability:

> Well, he is trying his best, but so far, public servants, we are not satisfied. He is doing his best, but for public servants, we are the ones who voted for him, the majority, we are seeing nothing after all.

Edgar, Cleopatra and Firoz were similarly explicit about promises, though more critical than KG:

> Ah Jacob Zuma promised us that he will pay us better, but he must deliver. (Edgar)

> Zuma promised us a lot of things but I see nothing, nothing happened. … Can Mr. Zuma please hear our cries today and minister of health hear us with both ears that we also want an increase. (Cleopatra)

> Well we expected some changes but there hasn't been major changes and that's why we are striking today … Why should we have protests? Government should realise that we have a problem. (Firoz)

Patricia, at the extreme of the spectrum, delivered the ultimate insult: 'You know, I wish it possible that we could go back to the old government because this government, I don't see anything new from them.'

When asked to explain government's failure to meet the strikers' demands, Nobuhle, a Nehawu official, attributed it to a reverse effect of the rehabilitated alliance:

> I think the government is taking advantage of the fact that we are the people who rallied around our government, we put the government in power. So they think that they can take advantage of that situation.

For strikers, disappointed expectations were implicit in their explanations. KG and Barlow both referenced the world cup to rubbish government's claims of having no money (my emphases in italics):

> No they are *only playing tactics* because they have money. Why did they build such big stadiums and they hosted a very successful world cup? Why fail to give us that amount? (Barlow)

> Well *they've got their reasons*, they took money, they used money wherever they wanted to use the money for the world cup, and wherever they are they are satisfied, but they are not thinking about the teachers who are doing the most paid work. (KG)

Several strikers performed KG's projection of being somehow mystified by government's motives:

> *I don't know*, they said there is no money, but others were given money…. I don't know why they can't sacrifice and give us. (Susan)

> Well *I may not talk on behalf of government* because they say there is no money, *but we are not convinced* as civil servants … because government knows and our leaders have been negotiating with government for some time now… now for them to say there is no money, it is hard to believe that. (Mbai)

Mbai's statement shows that the device of being mystified expressed not ignorance but disbelief:

> I think it's up to them, *I wouldn't know,* because they are saying the money isn't here *but to me it's surprising* because they were able to give other role players like the Eskoms and they were also able to spend money for stadiums, which is something that is surprising… if honestly speaking there is no money I wouldn't mind going back to work as long as two weeks, three weeks down the line the money is not given to them. (Jacob)

> *That I can't tell you* because I can't say, … they are fighting with us, so I think its a government problem. they say there is no money, but there is money, …*but we know* the government has got money, the world cup was here, why don't they give it? (Kennet)

Lisbeth was explicit about this sentiment:

> Government *always amazes us*, isn't it that the government said to us we must not go on strike before the 2010 world cup and then they will negotiate after that? The world cup is finished but we are still waiting for our money. (Lisbeth)

This device not only worked as a form of expectation (by implying that government's stated reasons were so unbelievable that they had to be false, leaving the real reasons shrouded) but also suggested a sense of distance within the rehabilitated alliance, intimating that strikers and unions did not know what was in the mind of their alliance partner.

A week later, some strikers continued to perform being mystified, though simultaneously imputing motives which conveyed a breakdown of loyalties with the Zuma government, as in this face-to-face interview with Kefilwe, a teacher, on 18 August:

> Our government is *inconsiderate*, they are not giving. … I think [the 2010 strike] it's going to be the same [as 2007] because *government does not want to listen* to us. [Me: Why not?] *I don't know*, because if you can just look at our salaries… [Me: what do you think about Zuma?] *Sjoe!*[146] *I don't know*, I don't think they consider us.

[146] An exclamation from Afrikaans, expressing surprise, exhaustion, admiration and so forth, roughly equivalent to 'gosh!' or 'wow!'

Stanley, a teacher interviewed on the same day, cut straight to a balance-of-power analysis

> [Me: What brings you here?] It's the question of the government's intransigence ... we tried to be showing patriotism to our government and they take an advantage of the fact that now it's [was] the world cup … *it's not economics, they are just being stubborn*, they do have the money. I think they are *trying to test how strong we are*…

He concluded that Zuma was not a correct vehicle for meeting workers' needs:

> [What do you think about Zuma?] As long as we are still in capitalism, you can't expect a horse to deliver a baby of a cow.

Zuma's threat to fire the strikers on 19 August naturally brought to the surface harder attitudes towards him specifically as well as generalised expressions of anger. Comfy, interviewed after a teachers' meeting on 20 August, answered a question about Zuma's class: 'Extremely high class, his salary can pay me ten times over!' What did she think of his statement the day before? 'He did not think before he said that! … The strike is going to intensify because *we are angry*, really angry,' she replied. Lisbeth, interviewed at the same meeting, replied to 'What brings you here?' with 'I'm here because I'm a very angry teacher … *our government has just gone from bad to worse*.' Had she had hopes for Zuma?

> We did, because when he started to be president many good things were promised to teachers, we voted for him … we thought we were going to benefit from it. Today I can see we have benefitted nothing, let alone ordinary people in the streets, they don't have bread on the table on a daily basis. [Me: What did you think of the president's statement yesterday?] The president … doesn't care about us.

Note here that she volunteered a community of fate beyond the strike when asked about Zuma ('let alone ordinary people'). Later, when asked directly about delivery protests, she found a likeness with her own issues via the housing issue. (Tsela, Baruti and several other strikers drew the same parallel.) Zuma's betrayal was related, via a question about his class, to self-enrichment: 'They [government] are a high class, extremely high, they are aaaaaall very rich … gold diggers. Their purpose to be in parliament is to enrich themselves.' She also portrayed a conflictual relation to government in the following balance-of-power reply to a question about how the strike could win:

> To go back to class before they give us, it means in future we are no more going to be able to get what we want from the government, because *this*

> *government can't give us what we want free of charge*, *we have to work for it*, we have to strike a lot.

Tsela, a Nehawu shopsteward interviewed at a hospital that same day, was much more contradictory about Zuma's government. So, while explaining that the public should be patient with the strikers, because 'the department as government has got a role to play [in causing the strike] … it means they don't care about the people who voted for them' he went on to volunteer a power-flip response to the president's threat:

> Remember if this labour can be withdrawn, the government can collapse. I heard the president say yesterday, fire them all, all those who were on strike. That's irresponsible statement from the president… remember in 2007 the president didn't say anything for a month. [Me: So how are you feeling about Zuma at the moment?] I don't know, I'm not the presidential class, but I think it was some sort of mind game, that was some sort of intimidatory statement that he said people must be fired. The president must be out of the bargaining chamber, he's not a negotiator.

but then continued, still unprompted,

> So what I'm feeling is that at least there is a response, because that time [2007] it was Geraldine alone, like it was her issue not government issue… yes we are disappointed that they are saying they can't give 8.6% which is a provocation, but … before there was silence from the very highest office.

When I asked 'Did you expect more from Zuma though?' he made a circuitous reply which alluded to Zuma's reputation as a listener, admitted that he was disappointing, then quickly returned to talking about the demands.

> Look, errr, maybe … as a worker I understand that as long as you are still working you are not free … it's the economic situation. Most of the time you will say I am voting for Claire because Claire is able to talk to me. So to be honest yes we expected that some of this things will be responded to without this situation. Yes because remember negotiations is a give and take…

I am uncertain if this reflected his own internal conflict or a conflict between the union's established position and his own newer disappointment. Either way, it illustrates both the conflict introduced by Zuma's statement but also, importantly, the appeal to the pragmatic by which strikers themselves brought the suspended realities of their strike expectations back down to earth ('it's the economic situation'; 'remember negotiations is a give and take'). This device – referring to an apparently objective force larger than both the strikers and Zuma himself to excuse Zuma - was important for maintaining the alliance. We encountered a version of it at the end of the 2007 strike. In the next chapter, however, I will demonstrate the cracks in even this device.

A related device, one more widely recognised before this thesis, was illustrated by Kefentse, a teacher, when I asked him on 25 August whether a Sadtu speaker was contradicting himself by saying in the same speech that we needed a new government and that we had to discipline the ANC.

> [We] can't do away with the ANC. We need a new government, I agree with [the Sadtu president] … a person who is not from a township will not understand the suffering of the poor. We thought that the president [Zuma], because he is from Nkandla, a poor society, would understand the poverty of the people, but apparently he does not, so to make sure we need a person who will understand the problems of the people, we must have a person with a communist mind.

Earlier in this thesis, I called this challenging the actually existing practice of the alliance without challenging the theory of the alliance. The alliance allowed Kefentse and other strikers to imagine changing government without abandoning the ANC. However it is important to note that the iteration is not a static repetition: whereas in the first strike it was enough to imagine replacing Mbeki with a down-to-earth president who listened, Kefentse now needed to imagine, much more specifically, 'a person with a communist mind' to maintain the device.

At the 26 August march, Kefentse's sentiments were reflected in a call and answer chant between the platform and the crowd during the rally preceding the march: 'Take over communist party take over (take over!)'. An unnamed striker interviewed on camera that day told me: 'We are here fighting for our rights, basic wages… and *no longer accepting the lies* from government.'

By this time in the strike, it was easy to see such sentiments as purely reflecting the sentiments of the union leadership. From the platform at the march's destination, Vavi told the strikers: 'We are loyal to our members and not the government. We are here to exercise leadership and that leadership says, government, give more' (recording by Sam Amakoa). Dumisani, representing Cosatu from the platform, reflected the pressure union negotiators must have been feeling from their comrades in government: 'Thank you for coming in numbers *to demonstrate that leadership is not mad*. We are not going back until this government that *we elected listens to us*. If they don't do that *we are going to recall them*' (My emphases).

Such militant calls for accountability from the top were muted when Zuma ordered the parties back to negotiation. For some strikers, this was all they needed

from Zuma. For many others, the meagre crumbs falling from the return to the table sealed their discontent.

8.3.2. Betrayed identities

> *This whole strike has become a political mess. Zuma [only] said they must go back to negotiating because he must now protect his political home. (Tumi, 30 August telephone interview)*

The end of the strike left most strikers feeling conflicted. On one level, strikers were mostly relieved, out of concern for learners and patients as well as the money they were losing, and most accepted something of the logic of collective bargaining. At the same time, however, dissatisfaction with the deal was widespread, and most strikers I spoke to were unsettled by the way the deal was announced. Union identities took strain in the immediate aftermath of the strike, and, although Zuma was sometimes excused, most strikers interviewed by telephone within the week following the deal implicated Zuma in their dissatisfaction, often reiterating themes of accountability, and frequently finding an identification with the delivery protests via the theme of broken promises.

The subsection is broadly divided into a discussion of those who excused Zuma and those who did not (with a third ambiguous group who were ignoring him). I have generally not separated out attitudes thematically in the first part of the section, because that would obscure some internal conflicts, although I have occasionally thematised subthemes as they arise in a particular striker's holistic narrative. Towards the end of the section, I have increasingly separated out attitudes to Zuma from attitudes to Cosatu from attitudes to the strike.

Nonjabulo, a hospital clerk who had struck in 1992 and 2007, was among those excusing Zuma. Asked how she was doing, she replied:

> Ayi, nothing comes alright, it's too bad. [Me: Are you satisfied with the offer?] *I'm not alright*, I'm not alright at all…. Yes *I was expecting more* from the table … people [strikers] are so strong, so strong, the problem is that offer, it's not good for us, really it's not good. In fact *I'm angry, I'm angry for the government*, what the government is doing to us is not right. In other words the government is not thinking for us, it is thinking only for itself. [Are you satisfied with Zuma's intervention?] Yes, yes, *ja*, I can say *the president*, what he was talking was good, really, because it shows *he cares for us*. I can say that… [So who is responsible?] I don't know whether the government or Baloyi. They must go and sit down and talk so this can be resolved. (My emphases)

She then returned to justifying the demands again, something we saw already at the end of the previous strike. Later, illustrating her conflict about the end of the strike, she added,

> So I don't like to strike but what can I do … it's the only way to get better money … What is worse in this strike is children and people losing their lives and we feel for them.

Tumi, who had represented the deal as a political game in the quote opening this section, nevertheless excused Zuma in a 6 September telephone interview. His opening words blamed 'other unions':

> Really nothing to say except that, er, we were sold out by other unions, our comrades were ready to continue, we were let down by members of other unions … comrades were disappointed. What we were meant to get we didn't get. (Tumi, teacher, 6 September)

When asked about Zuma, he shifted the locus to implied political machinations of the alliance:

> No look - we can't drag the president to the whole matter, *he had to do what he had to do as the president* … remember when he came back from China he said the whole matter must be resolved. When negotiations resumed – you'll remember that *it's not only union members and negotiators*, [but also] cabinet ministers, Cosatu big wigs, also ANC. So one can never say what transpired there. *All efforts were made to ensure our members were satisfied*. So one has not received a proper brief to say what has come out of those negotiations.

Although he appear to be positive about the negotiations in the second last sentence above, their next sentence, unprompted by me, cast a more complicated light:

> Though personally I would have wished that our negotiators that moved should not have gone to those negotiations. Coz really there's nothing they came up with, there's nothing they came up with.

And shortly after this, in an off-the-record discussion about matters outside the strike, Tumi registered forceful disapproval about broken promises.[147]

Barlow. interviewed by Tabea Nong on 22 September (by phone, after the 21 days had expired), profusely praised Zuma's speech the previous day for showing that 'the ANC was on track', ignoring that it had roasted the public sector strike. He felt 'satisfied' with the outcome of the strike because 'although we did not achieve what we wanted, but government has seen that our challenges have been tough'. This line

[147] The reader should not imagine that anything illegal or nefarious was discussed here. Other strikers spoke freely and on the record about the same subject, but Tumi wanted to be 'careful' and 'only respond to things I am involved in'.

of reasoning – we didn't win, but we moved government - was familiar from accommodations to the end of the 2007 strike, and drives home that strikers consider more than material gain in assessing the outcome of a strike. Barlow also presented the pragmatic explanation about the nature of negotiations, as strikers had at the end of 2007, but Barlow's diverged from the 'give and take' notions in 2007 in a subtle but important way:

> You'll realise there are two parties to the negotiation, *one becomes the winner and the other one becomes the loser*. Those are the characteristics of negotiations, we have to accept that. (My emphases.)

Here, negotiations are no longer a meeting halfway but a zero-sum game, where, by implication, the strikers' losses are the government's gains. This moves the relationship from simple conflict to something closer to antagonism.

Finally, while Barlow thought that 'it was the right decision for leadership to call off the strike for the benefit of the country', he wasn't satisfied with the way the strike ended, specifically *because* the leadership called off the strike:

> because it was just *directions from above*, members on the ground have unanimously rejected the offer, but *when the mother calls the babies have to react*. So we accept the decision, *sour as it may be.*

Note the inversion of mandating here:

> … as affiliates *when the leadership speaks we have to listen*, though Vavi was not supposed to be directly part of the negotiations, but he is the secretary of the congress… so we have to listen because *we are taking mandate from them as leadership*.

This inversion appeared again in the narratives of Mbai, interviewed by Tabea Nong on the same day as Barlow. Mbai was not conflicted, but contradictory. He defended the strike but expressed approval for Zuma's speech the previous day:

> I think he has spoken like a president, like the father of the Tripartite Alliance, of course he came very strongly on Cosatu on what it had done, in terms of waging a strike, he came very, very strong to us, but then what must be understood is that the unions are fighting for the rights, we are guarding the rights of the employees and we are also taking their interests into cognisance. So the president at the same time must speak as someone who heads the country … a comrade is not a friend, and *that is the nature of politics* … The president spoke very harshly in terms of the strike but we understand, that does not necessarily mean that the alliance is breaking.

It is not clear, in the above extract, what the alliance is *for* in Mbai's thinking. However, recognizing but normalising contradictory interests was, by then, standard alliance thinking, as mentioned in earlier chapters. His sympathy to Zuma became more

understandable when he attributed the movement in the government's offer to Zuma: 'You'll remember after the intervention of the president the housing allowance was improved.' Yet at the beginning of the interview, he had said he was 'disappointed' in the very same deal and attributed the movement in the government's offer to the strike itself: 'High points [of the strike] - *we* managed to push the employer … it had an impact, it … *forced the employer to go a step further*.'

Mbai had a 'mixed reaction' to the suspension of the strike (disappointed that the demands were not met but relieved because 'no work no pay is very, very hard on us') but he '*obviously'* was not satisfied with the way the strike ended 'because our demands primarily were not met and the majority of the members were *not in favour of the strike being suspended*, but then *we had to listen to the leadership*' (my emphases). Yet he felt the strike could have succeeded: 'If the strike was not suspended and if we kept the strike indefinitely like we intended to, I think eventually we were going to emerge with an offer which is very close to what we wanted'.

Mbai's narrative illustrates several devices necessary to sustain the alliance at the grassroots level. I can describe these with greater certainty than I can explain them, and my attempts to do the latter must be kept in perspective as hypothesis rather than findings. One is separating the individual from the institution, with the president absolved of government, and the employer's behaviour blamed on other institutions or actors, as Nonjabulo and Tumi also did. This is not so surprising when we consider the number of Cosatu and SACP people delegated to government to influence it only to transmogrify into neoliberals and labour bashers, sending a message that institutions override individuals' intentions. Of course, this stands in contradiction to Mbai's acceptance that Zuma had enough power to order the very same institutional actors back to negotiating. A second crucial element is picturing the president, and by implication the alliance itself, as rising above the narrow sectoral interests apparently represented by unions to represent a broader collective, 'the country'. It relies centrally, therefore, on theories which replace notions of the proletariat as a universal class with the idea that 'the nation' as the more inclusive unit. Related to both of the aforementioned is a reinversion of the power flip, where mandates come downwards – from the union leaders in this case, but also by implication from the 'father' of the nation to the 'babies'. This in turn rests on a misattribution of the strike's power (or unions' or workers' power) to the president (or the ruling party or the state). I suggest that a certain amount of compartmentalising was necessary to sustain Mbai's

contradictions, illustrated most clearly in attributing the same shifts separately to the president and to the strike itself (not, as one might more easily accept, to the president acting because of the strike).

The reinversion of the power flip in Mbai's narratives is no small thing: it was and remains, in a very real sense, the absolute essence of the alliance as it was and is actually practiced to work as manager of conflict and a 'leash' on the working class. It is beside this that we may understand the significance of the apparently minor demands for accountability in the narratives to follow and in the various incarnations of the power flip described in previous chapters and the previous section.

Mbai's mixed feelings about the suspension of the strike - relief and disappointment - were expressed almost universally by other strikers interviewed, and I will not repeat these below, but the sympathies to Zuma expressed by Mbai, Barlow, Tumi and Ntokozo were rare.

Baruti, interviewed on 1 September by me on the phone, began the interview recalling the unfinished issues of 2007, then continued:

> Things have not changed, it's basically the same things. What angers people now, it's like they are saying money is not for you, it's for others, *obviously* this offer was rejected outright.

When asked about Zuma, Baruti asserted a political power flip, as he had done in 2007, highlighting broken promises and turning mandates on their feet:

> I don't think [Zuma] has done enough. This is a matter that needs his intervention. He shouldn't have gone to China… they must plan, they should have prioritised the salary of educators. [Me: Why is government stubborn?] It's a question of not having their priorities right and not looking at *where their bread is buttered*, because *the people who put them where they are the ones revolting against them*, we are the voters but ***they don't follow the mandate***. *At Polokwane,* one of the issues was that the public servants must be looked after. ***But he's not looking after us***. … that's why you find that *people are recalle*d even before the end of their term, look at what happened to Thabo, and I'm afraid I suspect that that is what is going to happen with the likes of Jacob Zuma.

Anele, interviewed again on 2 September, said: 'We are suffering now. Because the government didn't want to listen to us and there is too much money!' She complained about hotels and luxury cars. 'That's why you see the public workers are very stubborn,' she continued, 'that's why we don't want to listen … I was so *embarrassed'* (her emphasis) by the offer. About Zuma, she was:

> not satisfied, I am dissatisfied. Because you can't delegate. If he was a real president before we can strike he would have sitted [sat] to hear our problem before going to China. *Same as Mbeki*, when we were on strike he just went out, to US or something, do you remember? So they are behaving the same. I'm not happy with how he is intervening. *He must come to the people* …

as he did with delivery protests. 'Even that time [when Zuma was elected] I knew there was no smoke without fire', she continued, mentioning the corruption allegations and rape trial. Most importantly, she was not casting for alternatives within the alliance or, indeed, within existing parliamentary parties: 'Mbeki was a stubborn man also'. I asked who was the alternative: '[Maybe] Ramaphosa - but let the party change. We can't go on with ANC.' Asked about Helen Zille of the Democratic Alliance[148], Anele is equally dismissive: 'That lady also is very stubborn. She doesn't care about public servants either. *They are not buying in the same shop as us*,' she concludes (my emphasis), thus categorising politicians in general into a different class from the public sector workers. Asked about the delivery protests, she concluded: 'ANC didn't deliver nothing, nothing, for 20 years … They gave the money for stadiums. Don't worry about money, money is there, we hosted a *nice* world cup. (Her emphasis)

Busisiwe, a hospital general worker interviewed again on 5 September, had ended the previous strike 'disliking government more' and determined not to vote for the ANC again. This time, she was guarded at first. She said she would 'rather not comment', chuckling, when I asked how she thought Zuma compared to Mbeki. Was she satisfied with Zuma, I asked next? She checked the question and then there was a long silence. At last she said,

> At least there is somebody who is the president. But – Zuma, that man Zuma, what he's doing to us! Because the first time when he comes up into parliament he was promising that he is going to make everything better for civil servants. But we don't know what is going on, he's just quiet …. And they should stop this intimidation! [Another long pause for dramatic effect] Those people who are intimidating us are those people in government!

She went on to say that she didn't care if they fired her, because, at 57, she was ready to retire anyway; the job was becoming unbearable as they were not provided with mops and sometimes got no soap. In January she had bought three mops with her own money. She was unhesitating on the delivery protests: 'Government has to pay

[148] The DA was a liberal opposition to the ANC, more neoliberal than the ANC itself, supported mostly by white voters at that time but beginning to make small inroads into so-called Coloured and Black communities on the back of the ANC's failures.

all those things. Because we are working with no equipment. And then there's these houses.'

Striker after striker repeated similar sentiments of accountability around the president (all emphases are mine):

> This one [2010] was worse [than 2007], *remember there was a new government this year, many promises were made* by government, many things they talked about have not been seen so far and that makes the public servants angry, *because people expected* that and that and that, *everything he promised, they're not there*, that is what he promised, looking at his officials driving expensive cars. I am dissatisfied [with Zuma]. He didn't treat us well – we were expecting him to say something, he went to China. (James, 7 September)

> I think [the president] he's not honest – before, *he made promises*, now he just shut his mouth down. (Clement, 7 September)

> Zuma forgets that it was *through us that he was able to be president*. He forgets that it's the workers that sided with him and supported him, even when the days are tough. (Matla, 28 September)

Even Doris, who I had interviewed in 2007 and had moved out of the public sector since the first strike, shared a similar analysis from the outside, suggesting that identity eventfulness does not always require direct experience of a situation:

> Unions are using people now. The unions and the government, *there's a power struggle … I expected him [Zuma] to say something*. He didn't say much. *He doesn't want to upset anything, he wants to stay in power*. People were really, really upset and insulting him directly, *I don't think he did what people expected him to*. I wouldn't have been satisfied with the offer. It's an insult, its nothing.

Susan, interviewed on 28 September, had not heard Zuma's speech and Tabea did not rephrase the question. But at the end of the interview, when Tabea asked if she had anything else to add, she replied in a way that still evoked accountability:

> Well to you students I say keep on struggling and keep on working hard, keep on reading*, so that we must have better presidents of tomorrow*, who have knowledge, that will obey law *with the people and do everything with the people* of the nation.

Finally, Patricia and Lisbeth, like Susan, both had not seen Zuma's speech and therefore did not answer question about their attitudes to the president, but they represented this in quite different ways. Patricia stated it rather factually. She was generaly forgiving of government, switching between a zero-sum and a give-and-take view of strike outcomes but ending on a wistful note:

> I won't complain much about the strike because you know that when you go on strike it is 50-50, its either you win or you lose. But *at least the government met us half way with the housing allowance* … And if there is no money there is no money. … I am not really satisfied, but at least government gave us something… they didn't budget for that, *but otherwise they did think about us* because they managed to meet us half way, even if they didn't meet one demand, at least *they were supposed to meet one demand*…

But Lisbeth, the laundry worker, came across differently:

> I was not all right [with the suspension of the strike], because some of us are breadwinners in our homes and I felt that when we don't strike, what is going to happen to us? We had to stop so that we can be able to work for our children. [Tabea asks about Vavi's role and Zuma's role] You know when you are absent-minded you can't keep track of the news. I was just focused on working for my family and *I was no longer interested in the news*. … There is nothing I can do, so all I can do is accept the deal. I am not satisfied.

In this narrative, not seeing Zuma's speech comes across as a wilful ignorance, a decision to cut Zuma and indeed Vavi out of her life.

Finally, let me conclude the discussion of strikers' attitudes to the suspension of the strike, Costu's and Vavi's role in the suspension, and attitudes to striking, already touched on in the first section. Although most strikers were relieved by the suspension, as mentioned above, few of the strikers interviewed were satisfied with it or with Vavi's role in it. Susan was amongst these few: 'Ah well Vavi has spoken well to us but there is nothing they can do, they said they [government] haven't got money.

Baruti, interviewed on 6 September, understood the suspension as a way to sneak out of strike, despite initially remarking that it was 'a good thing' because 'we are responsible, worried about learners and the strain of catching up. If nothing [changes] after 21 days, then hell must break loose'. However on being questioned further, he didn't see it actually happening: 'I think this is just a strategy for us to go back to class.' However, it was difficult to actually resist the suspension, because 'people are tired, you can't have something that doesn't end.'

Patricia's strategic evaluation was that the suspension had to happen because the strike was badly timed:

> There was no chance for the strike to be successful, because … we were supposed to strike around the World Cup. Even if we can go back to the strike [now] again, the government won't meet our demands because they will say they don't have money, but then, even if they didn't have it they were going to make a plan.

But Matla, like Mbai quoted in the first part of the section, felt that 'the union should not have suspended the strike because by now we should have obtained our demand and, unprompted, blamed 'our union Cosatu [which] did not consult with us about suspending the strike, we just heard the news from the media. [Vavi], in all honesty, he is not good, because he takes decisions that do not come from members'. Nicolas, who 'realised the more it got prolonged, the more we were going to lose' was nevertheless 'not happy [with the suspension] because they [the unions] claim that members were consulted but clearly the mood on the ground was that the workers were sold out. About Vavi, he said, 'I knew from the beginning his role was a political one. I was not surprised by some of the comments he made. I knew that the whole thing was a political thing.'

A young teacher who struck for the first time in 2010 said that she could now understand those second-time strikers who 'just stayed at home and did their washing and their housework' during the strike. ('Frieda', interviewed by me on 21 September). Clement, another teacher, also said 'That strike just wasted our time because we didn't get what we expected, so I am feeling very much bad.' However she did not extend this to striking in general. At the end of the interview, she said, 'I would strike again.'

For some strikers, however, the end of the strike required a shift in thinking about where power lay. In 2007, Busisiwe saw the strike as having won something and said she would strike again. But when I asked her the next steps to win now in 2010, she asserted determination repeatedly, but shifted the power to the negotiators:

> Those people who are negotiating … must put pressure on government to bring a better offer.. [Me: what about your action?] I think it's for the shopstewards and government to speak. [Me: what is your next steps?] We are just standing there until he [Zuma] comes down. [Me: You're not giving up?] No we're not.

Nicolas, also interviewed after the 21 days, similarly shifted the locus of power:

> I'm not sure [if the strike could have been successful] to be honest, because *the power doesn't lie on the strikers themselves*, I think the negotiators are the ones who are influential.

8.3.3. The deflection deflected

In summary, then, this section has shown that the arc described in Section 8.2 was, though not universal, broadly characteristic of strikers' own thinking, moving from expectation in Zuma to disappointment and anger. Note that, for those strikers for

whom I had earlier interviews, the damage to identifications with Zuma was not necessarily a complete sea change from their attitudes to government at the end of the previous strike, but often a continuation and an intensification. The second strike completed a previously truncated dis-identification through, first, the public and collective expression of these sentiments in the strikes; and second, therefore, through their effect on the alliance, which I will discuss briefly in Section 8.4 below. Important for my purposes here is to note that the restoration of the alliance around Zuma in 2007 did not bury, but only delayed, this process. In this section we have witnessed a normalisation of the power flip for the majority of strikers.

Moreover, the chapter thus far has demonstrated that the management of conflict in the alliance did not come free, but incurred significant cost to the identities of many strikers with their union leaders.

In short, this time, there was no workable political deflection in which to tuck away the strikers' disappointments for later. The deflection, this time, was rooted very much in strikers' inability to clearly win the strike or effectively exercise any other source of power, which I have linked previously in the section to the limited strategic imagination and which I have also attributed, in my political activism, to the absence of alternate networks for organising – something the APF could perhaps have helped to provide had it intervened more systematically in strike support.

Finally, this section explored at the micro-level some of the beliefs which allowed the alliance to hold together among those few interviewees for whom it was holding well. These included prioritising national unity, inversion of mandates arising on one hand from prioritising the nation and on the other from misattribution of power, absolving the individual from institutions, which was closely related to 'force majeure' (the idea that government decisions reflect larger forces beyond their control) and, finally, the room to absorb radicalisation within the alliance by cycling through organisations or leaders. However I also suggested that these devices, in the context of deepening tensions in the alliance, have a shelf life, partly because strikers (in my study) do not merely reiterate but are forced to iterate such cycles and devices.

In Chapter 9, I will consider whether the identities discussed thus far can be considered eventful in any way. In other words, have we witnessed a permanent change in the way strikers saw themselves and the alliance? Before that, however, I will conclude this chapter, and the arc of the two strikes, by considering whether the

strikes exerted any eventful properties on the structure of the alliance or of collective bargaining

8.4. The fallout: were the strikes eventful?

The strikes were undoubtedly implicated in many aspects of shaking up the alliance, whether as cause or effect. The fallout from the 2010 strike took a while to subside.

One small indication of the waves it caused was that Vavi had to go up and down to all the public sector congresses justifying Cosatu's role in the end of the strike.

The skirmishes between Sadtu's Johannesburg Central region and the Department of Education continued for at least a month after the strike was suspended, with the region calling a teachers meeting during school hours which was then declared illegal by the department, and then later pulling out of the holiday catch-up scheme when the department revealed that they would not be paid for this. Angie Motshekga as well as Gwede Mantashe, then secretary-general of the ANC, were booed at the Sadtu congress in September. The chair of Mantashe's session struggled for minutes to bring the delegates to order. One delegate reportedly shouted 'We are not Nehawu, you can't tell us what to do!' (Mataboge, Letsoalo, and Seekoei 2010). Mantashe scolded Sadtu, but his speech also reflected how nervous the ANC was of what I called elsewhere 'the spectre of an alliance with a union leadership unable to control its own members' (Ceruti 2011, 156); his speech 'cautioned' the alliance partners 'against being "reckless" with their alliance … "Cosatu being in alliance with the ANC and SACP adds value to you. Therefore if you move out of the alliance you are going to be ordinary … there will be strikes in the future, we are going to have to manage them".' (Marrian 2010).

The ANC's nerves about losing control of the alliance were also reflected in its overreaction to the civil society conference called by Cosatu. As a political party and not a civil society organisation, it was not invited, but it took this as an attempt to marginalise it. The fact that Cosatu would contemplate such a conference was itself indicative of a crisis in its strategy to achieve a leap to the left by supporting Zuma. Cosatu's central executive committee statement in September 2010 declared:

> The post Polokwane period has been highly contested … despite some important gains, we are far from realising the bold vision set out by the ANC delegates in 2007. (Cosatu CEC 2010)

At the Nehawu congress shortly after the suspension of the strike, Vavi explained that 'There was a honeymoon period post Polokwane, but the emergence of the … loose coalition of predatory elites hell bent on accessing power in the ANC as a route to control the state for narrow accumulation agenda, disrupted the emerging unity of purpose'; and asked 'Has the NGC [National General Council, held shortly after the suspension of the strike] put back the alliance on track?' (Vavi 2010b).

But if Cosatu was hoping that it would either be rewarded for calling off the strike or see concessions and greater respect following the show of strength which the strike undoubtedly was, up to a point, it had not banked on the ANC's determination to dominate the alliance. Later in his speech to Nehwu, Vavi observed that 'Overall however the actual commission on economy resolution [at the NGC] is disappointing' (Vavi 2010b). Moreover, rather than honouring the weight of the unions demonstrated by the strike by giving Cosatu more respect in the alliance, the ANC tried to close the laager, prompting Vavi to complain that while Cosatu accepted the ANC as the leader of the alliance, it was disturbed by the party's insistence on being 'the only strategic centre of power', whereas Cosatu felt the centre of power should lie in the alliance itself, that is, in the meetings of the three components (Vavi 2010b).

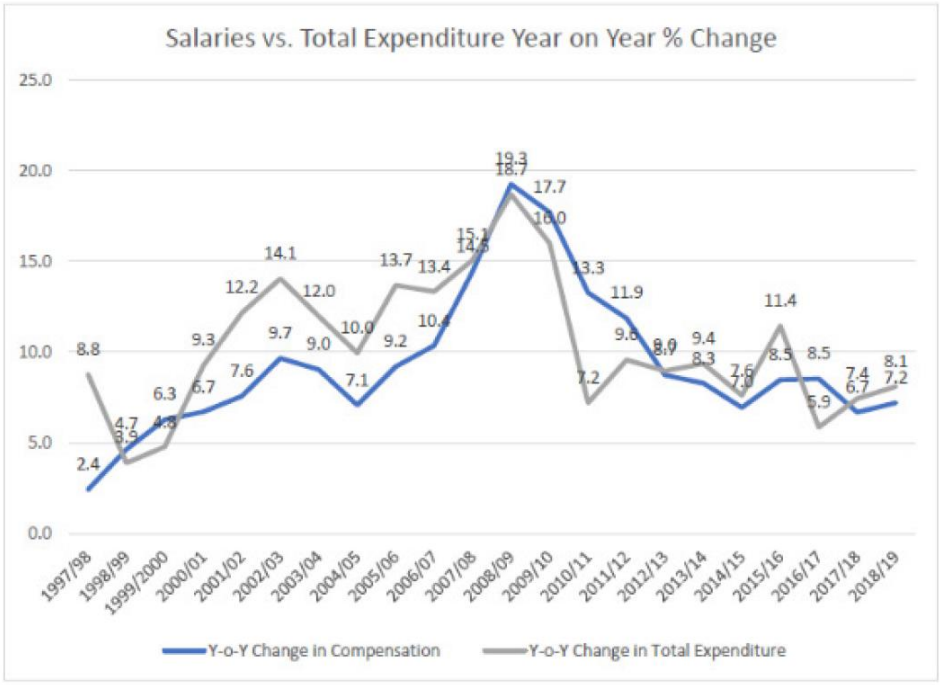
By November, the Zuma government, fighting fires on all fronts, had reshuffled the cabinet. Cosatu sent its best wishes and said it would 'seek to meet with the new ministers as soon as possible, to discuss how we can work with them to implement the policies of the ANC's 2007 Polokwane conference … as speedily and effectively as possible' (Craven 2010b). However the New Growth Path, announced on 23 November that year, left Cosatu dissatisfied. I commented in 2011:

> The (New Growth Path) is a break with classic neoliberalism – for example it asserts a greater role for the state and the need for a certain amount of social welfare – but it is by no means the Keynsianesque dream drafted by Cosatu…. Most of the concessions to Cosatu take the form of targets or intentions, such as the intention to create five million jobs, rather than policies. And, crucially, these promises come at a price: the plan calls for wage restraint for workers earning as little as R3000 a month. And the centrepiece of the plan … is a social pact between capital, the state and labour – an industrial alliance to reinforce the still shaky political one. (Ceruti 2011, 156)

So the strikes shook up the alliance but did not, directly, cause a significant change in policy. In terms of wages, Figure 7 below shows that, while the 2007 strike

may have helped to increase expenditure on public sector wages, 2010 came in on a downward slope which it failed to reverse.

Figure 7: Year on year changes in compensation for employees and total expenditure



Source: Hassen 2017

In short,

> These strikes transformed the face of government in that they contributed to challenging the president, Thabo Mbeki, and his policies but they were not transformative in the sense of fundamentally reshaping power, government policy or indeed the material position of the strikers. (Ceruti 2012)

Having said that, however, we should not conclude that the strikes were without effect. First, along with the cleaners and security strikes in 2006, they temporarily shattered the dampening structure of three-year collective bargaining and helped to reintroduce conflictual, non-demonstrative and indefinite strikes to the South African workers' repertoire after a long decline in such mobilisations. The size and length of these strikes, and their succession just one bargaining cycle apart, were significant in the preceding context of a long industrial quiet. They cannot be set apart from a rebirth of what Andrew Levy called, in 2011, 'unreasonable expectations from trade unions':

> I'm afraid the state of our labour unions at the moment is particularly adversarial. The unions this year … have the bit between their teeth … It is unlikely that they're going to behave in any manner which an employer would regard as being rational (Moneyweb podcast 2011)

This is not to say that the collective bargaining framework was shattered or that its dampening effects no longer work: far from it, it prevails until today. What has changed, however, is the possibility for collective bargaining to take place behind closed doors above the unpredictability of the activity of larger collectives.

Of course there were other strikes which helped to do this; the public sector strike was, like those, an effect of the same broad dynamics as much as a cause. But the public sector strikes occupied a unique place amongst strikes in breaking open the developing cracks in the injunction against airing alliance disagreements in public.

After Marikana and amidst the long, messy implosion of the ANC that continues until the time of writing, it is difficult to remember how unusual that had become. But simply going into a real strike, in that pre-Marikana context, was in itself eventful. A year and a half later, in April 2012, just months before Marikana, the ANC still had cause to complain:

> In particular, the relationship between the trade union movement and the democratic state is fraught with destructive tension and unhealthy contradictions. The public sector trade unions from the ranks of the congress movement and their cadres of our movement and their cadres of our movement deployed in the state are often locked up [in] skirmishes that undermine our common agenda … *the approach to public sector bargaining is based on a model that assumes that the employer and employees are locked up in mortal combat in which only the fittest survives* (my emphasis)… we need a fresh approach … on the relationship between the democratic developmental state and the progressive trade union movement. (ANC 2012)

In other words, far from returning public sector bargaining to a comfortable chat amongst comrades, the strikes cemented a conflictual attitude to bargaining and the alliance itself.

There can be no doubt that these strikes were a key element in the way the the normal functioning of the alliance began to malfunction *from the inside*. The managers of discontent failed to manage discontent. The strikes did not break the alliance, but they damaged it and, moreover, were an early iteration within a series of iterations around how to set the alliance 'on its feet' to restore the lines of influence which the alliance was supposed to give unions, which would eventually split some unions from

the alliance (even if the public sector unions themselves were not part of that reckoning); importantly, they were a test of whether such a worker controlled alliance was even possible.

In this sense, the strikes should be considered near-events, albeit highly localised – practice runs, early iterations - in the unravelling of the alliance which was still to come.

One more element must be considered in understanding eventfulness in the strikes. This is eventfulness in strikers' identities, the 'molecular change' referred to in the opening chapter. The preceding section has suggested that strikers' initial identities with government were badly damaged in the strikes. The next, and penultimate, chapter explores how four individual strikers' identities developed over the course of both strikes. That discussion helps to refine our understanding of how eventfulness was ultimately contained, without losing sight of how the alliance stored up contradiction. More than that, it explores the hidden element in eventfulness and near-eventfulness: identity eventfulness.

Chapter 9. Four strikers across two strikes

This chapter is devoted mainly to granular accounts of three strikers' and a partial striker's identifications, de-identifications and dissonances across the two strikes which have been analysed in chapters 5 to 8. Those chapters have prepared us to now stitch together the story so far of the two strikes, brought into relation with each other as episodes in a longer arc of the unravelling of the alliance, and I will begin this chapter by summarising the broad arc of alliance-related identities across the two strikes as the context of the four strikers' narratives.

Nothing in these narratives is entirely new[149], but the individual narratives in this chapter will make three things clearer. First, the chapter develops the observation that misidentification and de-identification may be rolled up together in the same 'meme'. This could be called mis-identificatory de-identification, in that a presumed-shared identity is the kernel of the distress signalled by the de-identification. What is special about this for my purposes is that it is, *at the same time*, an interface for restoration which *nevertheless cannot help prising open*, by at least a fingernail, a potential exit to fuller and deeper de-identification – for the individual concerned *and by legitimising or normalising the de-identification to others observing it* during the period of signalling. Second, it shows that the shocks to identifications described above did involve movements in *individuals*' identifications, not just shifts in the locus of power from groups stably identified one way to groups identifying a different way (although that doubtlessly happened too), even if the movement took the form of a loop, or a stretching and rebounding, and not a straight progression. Finally, it fleshes out and gives texture to the identity damage proposed at the end of Chapter 2 and illustrated in subsequent chapters. To the extent that the end of the second strike finally restored some industrial calm to the alliance, it was not restored to its past self but to a still less 'innocent' version; but for these workers, it was driven at least partly by the experience

[149] This chapter may seem repetitive after Chapter 8. This is largely because because the individual longitudinal narratives of the strikers interviwed across two strikes suggested several themes relevant to the previous chapter. Several of these are repeated here, but they are not merely repeated because here, they are set in the individual's trajectory rather than the strike's trajectory, as explained.

of losing the strike and a consequent sense of powerlessness, no longer by supposed mutual loyalties, in the self-regulation of the alliance.

9.1. Identifications across two strikes: a long view summary

Figure 8 below diagrams, in a highly simplified fashion, the arc of identity events in relation to the alliance across the strikes.

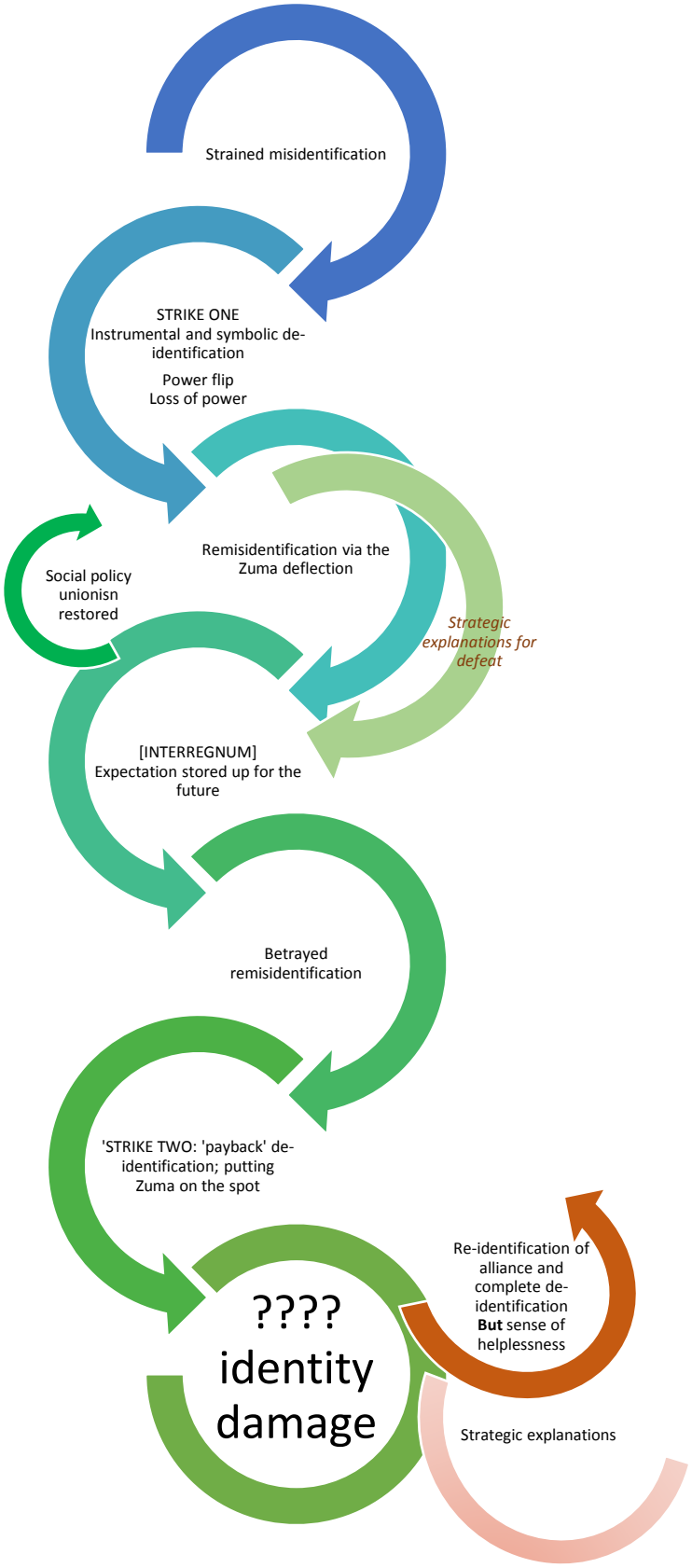
I said before that the first strike challenged the established practice of the alliance as merely a conduit in one direction for electing the ruling party and in the other for domesticating the working class. The normal function of the alliance began to malfunction despite the intentions of the actors because contradictory interests of the actors increased friction amongst the different uses and desired uses of the alliance, so that going through the usual motions no longer produced the desired results.

The first strike emerged from long-strained *misidentifications*, without any general awareness of antagonistic interests, well ahead of retheorising the alliance; indeed many were motivated by longing for its restoration to a long expired mythical ideal. But the basis of the misidentification (‘our government’) initially *heightened* the sense of injury and of deserving, rather than deflecting the strike as it had for so long before 2007.

During the strike, the misidentification underwent a ‘power flip’, from literally paternalistic imagery through assertions of mutual dependence to unqualified insistence that the employer/government depended on the public servants in the workplace, the ballot box, their careers and, for some, in the alliance as a whole (without strictly separating these various arenas). A rich variety of metaphors for government’s distance from the strikers, extended at times as far as de-identification.

But the de-identification, which was in any case often focussed on individuals rather than organisations or the idea of the alliance in the first place, was deflected by directing hope to ‘the political kingdom’, specifically to the person of Zuma replacing the person of Mbeki, with the demands of the strike deflected to Polokwane and the next budget, for many (though not all) of the strikers and for the union bureaucracy. This smoothed the quasi-defeat of the strike thus accomplishing a *re*-misidentification (in other words, the alliance was repaired); it also covers the divergence between the union leaders’ uses for the alliance and the strikers.

Figure 8: The progression of alliance-related identity events across the two strikes



This deflection implied a sense of the strike being effective beyond the workplace despite having a very limited effect on the wages and conditions of the strikers, and at the same time shifted the locus of activity and decisions upwards again, after a month in which, for the first time in more than a decade, broad activity at the grassroots (in the form of the strike) was again pivotal to the success of a union venture. (I will return to another paradox of the deflection below.) Strategic explanations for the end of the strike were able to imagine that next time they would be wiser and more practiced.

Another thread of identifications in the strike, not explored fully in the diagram, concerns the question of who constitutes 'us' when government becomes 'them'. To begin with, the 2007 strike was enabled by a convergence of the union officials' frustrations about the failure of social policy unionism in the alliance on the one hand, and the members' frustrations.at their work conditions on the other, and further fuelled by union leaders' worries that their members felt them too distant.

In the early days of the first strike, an expansive identity - 'all the public sector workers' - represented not only a feeling of strength but also a relaxation, albeit a purely instrumental one, in Cosatu affiliates' hitherto gatekeeping role over who qualified for the struggle. Moreover some strikers expressed cautious or lightly qualified sympathy for delivery protestors, and shop stewards and some local union officials welcomed the SECC's support in Soweto. However the expansive public sector identity was soon replaced by strikers vs *amagundwan'* as the interdicts plus no-work-no-pay divided the workforce, while the strike's failure to develop more inventive strategies for sustaining itself increasingly shifted the responsibility for the strike's consequent weakening on those still going to work. Meanwhile potential identities with the broader public were not explored via attempts to build practical solidarity, and therefore the state had a free hand in turning the public narrative into strikers against the public. Finally, the settlement of the strike played on various occupational divisions, explicitly trading off an adjustment for the lowest paid workers against the percentage increase.

To the naked eye, the alliance had once again worked to release pressure and thereby re-absorb opposition. But this time, the cracks remained visible despite the repair, with factions firmly out in the open. In terms of the strike, the deflection of the 2007 demands was less a Bruce Lee block than a boomerang: the Zuma deflection had restored the union apparatuses' hopes for social policy unionism, but had stored up members' expectations for the 2010 round of bargaining, heightened by the context

of a soccer extravaganza. The rumour that government was going to award a highly unlikely 15% increase during the 2009 wage adjustment negotiations was a hint of the wild expectation the Zuma deflection induced. When all that patience and hope was punctured in 2010, the result was the 'surprise strike'. The fact of a surprise strike shows how 2007 had returned the indefinite strike to the reflexive repertoire of public sector workers, even though many veteran strikers, dispirited by the previous strike, were reportedly passive strikers this time.

In this strike, identification with other protestors deepened, although scabs/strikers remained a key divide. Strikers vs. the public was the identity attributed to the strikers by most media and government from the start, although the strikers' emphasised their sympathies with the public as the strike wore on, placing themselves within the public.

The second strike was also based on a strained, or by now betrayed, misidentification: the Zuma government had been expected to take care of unfinished business, and now it was the Mbeki nightmare on repeat, an endless affair. The often misidentificatory de-identification[150] was fast and furious (and often funny. Remember the placard, 'The alliance is like buttocks'). From early in this strike, the president in person was publicly called to account, alongside or more than the relevant ministers, much more visibly and frequently than Mbeki had been in the previous strike. Family metaphors were all but displaced in the second strike while outstanding receipts were abundant in strikers' expressions of distance, and there were even placards and poems specifically about the alliance this time. Consequently the power flip was pronounced differently in this strike, emphasising this debt much more than work, and tugged awkwardly in the direction of more personalised as well as more political

[150] By this I mean a de-identification (from Zuma) rooted in, and still yearning to restore, the strained misidentification (of workers with Zuma/government/the alliance). Recall that in the glossary I defined misidentification as believing that someone or some group is more or less like you than they actually are, and de-identification means simply breaking a previously held identity. I use the phrase 'misidentificatory de-identification' to differentiate it from a de-identification based on re-identification, where workers de-identify from government by realising that it is unlike themselves/not on their side/in a different camp from them, and reclassifying (re-identifying) it. With mis-identificatory de-identification, there is still an expectation that government/Zuma/the alliance is like the workers (a misidentification) and workers start to distance themselves from government/Zuma/the alliance because it does not act in a way consistent with the misidentification. Put another way, de-identification with re-identification has you distancing from government because it acts *exactly as you would expect it to* against your interests, whereas mis-identificatory de-identification has you distancing from government because *you did not expect it to* act against your interests. There's more about this in the strikers' narratives.

(organisational) causalities. (Crudely, the power flip became focused on who voted for government rather than whose work sustains society.)

The end of the second strike was a more widely negative experience than the end of the first. It was difficult to spin this as a victory and a great deal of sacrifice and determination had amounted to little. The Zuma deflection was no longer available. And most bewilderingly, it had come sharply back into view that the restoration of the alliance achieved in that deflection meant different things to strikers and the union apparatus. For the latter, the 2007 strike and Polokwane were flexes that restored them to the cut and thrust of arduous social policy unionism. For the strikers, it was supposed to have led to a budget to fix their wages. The distance between strikers and (most) union officials, only recently narrowed, was abruptly widened again.

For some, this induced a re-identification of the alliance which bordered on retheorising it, as the increasingly frequent complaint that unions were 'just using' the strikers and workers for others' political ends yielded a slightly more accurate perception of the alliance – but, as an insight bound up with confusing defeat, it encouraged passivity as much as practical rupture. But even for those very close to one or other alliance organisation in their loyalties, the end of the second strike was marked by a period where misidentification had neither been clearly restored, *nor* displaced by uncomplicated de-identification (a re-identification)[151], while trust in the union apparatus, a key actor in maintaining the alliance, was badly stretched.

The progression of these dissonances towards what I will characterise as unresolved identity damage is the main concern in this chapter.

The granular accounts at the heart of this chapter further confirm that shifts in material power in the strikes (crudely, winning or losing, if you like) gave shape quite directly to the identities articulated (a la Fantasia 1989) and, importantly, constrained which identifications visibly persisted. Moreover, material power and the contradictions produced in the course of its operations worked at the level of the individual's identifications, and not just by shifting the locus of power among different groups at different times (although that played its own role in material power). The individual strikers considered below all display considerable stability of analysis over time – reflecting, I think, that as humans we compulsively theorise or model our world, and

[151] In other words strikers had neither restored the belief that government was like them/on their side nor decided firmly that government was not like them/not on their side. Shortly I will return to my conceptualisation of this state as identity damage.

that a certain amount of self-regulation is intrinsic to modelling. Yet the narratives also show strikers grappling with shocks to their identifications which strain these structures, and this is most noticeable towards the end of the second strike. In exploring how damaged identifications are retheorised (or deflected), the chapter establishes that what is happening here is not merely that conflictual and conflicted strike identities lost salience and faded. Rather, de-identifications were actively retheorised, repaired or deflected – but the contradictions which had intruded in the first place on strikers' misidentifications damaged identities in a way not so easily recouped in the second strike.

The narratives on the road to identity damage[152] in the section following constitute a kind of comparison in that individuals are compared with themselves over time, but it is not the kind of comparison that could be achieved by organising data into a grid, with a column for each strike crossed by rows of common issues, types of happenings, demographic profiles and concepts at different times in the strike. In other words, I am not exactly going to detail how Strikers A, B and C respectively felt about Theme X and Theme W at Time One, Time Two and Time Three (which is, after all, only the grid with an extra dimension). Time in this analysis is understood as a property of social processes *in motion* where I am investigating how *something becomes something else (or fails to).* Therefore themes emerging from the strikes and strikers are necessarily understood as moving targets. I am going to note how themes were established, supplanted, transmogrified or discarded, and the *variation* (over time and amongst individuals) in what figured uppermost in strikers' concerns, imagery, anger and so on, rather than choosing a few concepts to trace through the strikes.

9.2. Close-up: four people's strike identities over four years

These strikers were chosen specifically to illustrate unresolved identity damage. Paradoxically, the most striking trend in the narratives that follow may be the overall *durability* of some convictions and explanations in individual strikers' narratives. The self-regulating tendencies of our compulsion to model (theorise) our world make all the more interesting the instances which rippled the surface of the strikers' identities,

[152] Recall that in Chapter 3, I explained that I would use the term identity *damage* to suggest that people in the process of de-identifying may have their old identities and identifications called into question without necessarily having a replacement identity readily to hand, thus opening a window of uncertainty. (See also the glossary). The strikers' narratives in the remainder of this chapter will illuminate this concept specifically.

and how the person resolved the dissonance. Forms of resolving dissonance which emerged from the 19 strikers across both strikes included strategic analyses and 'ways forward', seeking other sources of power, restating desiderata, explanations and retheorisations, skimming over and deflections, loops, avoidance and sitting with it. Not all of these are reflected in the narratives to follow.

The narratives are reported mostly chronologically, more or less abridged and heavily annotated, and I develop themes *in situ* around, particularly, a concern with dissonance. This is not streamlined but it is better for capturing how themes and contradictions emerge, the ways they are linked or compartmentalized, what people keep coming back to, and my part in what was said.

The strikers selected do not characterise 'ideal types' in the strike. The four strikers are all women, which I will not justify, and all in the health sector. Their occupations vary. Comparing and contrasting teachers and health workers has been purposefully left out of this chapter for later project, to ensure that subtle dissonances are not overwhelmed by easier contrasts with strikers from a more militant or rhetorically independent union. I chose three for their persistent loyalties to alliance organisations. Two of these are shopstewards. All three are of a similar age and in the same union (not the same branch). The fourth I chose to explore the uncomfortable position of the partial striker.

It is not surprising that all the strikers – even the partial striker - were estranged from the government-employer to some degree by the time the interviews started, and the 'alliance payback dividend' (the expectation or demand which arose, paradoxically, from (mis)identification with government), was also pronounced at an individual level, not only organisationally. They all went through some form of the 'double deflection': placing the unfinished business of the first strike in Zuma's hands, only to be disappointed by him, too. The second time, with that deflection no longer available, there is a period of suspense, but a sense of otherwise-helplessness emerged as a key deflector.

9.2.1. Florence: persistent loyalties

Timing of interviews
25 May 2007
After strike 2007

August 2009

2 September 2010

6 September 2010

Florence was a member of Nehawu when I interviewed her, in her forties at least, working as a clerk and living in the Vaal by 2010, at which time she said she was middle class because she had gotten a 'better post than before' (See Phadi 2010; 2011), in which labelling oneself middle class in a non-workplace setting was a marker of personal progress for some respondents), although it was not an identity that came readily to her. She had been on strike in 1992 when she worked in a hospital, and retained considerable faith in the strike as a method in the majority of our interviews, alongside optimism in mutual loyalty with government. But both were shaken in the second strike by disappointed expectations in Zuma, illustrating the sting in expectant identities for the managers of discontent. However retheorising the relationship with government was deflected when Florence attributed the stalemate to government but also to the strike practice of requiring mandates, wishing instead for more direct communication from government. Paradoxically, then, her repair-deflection binds her tighter to the disappointing relationship. Quizzed explicitly on the failure of mutual trust with government, she enters what appears superficially to be a kind of loop of unreached desiderata.

Our first recorded encounter on **25th May 2007** was short: 'We want money! We're struggling about money!' she explained, then answered that she had been on strike before, and the recording ends. I did not reach her again during the strike. **After the strike,** she told Lawrence Ntuli**:** 'I feel happy, the strike achieved more than we expected.' She mentions medical aid and housing subsidy increases and the abolition of pay grades 1 and 2 (doubtless a substantial immediate prize for workers in these grades). Any greater expectations – I'm not saying *she* had any or not – were deflected via two devices in Florence's narrative. The first, 'the budget and the unforeseen expense', appears in this after-strike interview:

> The majority of workers are happy about the results of this strike. The government wanted to give us more, even to give us the 12%, but because they never knew that there will be a strike this year, it fail to budget for 12% … the government spending is dictated by the budget … it plan in advance. But I feel the government tried something, it made a difference in our lives. We never expected [the housing subsidy increase], that was a surprise.

But right after this, she flags another unsolved problem in her workplace:

> As government workers we are still suffering. Where I work there is a shortage of staff, as a result we are overworked, we do more jobs. This makes us to be tired. When you arrive home you are very tired. We want the government to hire more people. There are many people who want jobs, the government must employ them…

Then she illustrates the assumption for future budgets implied in her friendly acceptance of 'the unbudgeted expense' explanation and her profession of an identity between the government and the workers (and it is most likely not the interpretation intended by government negotiators when they proffered this excuse): 'The government try to be part of the workers. This is demonstrated by its offer to workers. We also *hope after this strike it will do more things for the workers.'* [My emphasis.]

The second device, 'the slow but sure promise of Zuma's presidency', emerged later in Florence's narrative, when we talked on **8 August 2009,** amidst wage adjustment negotiations between collective bargaining rounds. This device, which I have described previously as the deflection of the strike's unfinished demands to the political kingdom, related to the budget device in that it was the unions' strategy to secure better budgets, and resembled the budget device also in the sense that it heightened expectation. In this interview, Florence is again very positive. She interrupts my first question ('How are things with you two years after the strike?') to answer:

> The new president is trying his level best. We were thinking of a strike but – we are asking for 15%. So I think it's better than before. In 2007 our president didn't say anything to the workers, so I think it's better than 2007. Samwu was on strike, they gave something to them. So I thought Zuma is better. I don't know, as time goes on, what will happen, but for now, on my side, I think it's better.

Everything at work is also better, she says. Since when, I ask? 'After April this year, everything have changed.'(Zuma was sworn in as president on the 9th May.) '*Ja* [yes], things are not like before but somewhere, somehow we see the changes.'

Here, she explains the importance of strikes but returns repeatedly to her patience with the Zuma government. When asked about the recent municipal strike (during which rubbish was strewn around town) and the strikes amidst the construction boom ahead of the soccer world cup, she replies, '*Ja* it was bad [but] you know, this people want a living wage. If you want something and it's not coming, you have to go to strike.' In the next breath: '*Ja* but everything will be fine. We will see what is going to happen with our new government.'

Asked about the tense standoffs in Balfour and Thokoza, she replies,

> … but let them wait and see – we must not predict what is going to happen now. [Me: 'Were they right to 'strike'[153]?'] No they're right. If they are not satisfied they are right, 100%. If we are not satisfied we are going to fight. *If we are not fighting, we go to the table negotiating*, if you are not going to see me, to see my anger – *if you talk and talk they don't take you serious*. But if I am striking, it's going to shake you – then you are going to answer me.

But again, within a minute: 'We must wait some months to see what happens.'

Our next interview was also towards the end of the second strike, **2 September 2010.** Remember that Cosatu had by now stepped in to try to seal a deal, but Sadtu was still resisting. Florence is strike-weary now, increasingly worried about the effects and effectiveness of the strike. She sees the situation as a stalemate and blames government for causing it, but she doesn't see a way for the strikers to change the situation, and therefore her reliance on government, paradoxically, grows just as she is questioning it. She started the interview:

> You know, this things of the strike is not going to end because of our government. I don't know, because I am only one, if we can take this one then next year again we go to the negotiations. Because you know it's not going to end. Sadtu's members are still angry, and another thing, the government it don't want to listen to our demands. *We don't know where to now, we are still hanging*. I'm listening to the news now and they said there's no money, so I don't know. [My emphasis.]

As at the end of the previous strike, she thinks the offer 'is not fine' but '*at least* it's done something' (my emphasis). But this time, she does not name specific 'at-leasts' as she did before. When she does get specific about details of the deal later in the interview, it is to say that teachers might be willing to accept the 7.5% if government would reverse no work no pay for the time of the strike. In other words, although she seems eager for the strike to end, this time she gives attention to details of what has *not* been offered in the deal, a negative rather than a positive view of the deal. Back at the beginning of the interview, she explains that Nehawu leaders 'want to take the offer' but other unions (Sadtu) are not ready to settle. Does *she* want them to accept the offer? It's not for her to decide alone, she insists. Would she be satisfied with the offer if they accepted it? 'Not actually satisfied but *at least* – I'm not satisfied but *at*

[153] In the South African sense of the word, which may include stayaways by non-workers.

least he's[154] done something, but now, if this thing is going to go on, it's impacting on our country' (my emphasis). She is worried about the disruptions to schooling and healthcare.

She refers directly, unprompted, to the build-up of deferred promises when asked to compare 2007 to 2010. She says that 2007 was 'very heavy and this one is not so' but people are angrier this time:

> The last time, 2007, the government promised us one two three, even today it didn't do this. So you see people get angry and angry every time because last time we talk with our government, it says it will give us the things we need 2010, but it didn't. So you know every year they say it will give you one two three but it's not doing that. So people are angry.

Dissonance is clear when I asked what she thought of Zuma's role in the strike: 'I *like* Zuma, very very much, but now he disappoints me. I like him very much but now I'm so disappointed, I'm so disappointed, really really.' 'Why [did he disappoint]?' I ask. She elaborates: 'I didn't think president Zuma would say this to us. Because its Cosatu that voted for him. But now he disappoints us.' Rephrased, the question is met with more elaboration: 'I didn't think one day he'll talk like this to the unionists. Because we fight and fight and fight for him to be there as a president. That's why today we are disappointed, all of us now are so disappointed'. 'Why does this happen?' I try. 'If the government listen to our demands very soon this thing will be not like this. Ja.'

This exchange suggests that the experience of dissonance remains uppermost and that she has not yet retheorised her expectations in Zuma. Her way forward loops back to wanting government to do the right thing for the workers. But, while Zuma is the disappointment, the strike practice of mandating is criticized. (Is this an oblique critique of the union bureaucracy?)

> The way forward? Hey man you know the way forward! Government must *come to the people*, address the people. Government must come to the people, address the people [repetition in the original][155]. So if they don't come … the mandated people are not going to do it. Because every time we are waiting for mandate this thing is not going to end. You know what,

[154] The use of 'he' is tantalizing because Florence had not personalised or individualised government in previous interviews as many strikers did. However it is not clear whether this represents a change in Florence's focus or whether it's a slip from speaking in translations. Elsewhere in the same interview Florence uses 'government… it…' or 'government… they…' but it's not uncommon for people to substitute s/he for it when talking in English about 'peopled' objects, given that the isiZulu word for government (*uhulumeni)*, for example, is amongst the class of nouns with the humanising prefix and verb concord 'u-'.

[155] I retain repetition in the narratives because it can signal things which really bother people, things they wish to emphasise, phrases rehearsed because they have said them repeatedly, as well as a pause to gather thoughts. The context usually suggests which. For the same reason I have sometimes retained talking in synonyms, suggestive of the speaker wanting what they say to be precise or also done for emphasis.

> the thing I have saw, if Zuma is going to talk to the unionists and to the people also, I think it will be much better. Unlike sending mandates for us. If he speak to the media, better. If there is no money serious, if there is no money serious, go to the media and tell us what he will do after this [about no work no pay].

I take this opening to ask, 'Is it true that there is no money?' Florence takes the opening to return to and dwell on the government's rebuke to public workers' respectful patience:

> Hmmeh. We'll never know, because during world cup, before we went to strike, they get what they want. *We tried to be nice to government* before world cup, we said we would come back after world cup, now they try to disappoint us [my emphasis]. So now world cup is finished they are trying to ignore the public servants.

Asked for a strategy, she repeats or reports the strike mantra, but circles back to its inadequacy: 'Not going to work, not working, we put pressure to the government because now people are going to be on the street. People are dying. It's the pressure we put on government. But now they don't want to listen to us.' 'How to increase pressure?' 'By not going to work. Continue toyi-toying….' What about getting the public on the strikers' side? 'If the parents of the kids go to march with us, government will see,' she replied, 'but now the parents are staying at home … seems they are not serious'.

Our last interview was four days later, **7 September**. She wants the strike to end but retains the emphasis on what *should* be: 'You know what, I think it's better but if they are going to withdraw the money for the days we were not going to work – we can take the offer, if they withdraw.' She returns to the refrain: I'm not satisfied, not satisfied. But I think next year they are not going to fight, they must bring something better at the table.' Me: 'Did you win or lose?' In reply, Florence elaborates the previous point:

> *Ja* I think this must be the *last* one [her emphasis]. We are not going to strike, they must bring something better. Not like 2007. Because it's a waste of time, kids suffering, patients dying –it's bad, it's bad. … Also it's *not their kids* who are at school. It's *our kids* who are suffering. [My emphasis.]

So was it victory or defeat? 'Uh uh' she sighs. 'I think we must go back to work, kids must write matric. It's already too late. So for the sake of our kids we must go back to work. Ja.' Remember that the strike came late in the year because of the world cup, a show of good faith from the union apparatus which proved to be a strategic mistake

for the strikers as it now threatened exams. This illustrates a material pressure bearing on public servants, that their 'product' frequently served their own 'kids' and other relatives. But Florence is not offering a tactical critique. She wants government to 'bring something better' as an alternative to striking at all. As the second strike proves still not strong enough, all the strategic questions around it seem deflected to a desire to restore peaceful and fair collective bargaining.

When I ask 'Anything else you want to say?' she replies, 'No, no, you must brainstorm me. Even about the politician, not only the strike.' This gets us started again. 'What about politicians?' I ask. A small speech ensues in which Florence turns on its feet the government-employer's habit of contrasting the rural poor's demands on the budget with those of the public workers:

> Now about politicians, *when we take President Zuma to be our president, our president, we think things are going to be better than* the former president, *but now nothing has changed*, (my emphasis) things remain the same. We think things will be better than the other two presidents but now I think how nothing has changed, it's the same … people are still crying, poverty, toilets, water, electricity… that's the thing that hurt us. Because people in urban areas we've got those but other areas not. … Bucket for toilet, not healthy. In the present moment, it's not fine. Because they said they going to make things better than apartheid regime but now things are still the same. It's the same. Nothing has changed. Ja. But – let's hope. It's only a year. Let's look for these 4 years that are coming. So we give him maybe these 4 years. We want to see what changes. Really it is hurting when seeing other people crying – no job, supermarket just hire others going for low salaries because of hunger. We give him these four years and see what will happen.

Florence transitions smoothly from harsh critique ('as bad as apartheid') into the deflective concept that a president must be judged at the end of a full five year term, illustrating the importance of a parliamentary focus in delaying and thus often blunting disappointment.

The last part of the interview projects severe estrangement from government but a sense of helplessness prevails. Me: 'So what If it's not better after four years?' Florence: 'You know, we are not nearer the president, if he can come nearer to the people. Maybe he will listen to educated people. … We cannot see him. Politician is a dirty things. *They mustn't listen to one person, they must listen to all of us*.'

The sense of helplessness should not surprise, after two giant strikes didn't win. Maybe Florence articulates no strategy to get a government that listens because listening government *is* the strategy, to avoid further strikes. But, if helplessness is the

only thing we noted in this looping back to continually restate a desire for the very thing that isn't working, then we would miss that it simultaneously contains a 'stubborn' element, in which the loyalties projected in this desideratum are, throughout and increasingly, a one way street: not the quid pro quo of the recently passed phase of the alliance, but government must listen to *us*.

9.2.2. Puleng: partial striker stuck in the middle

Interviews

1 June 2007

16 June 2007

After strike, by Lawrence Ntuli

August 2009

6 September 2010

Puleng was a professional nurse at a clinic, and reported in our first interview on 1 June that it was her first time on strike. Puleng's family responsibilities, her union abandoning the strike and the no work no pay rule made Puleng a partial striker, expressing fear of the strikers and resentment for the employer. There were times that I wasn't sure if she was a full striker suspecting I was from management or a non-striker thinking I was from the strikers, but I my mind was set at rest about this when I put it to her that she seemed stuck between the management and the strikers, and Puleng enthusiastically agreed: 'Yes! I'm in the middle!' Puleng's complicated feelings for the strike, however, never clouded an unwavering sense of disappointment with government, shot through by the thread 'unfair'.

Puleng's uncomfortable relation to the strike was implied in the first words of our first interview on day one of the 'indefinite strike':

> Whether I go into a strike or I don't it's up to me. Otherwise they are going to pull up my salary, *ne?* But I'm doing this because this is unfair, the salary I'm getting. So unfair, I can't manage, I can't cope, I'm a beneficiary (sic) at home, I'm doing everything at home. And the food is raising up, petrol is raising up, everything is going up but the salary stays bad.

She supports this claim by describing her responsibility, shared only with her husband, for her child, her younger brother living in the house, and three unemployed brothers living elsewhere.

What does she think her class is? She: ‘What do you mean by class?’ (a frequent response to this question). Me: ‘What does it mean to you?‘ (also standard). She dives right in with no further hesitation:

> They [the employer] take us as the lower class because really they don’t respect our career and we do too much work. We’re saving lives and we do too much. And the salary – it’s a disgrace to us.’

The imagery here pivots on contrasts: the importance and volume of the work contrasted against the salary; the respect that should be given to her class (professionals, signaled by ‘our career’), contrasted against their misrecognition as ‘lower class’, implying both a poverty wage and social disrespect; ‘they’ and us.

Notably, with this question, Puleng slips from ‘I’ to us, our, we and they; she is wielding class in this context to describe collectives rather than to rank herself. Measured against formal class consciousness, Puleng’s model might lifelessly be described as going just beyond an occupational model of class, and remaining within sectoral or even sub-sectoral strike consciousness. An astute observer will wonder if it is about class at all. Puleng had, of course, appropriated my question for her own tactical necessities – to further justify higher wages, emphasize breached fairness and signal distress about the wages and the work. But we should not therefore overlook how readily this model of class lends itself to this practical work. Note also the following contextual subtleties. In this representation, affordability classes (Phadi 2010; Phadi and Ceruti 2013) are at the same time used metaphorically (‘lower class’) but are also linked to and supplanted by a more relational notion involving work, which becomes not only a means to an income but also intrinsically important. (It is very possible that the last element riffs off the concept of essential workers in the interdicts.) However, while the imagery is sharply conflictual, it stops well short of antagonism. It is a strike-enabling, or strike-ready, imagery of class which begins but does not complete the ‘power flip’ that we saw in chapters Six and Seven. When I asked who is us and them in her statement above, she replied, ‘I’m not sure anymore, I’m not sure anymore. Seriously’. But she spoke firmly, not hesitantly, asserting stretched loyalties rather than confusion. Pressed, she fretted for a few seconds about ‘outsiders coming into our country’, and then said:

> ... you know, everything is going wrong at the parliament, they are misusing our money, they don’t even give us that money, they are getting 57%, we ‘re only getting 6%. What is that?! [Pauses]. And *they are doing nothing*. They are *only up there*, *we are working hard* (My emphases).

Again, tactical justification for 12% is uppermost here, but the contrast between the essential workers working hard and government [the employer] 'doing nothing' shades into a strike-ready image in that you need to believe that your work will be missed in order to contemplate striking. However it stops short of metaphors for exploitation, in that the employers/government are merely inert, 'doing nothing' (where nothing could be interpreted in relation to work or in relation to election promises), and the inequality is established at the level of income.

In Puleng's case, the strike-ready power flip was curtailed by knowing that doing essential and important work is not always sufficient power to exercise its withdrawal: 'I'm not sure whether we are going to get the 12% because some of us *are (at) work here and everything is always smooth*' (my emphasis). This reverse assertion of the power of labour (workers make everything smooth) was 'painful' to Puleng because her salary would be deducted and theirs wouldn't, but all would enjoy the same increase. The interview ends with Puleng sounding both ashamed and proud of joining the strike:

> Really I don't, I can't explain [how it feels]. It's not nice but on the other hand it's also nice to support the other people. And to [whispers] strike, [louder again] to strike for what you want, to be strong somewhat. To not be a coward. Because I want money, I *really* want money. What I'm earning is peanuts, it's not enough' (Her emphasis).

By the next interview, half way through the first strike – a precarious high point for many of the other strikers I interviewed - she starts: 'It's terrible, I am just scared to go to work. I just go since I don't want to lose pay.' She has heard that 'some are being threatened on the phone when you go to work, and when you don't go to work they [management] say no work no pay'. Has she been to any pickets? She says she went '…before … no work no pay' because:

> …we were scared that they would come and hit us if we didn't join them … *sjoe,* I had to go and join them. That is how I managed … they were telling us that we were *amagundwane* [strike breakers, literally mice or rats] … it's terrible. And now I heard the rumours others didn't get salaries and I didn't go and take mine yet, I'm still at home. It's really terrible, Claire.

She had not personally been hit or threatened, but she had heard about it happening. Note however that her fears of the strikers are, each time, ultimately bound with her frustration at the employer's no work no pay policy. How did she feel about the demands of the strike now?

> Ah, partly I still want the money, because inflation is too high, everything is so expensive. And then partly I'm bored now, I want to go back to work. So I don't know what to do, whether you are doing it you are wrong, if you don't do it you are still wrong.
>
> How did she feel about government now?
>
> No! They are neglecting us! They don't like us, they don't take care of their people and employees. Because people are getting bad at the hospitals because they are not attended. Not to say that we don't want to take care of them – if you go to work and get *sjambokked*, if you go to work you get killed, the next day they will hire another nurse. Are you going to go to hospital? No! You will stay at home. And then you will not get your pay again. You see, it's so difficult and complicated now, and it's getting worse.

Despite Puleng's fear of the strike, her narrative always seemed to roll back to an uncaring management's door. The potential danger from strikers ('if you go to work you get killed') works to underline management's neglect, illustrated here by the disposability of nurses. The police, too, added to Puleng's discomfort with the strike: 'You can't know anymore … if you will be attacked by the police… but I still want money! … no I wasn't frightened, but I see the police at other hospitals firing rubber bullets – it won't be as peaceful as the first one that other day I met you.'

When asked to describe herself in three words, Puleng chose characteristics that are assets for a clinic nurse, working with people all day: 'Patient. Hardworking. Uhm [long pause] Jolly! Yes, I can say friendly and jolly.'[156] What about government? This gets her going:

> Ehyooh! I can't describe them! I don't know what they are thinking! You know, they are *self-centred*. If I can use *only that one word*. Yah, self-centred. *They are only looking after themselves, not the people who vote for them* … how can we say it's our government whereas people are dying and they are doing nothing, and we work very hard, workload is too much and we're getting paid peanuts, peanuts, you see, you don't get much money when you get paid. (My emphases.)

This closely resembles the class imagery of Fraser-Moleketi 'eating alone' (Chapters 6 and 7), but here voting closes the link, rather than work.

And the strikers in three words? She speaks sympathetically, 'The strikers they just want money. Really, they want money. Nothing else. Just that'. She explains strike violence via a free rider problem: 'Maybe if they hit someone, its coz, are you gonna

[156] Various inferences are possible here. Does this reflect simply that work was the context uppermost in her mind just then? Was she signaling professionalism, or that she was an asset to the work? Or was her identity bound to her work? I didn't think to ask.

be happy not to get a salary whereas you are helping for all the people? … They are fighting for us and we are just sitting there waiting for 12% to come'. 'Is that true or untrue?' I asked, unsure if this was her view or a representation of someone else's view of non-strikers and partial strikers. 'But it's true! It's true! Mmmm.' This seems curious because Puleng was, after all, apparently describing herself. But it turned out to be a polite criticism of her union: I reminded myself aloud that she was in Denosa, and she replied. 'Yes, *this boring one*!' clearly annoyed. Her union only joined the first day of the strike, and told its members to go back to work after that. How did she feel about that? 'I need to go back to work because my union now is … telling me to go back. It does not listen to what I want, what can I do?' She sighed hard.

Had she anything to add before the interview ended? 'I just want this thing to be finished. I'm tired now. Because we will end up in hospitals being depressed, because we don't know what to do.'

In the interview after the end of the strike, conducted by Lawrence Ntuli, Puleng spoke as a striker: 'The 7.4% is not enough, if the union can say there is a strike tomorrow, I will join, because we did not gain more things during *our* strike [my emphasis].' She reiterates her justification for the increase, without asserting the value of her work this time: 'Things such as food are expensive and inflation is on the rise. It is worse for those who are breadwinners, [loudly] 7.5% is not enough! We must buy food and pay for services, it is not enough.' Her imagery for government remains consistent: 'The government is egoistic. The politicians only care about themselves. The government does not care about its workers or the majority of people; there are no jobs …[and] even the majority of those who are working remain poor'.

> I just hate the current government under the ANC, it is useless and boring and it lies to poor people. I will be excited if the old white government can return to power minus apartheid. I hated apartheid but under the old government things were better than they are now … If you want a better life or a living wage you must enter a strike, without a strike you gain nothing.

The 'old white government without apartheid' is an intentional absurdity - not nostalgia, I suggest, but sounding an alarm about the failures of the current government. Here, the strike – there's no reference to voting this time - is recognized as a power, as the necessary action to push a better life, but also as an unfortunate feature of a useless and boring state of affairs – strikes are an unpleasant necessity. The interview concludes with a standard question from the rough interview schedule: how does she feel about non-striking workers? Once again, she places herself as a

striker: ‘Non-striking workers were scared to join because they were not part of the strike but they were *part of us’*.

In 2009, we talked for five minutes on the phone: ‘I’m watching, just watching. I’m not involved that much.’ This motif - watching quietly - came up again in 2010; it suggests helplessness but it is not quite apathy, as she is still engaging by watching.

What did she hope for? I meant in the wage adjustment, but she interpreted it broadly:

> Just hoping that some changes will happen. For everyone in South Africa … a lot of jobs. Because right now I’m still a breadwinner at home. So I want people to get some jobs, I want, you know, *rrrreal* changes [she rolled the R for emphasis]. Not just speaking about changes, but changes. Because some people are suffering. I’m still ok because I am gaining something to help my family but what about those who doesn’t have somebody, who’s not working at all? [Brief pause] I’m expecting a better salary also. Yah.

What did she think about the strikes and protests of the past two months? She saw them as damaging:

> Ohhhoh the last two months was bad for the economy of South Africa. I’m hoping they will fix things for us, the professionals, the, the public servants in fact, *that they will fix everything for us* because everything is expensive, you know, *to avoid the strikes*. Because you can’t just get one rand for your salary whereas bread is ten rand, one loaf of bread. So *to avoid more strikes they should just fix everything for us*. (My emphases.)

This is an important companion to her previous imagery of self-centered government because this is the desired and expected, almost paternalistic, relationship which underpins its foil. The relation is revealed to be currently dysfunctional, but not inherently pathological (antagonistic), in Puleng’s view.

Our last interview, in September 2010, repeats the 2007 loop: ‘We are really tired of the strike. But the money is not enough. I’m not interested anymore. But what can you do, because no work no pay. Otherwise I’m tired.’ She said she was again partly striking and partly working. ‘We wanted to strike but we couldn’t watch our patients dying.’ She added that she felt intimidated ‘by those on the streets’.

She remained deeply unhappy with the offer and the manner in which it was being imposed, even while displaying a sense of helplessness not unlike Florence’s:

> It’s not ok. It’s not right. I’m not happy about it. It’s still – very very low. It’s not according to the market, you know, everything is expensive. So *things are take it or leave it according to them*. They don’t want to negotiate anymore. So anyway even if we can negotiate they don’t care. So we have

> to take the 7.5. *And there's nothing we can say.* As long as you go to the streets it's no work no pay. So you think about our family, you think about yourself, what did you eat today?'

What did she think of Zuma? She referred immediately to his accumulation of wives to reiterate a now-familiar contrast, but a small variation this time[157] implies a parasitic, not merely lazy, elite:

> Oh man. I'm still watching him. I wonder what is going to happen if he decides to marry those two girls again?[158] Coz now they are going to get paid for doing nothing. … Coz remember that each and every wife gets a salary but they are doing nothing. His kids are going to school free. Remember *it's our tax also*, so it's not fair. They expect us to work one hundred percent but we are not being remunerated. So I wish I had another career, I would leave my job! (My emphasis)

She returned to feeling caught in the crossfire, expressing a literal loop: 'This year I didn't really participate. I didn't go to the streets. We were staying at the clinics, they chase us. We went to our [union] offices, they chase you to go back to work. That is now everyday life. Ja.'

She saw the strike's end as inevitable: 'Everybody's tired now of striking. They will accept the offer no matter what. But we are not still happy about the offer they are giving us.' What is the next step then? 'No I've got nothing to say, I am just watching. … if we were all at the streets … I think they would have given us the money.' Did she see a political solution? On the contrary: 'Ohhh those on top! You can see how they are fighting! What can you think? Coz they are now getting involved in the strike and they involve politics again. So I don't know what is going to happen!' So, rather than allowing public servants' demands to be transmitted to government via the political sphere, she sees factional battles being transmitted from there into the strike. 'Ah I'll see where it goes you know,' she concluded, 'But I'm demotivated, loss of hope in our government, *ja* [yes]*,* and disappointed'

I asked her specifically about Zuma's role in the strike. The phrasing 'did not love us' indicates social distance, but also implies that the expected relationship should be familial or filial rather than confrontational:

> I felt that he *did not love us*, because he said if you are involved in the strike they must fire us. It means he does not think about us, our needs. He is *only thinking about us giving the service*. It means *we are nothing to government* – like, they once said, you can take any person off the streets

[157] I couldn't say whether this was a new twist in her understanding or elaborating what she already thought earlier.
[158] Zuma was reportedly courting a new fiancé.

> and make them a nurse. But we study four years so it is not fair to us. [Did she expect anything different?] 'Yes! Because he is the president. He should have said to Baloyi, Baloyi do something! Yes!'

However Puleng did not dwell long on Zuma as an individual before reverting to the de-individualised 'government'. Here, work is mentioned to emphasise not the value of public servants, but their dehumanization, as their human needs are subsumed to their service which is in turn considered disposable.

I said I might contact her again if there was another strike. 'I hope there won't be any strike!' But what else could they do, I asked? 'You know I really don't know because every year we expect increase but before we get it, we must fight. You know.' This is also key to Puleng's loop: she isn't keen on strikes but she doesn't know another way to force an increase. Why is she not paid her worth? 'I don't know. Because they said our work is a calling! (laughs) So we are like volunteers.'

In overview, we have seen that Puleng's mind is made up on government right from the start. In 2009 between the strikes, she speaks hopefully, but apart from that, and despite variations in the source of expected accountability (public servants' hard work, the vote, taxes and humane relations), her basic imagery of government (uncaring, doing nothing) hardly wavers during the strikes. She presents a sharp contrast between the loyalties expected of government and its actual behaviour, but she displays no dissonance about it.

Puleng's dissonance is all about the ambiguity of wanting and needing the increase but feeling unable to strike, and she finds no resolution for this recurring loop in her narratives. Notably, resentment for management is nested in the frequent expressions of fear of strikers. Obviously a strike is an actually risky business, and Puleng's case illustrates how the resources of different workers to sit out a strike may depend on factors outside the workplace (the household) as well as inside it, and also on collective or organizational responses specific to the strike context (her union's withdrawal from the strike). I argued previously that the riskiness of striking makes a political solution seem attractive to strikers, and something resembling this deflection is undoubtedly present in Puleng's assertions of how government *should* behave. However she seems not to have placed particular hope in Zuma as an individual for changing government practice towards public sector workers. Indeed, she represents Zuma as an Exhibit A of what is wrong with government. Rather than binding Puleng to government, she comes to see the relationship as one of political meddling.

Puleng's acquiescence to the dominant state of affairs must be explained by other means.

What does change for Puleng - as for many of the full strikers - is that her overall trajectory moves from hope to a sense of increasing powerlessness, initially expressed in terms of individual constraints but later expressed as being 'tired of the strike'. Notably, her (conflictual but not antagonistic) strike-ready class imagery, which values her own work compared to the employer's lack of work, is accompanied by a deepening conviction that the power thus afforded by withdrawing work is compromised by the perceived disposability of public servants. Puleng's de-identification with government is deep, but it has nowhere to go without a sense of effective agency.

9.2.3. Nqobile and Carol, shopstewards: 'They must do things in order to remember where this government comes from'

Joint Interview
18 June 2007

Carol and Nqobile were shopstewards for Nehawu at the time of the strike. I introduce them together here because that was how I first interviewed them, and the trilogue in our first interview is best presented as such to preserve the mutual influences. Carol had been a professional nurse since 1994, ascended from ward attendant in the eighties, while Gabasile remained a general worker, clearing about R2000 out of a R5000 wage in 2010. Their family responsibilities were very different. Gabasile, right through both strikes, was staying in the nurses' hostel at the hospital in one room with her four children, while Carol, 'the only one working at home', supported her child and her mother in her mother's house in Power Park, an area developed in the 70s for state employees, who at that time were the popular definition of township middle class.

Of more interest to this thesis than these contrasts is that they came from a layer of the union placed to play a key role in the maintenance (or not) of the alliance, but who seldom featured as themselves in the literature around unions and the alliance at that time. Nqobile and Carol had been shopstewards since Nehawu was established. Shopstewards can be a vital glue in both a bottom-up and a top-heavy trade union machine, as an interface between members and union structures. In theory, they

democratically represent a section of members to the rest of the union; in practice, shopstewards in the years before the strikes also transmitted politics, policy and stability from 'above'; occasionally became fully bureaucratised, as with NUM's full-time shop-stewards, for example (Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout 2008; Sinwell 2014); and were also from time to time litmus papers of discontent, sometimes by representing discontented members upwards, sometimes on their individual or other parties' mandates, and sometimes by being deposed.

With the return of the 'indefinite strike', a new or renewed role fell on people such as Gabasile and Carol to motivate members to strike and sustain the strike. They were then expected to call off the 2007 strike in a positive light, and we will see that this put them in an uncomfortable position when Vavi settled the 2010 strike without them. They end up as buffers for the union-in-the-alliance, but to the extent that they played the role of managing discontent for the alliance, these narratives show that they are managing their *own* discontent in the process. Moreover, although their responses to the suspension of the 2010 strike were quite different (and this is the reason I included both shopstewards), with Nqobile rejecting the suspension and Carol accepting it, both display some form of identity damage, deflected for Carol via the SACP but unresolved for Nqobile by the end of the strike.

Our first interview was late in the 2007 strike, **day 18**. They were still upbeat about the strike's prospects (Carol: 'Everyone here is prepared to go forward with the strike.') Their confidence is perhaps related to their previous strikes, which we talked about next, in 1992 (two years before the first ANC-led government, but at a time when that outcome no longer seemed certain) and 1987 (the year of a second state of emergency under the repressive Botha government). People sometimes said the 1992 strike lasted six months because everyone was dismissed, and most were reinstated only six months later; Carol and Gabasile had to wait a year and a half to get their jobs back when arbitration reinstated them (in the context of tides turning in labour law and the political transition, I should add). In their experience, arduous endurance paid off. I wonder, additionally, whether the historic events in which their last strike was embedded had created an association between striking and shaking up government. Carol felt the strikes then and now to be similar, but Nqobile interjected to emphasise the size and breadth of the current strike. The 1992 strike was only Nehawu and only 8000 people, she pointed out, 'so this one I think it's a broader one, because there are all these people who are under Cosatu, all the public servants, they have participated'.

Next I observed that their previous strike was under a transitional government and they now had to contend with striking against their own comrades in government (and, I should add, in a phase of neo-liberalism considerably advanced since 1992, though I did not say that at the time); 'Why is this government being so "stubborn"?' I concluded, quoting another striker. Carol presented their historic loyalties as the strike's Trojan horse:

> I think *they took an advantage of us, that this is our government*. We used to conquer the previous [government] … because they did not know any strategy of us. But *this government knows everything about us*. In 1992, we were with the-e-e-e-m [she draws this out] on strike. Those, all [those] MPs were with us … they were helping us during the march and so on… that is why we won that government [my emphases].

This does not explain why comrades would use what they know about you against you, nor the use of old-government strategies by the new government. But it illustrates that these strikers' political loyalties were challenged in peculiarly personal ways. When Gabasile and Carol roll out the metaphor that Geraldine used to be with them on the picket lines, they mean literally, in the tumultuous days of 1992. However the political is not displaced by the personal connection here, and is perhaps intensified. We may speculate that politicians who rose look back at their time on the picket line as an episode in the unfurling of their individual benevolent greatness, which all those left behind are implied to have failed to possess; but Carol's and Gabasile's narratives insist on the fundamental *collectivity* of these ascensions to power. Gabasile adds a diplomatic note, but reinforces the theme:

> We cannot say our government is not fair [earlier, she called the government that fired them in 1992 unfair] but *at the moment* we are saying, this is *our government*, they have been *voted by us*, and whatever they are doing *we must call them to order*. And *they must do things* in order *to remember where this government comes from*. Coz *we used to help those people*, as the comrade said. We *used to be with them* fighting the old regime government with them, so today, that is why we are saying they are not fair, and we will still continue if they are doing wrong things [My emphases].

In this extract, she has subtly likened the current government to the past one by calling it unfair, but her metaphor of calling government to order seems to draw on a different catalogue of imagination, as it is borrowed from the comradely space of union and movement meetings or, at the most conflictual, collective bargaining and arbitration. The two metaphors constitute a small dissonance, but it was not one Gabasile picked

at, and ‘at the moment’ seems to expect or at least allow for eventual reconciliation. Nevertheless, Nqobile was making it clear here that the alliance is indeed a two way street, in which they (strikers and unionists) had done their part, and now it was time to show receipts, so to speak. In the ‘moment’ of the strike, at least, the pacifying possibilities of imagining the alliance as a two-way street had realigned to point in a more demanding direction.

Both the depth of the damage to old loyalties and the absorptive powers of the alliance were illustrated after the next question: what did they think of the Gauteng SACP’s recent threat to run independently? Carol replies, ‘We are going to be very happy for SACP to take over, because ANC government, it’s got most of the things we are not happy about…’, and the other places herself as an SACP member, adding, ‘Yes, *we are prepared to swallow the ranks of the ANC*. We are prepared!’ For the time, this was an unusually forceful statement of intent to contest the practice and organisational leadership of the alliance.

We talked about their occupations (detailed above) and threatening letters sent to nurses (about which Carol was defiant: ‘It’s okay, … I didn’t kill anybody, I’m fighting for my rights. I *want* my *money*! [Her emphasis]’). Asked next to describe herself in three words, Carol’s answers amounted to a sketch of how she saw herself as a shopsteward:

> I am a person, if I want something I want to get it. I am a faithful person – I can’t go back without the mandate of the workers. So I’m a person who wants a thing full force – but if it’s my rights, I want my rights to be GIVEN!. I’m humble – I want to lead with respect and be respected. And I’m a lovable person.

Gabasile then steered the conversation back to her housing, which had been interrupted by Carol’s letter. The government loan guarantee was ‘not even enough to get a four room’ [a Soweto house inherited from the apartheid council stock] and her salary was too low for a bank loan, and government employees were not allowed to get RDP houses: ‘*Government is making this difficult for us*…’, she laments. ‘We don’t know where to stay, so that’s why we are saying our government here is not right, and…’ – she moves on seamlessly to use the first of her three words to signal her loyalties: ‘…and I’m a person that likes activities of ANC, I’m a staunch member of ANC, and a staunch member of the community’. She uses the second word to place herself in the strike as an unflappable but versatile shopsteward and thereby to signal how serious this particular moment is:

> So I'm one person who is very, very calm and down, and I like negotiations, and every time at negotiations we must win… that's what I like about myself, I do really communicate, but when it comes to war, a fight like this of a strike, I think this is what I want, I don't go back I go forward.

The third goes to humanise herself, much as Carol's did: 'I like to be with people socialising in travelling to work.'

'And, the strike in three words?' After some hesitation, Carol offered a flood of words: 'The strike is not a good thing. Many people suffer … If things go well *we are supposed to get what we ask for*. Really I don't like the strike – there's no pay and our patients are our grannies and brothers.' These disavowals of the strike and themselves are about being good health workers aligned with 'the community', thereby impressing on the listener how far they have been pushed and that government is responsible for the strike:

> But I think our government, when it comes to the push, they must be *called to order* because we have got a bad picture to other cultures as if we don't care for our people ... *It's not the thing that we like*. We don't like ourselves *– we want to be on duty working for community.*

'And government in three words?' Gabasile picked up the same thread:

> Government is *unfair*, first of all, it means *they don't care for even communities who voted them in*. People are dying, *government was supposed to take this strike as a strike because they are the people who taught us how to strike and today, they don't care.* If they did they would have been negotiating since October if they were being fair… [My emphases]

The image of the uncaring government appeared as well in the narratives of Puleng, a partial striker, and, like Puleng's, the imagery of what government *should* be doing – negotiating 'fairly' – is far from antagonistic. Further the strike appears as a symbolic communication rather than an exercise in power. Social distance is expressed via references to a shared past. This suggests that dissonance was introduced, not by a mismatch of the strikers' and the government's models for collective bargaining, but by the actual percentage that each considered reasonable.

Next, Gabasle speaks about the hospital CEO repeatedly rebuffing strikers' proposals for a skeleton staff for emergencies (public ignorance of this fact was key to the gradual demonization of the strikers). Then, she puts the ball in the government's court when asked how long the strike might continue: 'He [she means government's negotiating team, not any individual] is trying to move, but so slowly we can't say…

We are still looking at that 57% that he did accept.' Were they surprised how long the strike went on? Carol: 'We wasn't but we was.' On one hand, a breaking point was expected: 'For the last three years we did sign [reach agreement], but we saw that in this [inflationary] environment … I didn't see any change in my salary', and she mentions the 57% again. On the other hand, she expected more sympathy from government: 'We are surprised how can we stay for this two weeks … because compared to the old regime, *government knows what is happening in our country*.' This last sentence once more appeals to a common history.

'Can you ever go back to comrade Geraldine?' Carol expresses extreme estrangement:

> I don't think so, I don't think so, because now she *lets us down*. She shows us very strongly that *she doesn't care* about anything. So I don't think that next time I can call her comrade. *She is not a comrade. She is not a comrade*. She rob us! *She's not a comrade, she's, you know, an outskirts person*, I can call her a person.

Nqobile added a maternal metaphor: 'And you can say *she's not a mother* because … as a mother she was going to understand. … *Workers crying brings nothing into her mind*.' During the 1992 strike, 'she was even demanding those wages that we did' but '*she thinks that because now she is in the parliament she gets everything,* that's why we are saying she is not capable to be a mother. I am not undermining her as a mother but … she undermines our demands'.

We can see that the shopstewards were not very protective of government and used metaphors not unlike those used by Puleng, Florence and other strikers, although they spoke in a more organisationally flavoured register. I continued below with each separately.

9.2.4. Nqobile: 'Every time our unions are failing us. What if a worker asks me these same questions?'

Interviews

18 June 2007 (joint interview above)

After strike by Lawrence Ntuli

20 August 2010

5 September 2010

7 September 2010

Lawrence Ntuli interviewed Nqobile again **after the strike**. 'Some of our demands were met, but *our main worry is 7.5*%. We are not satisfied with 7.5% because we demanded 10%'. She listed the 'gains of the struggle' that we already heard from Florence, but labels these as how 'the union told workers' that the strike 'was not in vain', and circled back to the increase: 'But some workers feel that the offer of 8 or 9% would have been better, because 7.5% is not enough.' Nevertheless she retained faith in the strike method: she hadn't read the written agreement yet, but assured Lawrence: 'If the agreement is not in our interests we will strike again … it is too early to say that other workers will consider an option of strike action but as a union leader I am prepared to mobilise workers for another strike action.'

'The government has disappointed the workers,' she continued, because:

> … this government is *selfish and greedy.* It does not serve workers' interests. All politicians in parliament are more concerned about themselves, that is pocketing more money for themselves. They also make rich people richer. The previous [Mandela] government was better because in the past it gave workers 10%. That is why we still believe that the Mandela government was friendlier to the workers. President Mandela *used to visit the workers and union leaders on a regular basis.* His aim was to ensure that the workers remain happy. *But Mbeki is not concerned about workers. He is more concerned about convincing workers to vote for the ANC. He only smile and talk during elections time.*

Here Nqobile uses somewhat more political language (workers' *interests*) in a familiar theme about selfish government, but implies a systemic imagery of government's role in saying that 'they' are *also* for 'rich people'. Her contrast between the Mandela government and the Mbeki government individualises in a way that allows the Zuma deflection, but also asserts what has gone missing from the relationship, in her view (consultation replaced by electioneering). These projections of estrangement remain

intimately entangled in misidentification: her next sentence is, '*Nonetheless this government remains our government.* But', she qualifies, 'I do not think that the people will ever vote for Mbeki, but for a different person. Mbeki failed to intervene during the strike, he said absolutely nothing'. She 'failed to understand why' those who work for government 'are suffering, unlike private sector workers, who are exploited for profit … we just feel that the government does not care about us. It does not take us serious'. This was despite the importance of their work:

> The politicians in parliament are more concerned about their pockets and they get high salary. But when in parliament they decide to build a school or a hospital. They expect public sector workers to carry out the task of building. *They fail to realize that public workers are central to service delivery*. In other words in this democracy workers are not benefitting, politicians are making poor people more poorer and rich people richer. We are working but we are poor.

Nqobile's power flip here makes the strikers central to government's plans without mentioning voting, and once again locates government and politicians specifically within a broader interest group which is against workers and the poor – almost antagonistic.

Curiously, Nqobile was harder on non-striking workers than police, accusing the former of being 'bad' and 'on the other side of the fence, with government', while accepting police (enforcers of government interdicts) as a 'part of our strike' who were excluded by government.

Her last words were: 'The government or the ANC is on our side. *The problem is few people* who are anti-workers, for example Mbeki and Moleketi. *The ANC is us, we are the ANC.'*

I found Nqobile again on **20 August 2010** during picketing at CHB. They were still fighting issues left over from 2007, she began. Asked to compare strikes, another worker taking an interest in our interview answered, 'This time the workers are more angry', and both agreed that there were more people this time.

Asked about delivery protests, the other worker was cautious ('I think people are angry, but I'm not part of them so I don't know what is happening with them'). Nqobile cuts in, 'But when we are talking about housing, housing really is giving us a problem, *even when we are talking about workers or the community …* I can't afford any house now … so that thing it gives us a problem country-wide'. She had turned the conversation back to herself but in doing so, she situated herself within a wider

community of housing fates. We talked more about housing, then I asked what her class was and how she knew:

> I'm in a *working class because* I was employed in CHB since 1982 up until now, so most of the times I'm in the hospital, *most of my time, I'm wasting it in my working place*. [My emphasis]

She derives her own class from how she spends her *time*, in the workplace, but for unemployed people ('lower class' because there's no RDP houses for them) she switches to a reproduction/consumption arena. 'Are you and they the same?' 'I could say I'm different because I am *working*, I am *earning something.* People who are not working are not earning, so I can't say I'm in the same class.' But she conceived of practical solidarity in the sphere of proletarian consumption. '[s]ometimes we have communicated with *them* and then *we* are in the *same class* because when […] all of *us* we are looking for the houses […] we must be part and parcel of the community'.

The last strike was under Mbeki, I say. How is she feeling about the Zuma government?

> Heh-eh! I'm really disappointed, because I thought that *in this government of ours*, *we have been with them* all along in the struggles *and they know our issues*, and then *I didn't expect* that this government would do what it is doing' [denying the increase]; '… we are *from location* [the township] *with them*, and they know all of our issues, really really I'm disappointed with *this government of ours.* [My emphases].

The list of nostalgic commonalities looks in two directions: the claim to mutual loyalties makes for a deeper cut.

'What's their class?' Here she remains in an income-related register of class, and uses class to loop back to the betrayal: 'They are in the higher class, because at the moment they just got new cars, working for big moneys', and she expected this government to be different from before with how money was used, 'but now I think they are going same like with the very same people we are accusing'. The reason is '… when … you go to the higher class you change, you forget about the people you were working with because now you are in a luxury situation and then you forget about people you were with before, so their class is very high than us… it's [level] 100, 99 and on our side its one percent'.

> What else did she want to say?
>
> Only that the government, even Zuma where he is, he knows very well that the working class was the people who have tried to - even in the elections, we were part and parcel to take Zuma up, so he mustn't forget that there

> are workers on the ground, people who were looking and supporting him at the very same time to be president … *so that they can know our struggle*, because when we were in the struggle as workers since 1980, coming from all these strikes that we had from apartheid up until now, they are the people who knows, and *he promised us the people of working class*, he promised us when we were having some congresses, he promised us, the working class I'm not going to forget you guys *because I know that workers put in the effort so that I can be a president*, so but he failed us, we did not expect [the statement yesterday - this was the day after Zuma said he could fire public sector strikers] especially from *our* president.

The constant recursion to a shared past here, the use of 'our', is a reminder 'Who sent you?' and therefore not necessarily a passive motif.

On **5 September 2010** when I called her she was about to go into a meeting and she sounded flustered: 'We don't know where we are'. She asked me to call later and dropped the phone. Two days later, **7 September 2010,** after the deal was announced on television, I got through to her again. My notes read, 'She sounds asleep,' and her first words after greeting were 'I am tired, yoh.' I offered to call back later but she actually wanted to talk. 'How are you feeling about the strike?'

> No I am not feeling ok, I am totally not happy because we don't know now what is happening – it's our first time hearing that the strike has been suspended. So we can't understand is it true that our strike has been suspended, how, why our unions say suspend the strike? Because we must make an agreement and sign an agreement and go back to work. Because I am afraid if we are going back to work and wait these 21 days, if they are going to tell us to go back to the strike, *people are not going to be interested anymore.*

'These people wanted [asked for] a mandate but they knew very well where they were going,' she complained further. They should have rather caucused a fall-back position, she said, insisting on pay during the strike or an increase backdated to April for accepting 7.5.

> *But now we are in a question mark*, because they have already suspended the strike, we don't know what they are negotiating…

She is stuck in this question mark. When I asked her how they could make the strike stronger, she replies, 'To suspend the strike was very wrong. People were going to be stronger if they didn't suspend the strike.' I asked how she felt about Vavi, who spearheaded the agreement.

> The problem is one, Claire, I can't even tell you. Yesterday *our offices didn't give us a clear mind*. People were fighting to hear that the strike has been

> suspended. The representatives of the workers, they didn't call us [to tell us what they were negotiating] and even the workers, they don't know.

She felt under pressure that she would have to face workers to justify what she did not understand. However Gabasile had a limited imaginary of a grassroots union movement capable of resisting the deal. She did not think teachers (who did not agree to suspend the strike) and health workers needed to meet together as their 'principles' were meeting 'in the bargaining chamber'.

'Did you feel like you won or lost in the strike?' I asked. 'That's why I'm saying, we don't know now, are we still talking about this 8.6 or are they talking about this 7.5? No' [not very hopefully]. She repeated her fallback position, and wanted a sliding scale 'next year in negotiations'. Unprompted, she continued:

> Coz already our unions have lost a contact and - I don't know how I can put it. Because *they failed us, even our government has failed us*. Because they know very well […] that public servant people they don't earn like this other people, and they were promising, our government, to start with the hospitals and the teachers, people who are not earning enough money. Yes. But now they have failed us. Ya.

She hoped they would come again the following day to explain, as that day they had sent provincial officials who didn't sit in negotiations, and the meeting was disturbed because 'people were very angry, even myself I was very angry because […] how can you give a person a mandate when they know they are already going to sign for that thing? This *happened again in 2007*. *Every time* our unions are failing us and they don't even talk to us [my emphases].'

Because it was 'happening again', it was much harder for Nqobile to deflect her double identity crisis, even while she retained strategic explanations and hope that things were better than she thought: she wanted the negotiators to report directly to workers because 'even now we are saying they failed us but we don't know what is happening in the negotiating chamber? [They must come to us and say] can we please take this offer? Then it's is understandable.'

She returned to government: 'Did you see the money that they are using for leisure, for pleasure, how much a person is using, two hundred and something thousand a month. And then they'll tell you they don't have money …the money is being wasted by these people. Mmm. Mmm. *Niyabona* [you see]'.

Then she's back to the suspension of the strike: 'That's a very very very wrong thing. You can't suspend the strike because immediately when you suspend the strike

people are going to tell themselves that they are no more going out.' Clearly, the unilateral top-down suspension of the strike had thrown Nqobile into a crisis upon a crisis of damaged identities, exposing the unreliability of their own leaders amongst the shock of Zuma's failure.

Nqobile took refuge in a budget deflection: 'Next year we must be negotiating from now, October already – before the government announce the budget. They must announce the budget knowing what the public servants want. Because now they announce the budget and they don't know what the public servants [want]…. Now they are saying there is no money.' She repeated this a few times. 'But they knew already what you wanted before the last budget', I suggested. She mobilised a 'peculiarism' in reply, but its subtle contradictions channel her back to her disappointment with government:

> They started to negotiate from last year October and they've told us, to ask us to wait for the 2020 FIFA world cup, so this is what they've done… *if we had started in time I think we were going to get this money.* Now they don't care because there is nothing that is happening you understand. Now they must take care of the people who have voted the, you understand… *because FIFA world cup they wasted money and money*. Now we've got stadiums that they allocated more moneys, now what are those stadiums doing now? They are doing nothing… but you are working for the government you don't have anything, but if it was a stadium they were going to get that money to make that stadium to be finished before that 2010. Ya they must think of us. Because we are the people giving the service… *everything is going fine in all these places but they don't care about those people*.

Crucially, these strategic explanations are not the simple deflection they appear to be. They do indeed relocate the failure of the strike from government's betrayal to root it in the strike's power or timing, but government is not off the hook ('Ya, they must think of us'); on the contrary, these strategic explanations scent independence and self-reliance, depending on strikers' own cleverness or strength rather than loyalties to get what they need.

Her last words are for the unions' betrayal and the strategic blunder of unilaterally suspending the strike:

> You know, I'm so disappointed, you understand, I'm still lost at the moment, as the chairperson of the union, I'm very, at the moment, very very very angry because if I am going to have one of the workers to come to me to ask these questions that you are asking me, what am I going to say because even me myself I don't know why are they seated now, they are going back to sit for what? Because it's already – when we are going back

> to work, they believe everything is fine, because they [the employer] can refuse to do whatever … they know very well [that people are not going to go out again] … because already now they have gone back to work and we don't have a victory.

'I am so angry', she concluded. 'What if a worker asks me the same questions?'

To sum up, earlier in her arc, we saw Nqobile wield loyalties and a shared history to demand accountability (who sent you?), and the power flip was never far from her images. Notably, even when she slides into an electoral register, it remained active and work-based – not voting, but being the people who implement service delivery and therefore government depends on them to fulfil its mandates. (We will see this differs from Carol's threat to call in receipts when next it was time to campaign for the ruling party, in the next subsection). This is significant, and Nqobile's class imagery contains a few tiny special elements, such as stretching to admit a subtly more systemic notion of class than others' by situating government in a broader group (the accumulative rich). This elevates it beyond a merely conflicted 'them' to a more truly *class* imagery (a group sharing interests). But note that there is no mirror here for the role of the work and hours which are at the centre of her definition of her own class, beyond being the implementation squad of the ruling party; she isn't thinking here of where she fits into circuits of exploitation/accumulation, and that perhaps helps to mystify her and other public servants' actual power.

Nqobile's discomfort was greatest about this double betrayal (the Zuma government and the union leaders' capitulation to it), and the difficult position this put her in as a workers' representative and a worker herself who felt 'put in a question mark'. It is a double betrayal in another sense, in that they have now been twice betrayed after the considerable sacrifice of a long strike. This multiple-whammy introduces identity *damage* at the time of the interview - she is 'in a question mark', literally unsure whose side these actors will prove to be on – which leads her to offer strategic explanations for the failure of the strike, which, intentionally or not, open a peephole on imagining alternatives to reliance on having the ear of the ruling party.

9.2.5. Carol: 'The problem is it forgets where it came from'

Interviews

18 June 2007 (joint interview above)

After strike by Lawrence Ntuli

2 September 2010

7 September 2010

Carol, **after the first strike,** was not conflicted: 'The strike won. We did not only want a salary increase, we also wanted changes in levels', and she listed all the other things considered to be gains. Her feelings for government were not repaired but she had not de-identified: 'The government do not respect and do not care about its workers. During a strike it was threatening essential workers. If it say workers are essential therefore it must give them good wages. The government do not care, does not appreciate its workers'. She explains:

> Government is part of workers. The problem is it forgets where it came from. We vote for this government, it is our government, workers cannot live or function without the government, the government cannot function without the workers. They need each other. The ANC is also part of the workers, we put it into power, as workers we made sure it wins.

She was more forgiving of non-striking workers than Nqobile: 'They are part of workers…. [who] fear to lose their jobs. [but] if they do not join a strike we become weaker'. She concluded that she would join a strike again, 'if it is legal or having good demands. The struggle makes our lives better'.

I interviewed her again on **2 September,** asking first about the rejection of that day's deal: 'I feel fine, it is our right to reject what we don't want. We demanded' and she lists everything, 'so we didn't get that we were expecting. So what I am saying is that we cannot go back. We are going forward. We reject the offer'.

We talked about that day's march, and about who was striking. Then I asked if she was satisfied with Zuma. 'No I am satisfied. You know why I am satisfied because he is not the one who is in front. Zuma has got his own cabinet. The president is busy around the whole workers, looking for the economy of our whole country. The people who must do their spadework, it is these people that we are working with.' She deflected from Zuma's person on to the cabinet, but this turns out to still mean specific people. 'Are you angry with cabinet?'

> We are angry about cabinet. Reason being, you know the cabinet has got *this tendency, always when we strike* they play the innocent role. After strike you will hear that they demand more money than we demanded.

The unfinished business of the previous strike is implied in 'this tendency'. 'But shouldn't Zuma speak more for you?' 'You know Zuma, he has got powers but he's got no powers also – because *he is ruled by the cabinet also. He is not the one who must tell them what to do*. But the cabinet as a whole.'

She thought the way forward was to 'continue to put pressure' and develop 'PIan B' (a fallback position). 'Three weeks out is not a child's play, you can't go back with nothing.' She was 'very much disappointed' when they heard the offer: 'We didn't expect that. We had demanded more but because of negotiations we came down to this level'.

I asked about delivery protests. ''No, I *do* support them, but what I don't support at all is to vandalise the structures, but the protests, there's nothing wrong with the protests, because people are protesting for their own rights […] It's their right even to demand houses [in Motsoeledi], we can't say we don't support them, we support them fully.' When pressed, she also didn't mind burning tyres across roads – 'no-one is injured – just don't vandalise, you need to reserve what you have got, it takes years to get.'

She then expressed 'strike shame', a device for attributing liability to government by projecting thwarted professionalism:

> What I want to say, comrade, is we are pleading to the government to reply us. [voice drops very low] It's not nice, it's not nice when you see our community being - suffered like that. Our children, our community are suffering, the mortuaries are closed… it's not nice, really, what we are doing *we don't like it*, *but we are very disappointed* with the government, we didn't *expect* the strike will end up on this way.

Here we see the strike presented as an involuntary reflex to government's failure. If public workers were indeed essential, she went on, 'we want to be given what we want. We want to sit down at the table, ask what we want, and be given – really we don't want this situation [the strike].' She contrasted the strike with the unions' restraint and government's friendliness at the table during the soccer world cup:

> We want it like in June, *everything went smooth until all the visitors were gone.* They didn't see anything because *we have tried to hide our dirty linen.* Our government disappointed us. *We are appealing to our government* in future they must consider our demands, immediately! We don't want to

> strike. Strike is not a nice thing. Because on strike we develop this anger. Yes, this anger. We don't want to be like this. We are also mothers and fathers! [responsible adults] We don't want to look like animals. So we are *appealing* to the government. [My emphases].

However, she remained militant about the strike: 'Comrade we are not going backwards, we are not going to end the strike until they can come with another offer.' But when I asked how they would increase the pressure, she had only the usual 'picketing and marching'. I asked why there was no campaign to involve the public in support. This was a strategy 'that we didn't embark because we thought the strike would end immediately'. This illustrates the depth of the expectation that this government was going to sort out the issues.

Two days later, on **7 September,** Carol's determination had been replaced by pragmatic equanimity about the suspension of the strike: 'It's ok. We need to give other people and ourselves a chance to negotiate further […] You know it cannot go on and go on […] So we go back to work and [leave] the officials and government to discuss the issues.' She further justified this in describing the return to work: 'Today we went back to work. The departments are no longer being the same like as when we left the hospital, you can see the patients were suffering.' She returned to the idea of 'giving other people a chance to negotiate', implying that 'other people' would have to clarify the details of the agreement. This did not mean she was content with the offer: 'We're not satisfied, you know, yes we are not satisfied.' But forces bigger than the strikers were seen to be at play – 'Because of, er, the, the economy, there is nothing we can do, we can accept whatever' – and she mentions no work no pay as another reason that 'we have got what we demanded but not exactly what we were demanding' (though she did not enumerate what they had got, and elsewhere, as we have seen, claimed not to know the details of the agreement).

I asked if the strike could have been stronger, and what they had learned from the strike. 'What we have learned is that, *we need each other*. We need each other, everybody is very, very important in his job - even the government too, he need us. *And we need the government too*.' Whereas Nqobile retained the 'full' power flip, Carol is back to mutual need. The relative weakness of the strike was crucial to this restoration: 'And ah, we have learned that to fight – to continue by fighting when you can see that there's no winning, it's useless. Yes, it's useless. And sometimes we need to sit down and compromise some other things.' Curiously, she located the need to

compromise in the irreplaceability of public workers. During the return to work, they saw 'many, many, many connections, were taken out to be fixed. So it means those people who were using those machines [during the strike], they did not have a clear mind what was going on there. … So it was not nice. Really we went on strike but it was not nice. It was not nice to see our property [the hospital] being destroyed by the soldiers and whoever because they don't know the job that they were doing.'

When I asked again about the lack of a community campaign, the divergence between union officials and strikers arising from the restoration of the alliance after 2007 emerged:

> You know Claire, before, ne, I don't know how I can explain, *we were in a dark cloud, because there was no direction to coordinate from our officials* to coordinate with the shopstewards. It was not clearly what was going on. I remember the first day when we were approached, all of us didn't have that excitement of going out on strike you know. So we didn't have clearly understanding what is going on actually, because our leaders, they didn't come out really, you know, with full mouth, that is why we didn't have that [indistinct] to call the community. *We thought it would be a smaller thing, a strike of one week. because we have that trust on Zuma's cabinet*. We had that trust to Zuma's cabinet *that everything will move fast*, you know, and then we will go back to work. So that is why we didn't get a chance to update the community as before as 2007. [My emphases].

We talked for some time about why public workers did not meet together and then I asked if she was satisfied with the *procedure* for suspending the strike.

> Nooooo we are not satisfied. No we are not satisfied because they came to us and seek for a mandate, they came to us, but they didn't follow the mandate that we've gave them, and at the same time, they were the ones who were speaking on behalf of the trade unions of the draft that was made by Cosatu, *so it is the way they are speaking on behalf of the government, let the government speak on behalf of themselves,* you know. So we are not happy about that. Because that draft that we've got now, it's a draft made by Cosatu that makes us to go back to work. It's not about our mandate you know that we have given them to go and negotiate about.

Note how 'our mandate' expressed Carol's feeling of distance from Cosatu; the restoration suggested at the beginning of this interview did not come without damage. By remarking on the breach of the division of labour in the alliance – Cosatu has been speaking for government – she signalled both that Cosatu's allegiances have been called into question for her and estrangement from government. This is a pricklier image of what has been restored than 'we need each other'.

'Why did Cosatu do that?' I asked.

> Yah you know, *politics it's a dirty game*. It's a dirty game. So there's that thing that we must understand, we are clear, those people that are negotiating, *some of us they are* members of ANC. Let's put it clear, they are members of ANC. So they cannot leave the ANC and then side with us with everything. As I've told you, that draft was made by Cosatu, *it's not about us*. You know so they can't leave their mother body and side with the workers, of which is unfair because we have chosen them to represent us, not to represent their mother body.

The alliance, then, had become for Carol a conduit in 'a dirty game'. The formulation '… some of *us*, *they* are …' is emblematic: the alliance is a 'they' inside 'us'.

'What must workers do about that?' She did not answer quickly, suggesting it is not something she has thought about yet or not something she is decided on. She uses a slightly confusing metaphor of investment to defer the reckoning to the next election:

> Uhmmm. [Pause] I, I don't know, but see ahhhm, at the same time, we – we just put them in a bank. *We put them in the bank. Like money. Because we know there is a time that they are going to need us. They are going to need us to campaign.* That time we are going to tell them, you know what we are not going to campaign for you guys, because it shows you are using us. Yes. *We are very angry.* But we are prepared to tell them we are not going to campaign for you guys. Because the people who are very strong it's the working class. *The working class is strong for campaigning.* So we are not going to campaign for them. Because it shows *they are making us a stepladder for them to go to parliament* whilst we are suffering on the ground. Yes. It's our standing point. [My emphases.]

So Carol had again deflected the problems of the strike to the political kingdom, but this time in a way which dreams of cutting against a key practice of the alliance as it actually was (mobilising election campaigns for the leading ANC). Carol's membership of the SACP eases shelving the conflict for the future as it allows her to envisage overturning the practice of the alliance without breaking from the framework of the alliance. At the same time, the yearning to overturn (to 'right') the actual practice of the alliance, despite kicking the conflict down the road, forces the image of the delayed reckoning to faintly prefigure life outside the ANC.

9.3. De-identification corralled?

In summary, then, the preceding sections traced Puleng's trajectory through an already deep dissatisfaction with government plumbing new depths, but dragging her sense of effective agency down with it; Florence's determined attempts to remain

upbeat about government punctured, along with her faith in the strike, intensifying her reliance on government but also intensifying her insistence on mandates travelling upwards, not only downwards; Carol deferring the problem to the political kingdom once again, but in a way that begins to imagine life outside the ANC, though without imagining life outside the alliance; and Gabasile, transformed into a question mark by the triple betrayals of government (twice) and the union leaders.

These narratives confirm, first of all, that identity ebbs and flows occurred at an individual level, not only as a collective projection. Despite their individual peculiarities, each of these narratives echoes the broad wave of identifications summarised in the first section of the chapter and Figure 8: strained loyalties tested further by the strike, restored or put to sleep by the Zuma deflection (even the partial striker entertains a moment of hope), heightened expectation followed by deepening damage in the second strike.

Second, these narratives suggest that the alliance and its role in managing discontent, at a grassroots level, is not a blind structural machine absorbing discontent like a black hole, nor a simple suppressor, but a *repeated action (of repair) that people do***.** However, third, these motions for repair do not constantly repeat themselves in the exact same way time after time. Things move on, and therefore going through the motions does not yield the same results every time. In particular, changing external pressures distort the iteration. In these cases, re-misidentification, to the extent that it was achieved, was achieved in both strikes *at the expense of the strike's demands*. In both strikes, consequently, there was therefore a cost to the alliance in the form of identity damage, and the second time around, the damage acquired new qualities. The strikers found ways to explain the damage without bursting their pre-existing theoretical models, but a sense of injury lingered *even – or especially - for the strikers closest to the actual operation of the alliance*, Nqobile and Carol, for whom identity damage invited glimpses of '*life outside the ANC*'.

I said in the introduction to this section that it was striking how stable the strikers' world views remain through the shocks of the two strikes. At first glance, this seems to entirely contradict my claim that the strikes precipitated identity eventfulness. This is not the case. The strikers' beliefs do move, though by what seems like millimetres rather than yards. But it is important to understand that the eventfulness in their identities does not emerge from self-introspection. The identity eventfulness is born in the *collision* between those models or world views and the changes in what is

happening around them, under the pressure of actual contradictions surfacing, changing the meaning and significance of those beliefs. The idea that the alliance is a device for government to listen to workers, for example, was, for any number of years, the standard and uncontested reasoning that tied the unions to a neo-liberal agenda. In the context of the strike with government patently failing to listen to workers, the same belief becomes resistant, even rebellious, and requires a raft of new excuses if it is to persist.

Were these identities in any way eventful identities? I argue yes, in the sense that they revolved around desiderata, such as a government that listens to workers, that were being revealed to be at odds with the actually existing practice of the alliance and the objective possibilities of a nationalist government.

The next chapter will conclude the thesis by summing up the series of nested conclusions reached in the body of the thesis, relating the insights from the data back to the theoretical questions raised by Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Chapter 10. Conclusion: eventfulness denied… or delayed?



Photo 3: (Repeated) 'When will this endless thing get finished?' 2010. Source: Claire Ceruti

This thesis has developed a series of nested insights which move in both directions amongst the specific, the concrete and the abstract (and in several directions through time), to contribute specific activist propositions regarding the outcome of the strikes; slightly more generalised propositions for activists and academia about the workings and limits of the alliance; more widely applicable critiques of literature on class identities and strikes through attention to the development and deflection of classed imagery in strikes; and conceptual mechanisms regarding identity fluidity in high-stakes class conflicts, which stretch literature on collective identity and mobilising identities in 'new' social movements. Together, they propose the importance of eventful identities (and their deflection); the concept of the 'near event'; and the need to recognise structural contradiction in theorising rupture.

Until here, the thesis has traced the development of striker identities through two significant public sector strikes, thus not only uncovering relatively rare insights into subjective processes in class formation (including political, workplace related and non-quotidian, strike-ready aspects), but also revealing a hidden element behind the two arcs of upheaval and repair in the alliance. The first strike was during Mbeki's downfall

and was the largest industrial strike till then. This strike revealed strains in the alliance and further strained it; strikers began overturning the established 'direction' of the alliance. This strike's conclusion was finally deferred to changing the leadership of the ANC, which rendered identity shocks dormant but also stored them up for later. The second strike, three years later, was a test of the repaired alliance, and the first big strike since Zuma replaced Mbeki. This strike was precipitated by expectations deferred by the previous strike. Here, the repaired alliance was exposed, and strikers' identities with government were now strained to breaking point. The end of this strike (which also exposes a divergence between the strikers and the union officials) once again suppressed now (in some cases) permanently scarred identities.

What was not obvious before this study was the *identity eventfulness* beneath that newly smoothed surface, an insight that was made possible by bringing the strikes together, which also showed that what was unfolding in and through these two strikes was not only about shifting factions in the ANC/alliance but also about a developing collective experience of the class antagonism previously held dormant in, and always at, the heart of the alliance.

This conclusion restates and draws together the main theoretical insights arising from tracing these arcs, specifically how the thesis stretches Sewell's theorisation of Events discussed in Chapter 2 as well as literature on class, collective and mobilising identity discussed in Chapter 3. In doing so I will link those critiques to each other as well as right and refine some of the crude and mechanistic understandings of these specific strikes and the alliance.

Chapter 9 concluded that individual strikers experienced *identity events* over the course of the strikes. Put another way, these strikers were forced to re-interpellate themselves in relation to the alliance. The strikes shifted the possibilities of what was imaginable to the strikers by inviting at least some of the strikers to imagine life without the ANC and outside the alliance. In Chapter 2 I proposed that eventfulness in subjectivity is an important and underdeveloped aspect of Sewell's conception of the Event: it is necessary to consider eventfulness in subjectivity specifically, not only as an element of events, because it may remain hidden when an Event fails to mature. More about this later. Subjective eventfulness also speaks to class formation and identities as well as to activist propositions concerning the strikes and the alliance. I will come back to these below.

Further, I posited that the identity events were not as a result of introspection but because government's actions during the strikes and their need for an alliance to manage discontent clashed with strikers' ideas of what the alliance was for and their immediate interests, needs and desires. I argued that these identities were eventful because they resisted these cold facts by continuing to express desiderata in conflict with the actually existing practice of the alliance, which would remain at odds with any government constituted within the nationalist politics of the ANC, even when the desiderata remained within the frame of the alliance. This observation brings classe(ed) contradiction and internal systemic contradiction into conceptualising rupture, which is at best rudimentary in Sewell.

Importantly, I showed that these identities emerged from a series of happenings where people's routine actions increasingly produced the 'wrong' results, supporting my statement in Chapter 2 that 'the disjuncture between the intended and the actual is an important source of eventfulness'. All the parties entered negotiations expecting to find common ground, only to find a deepening conflict unleashed. This is consistent with the picture of social structure which I developed in that chapter, which centres human agency without reducing structure to semiotics, and therefore admits *systemic internal contradiction* as a motor of eventfulness as well as *class* contradiction – in this case, contradictions arising from differential control of actual resources and the inevitably partisan uses of the cross class alliance. The ministers' need to control labour through the alliance conflicted with strikers' expectation that the alliance existed to ensure that workers' needs were represented in government. Chapter 7 in particular demonstrated that the presumed identity ('misidentification') intensified a sense of betrayal.

Primarily (but not only) through close attention to strikers' shifting identities and identifications, I further illustrated that the strikes were *near events* rather than non-events: specifically, the fact that the strikes took place at all demonstrated that the routine maintenance of structure (in this case, the self-regulation of the alliance) was already breaking down, opening up experimental subjectivities (wanting to turn the alliance on its feet, for example) and exercises of power (the 'indefinite strike'), but which failed to finally develop into a full-blown event. The concept of the near event – a state of indeterminate possibility which does not always develop into an Event - allows us to understand eventfulness in a way which allows for structural contradiction but retains the centrality of human agency in, finally, moving eventfulness towards an

Event or not. This conception foregrounds history as a series of *conjunctural alternatives*, rather than a chain of inevitabilities. Sewell allows for a transitional state, but does not consider the possibility that eventfulness may fail to mature.

Having the concept of the near event requires explanation not only of the development of Events but also of their failure to develop. In my study, the maturation of an Event was deflected, broadly speaking, by deferring the first strike's demands to the political kingdom (the Zuma solution), by the failure of the strikers to sufficiently *re-theorise* the alliance even while questioning its actuality, and, in both strikes, by the limits of the strikes' power. Later in this chapter I will return to some of the specific devices that strikers used to rationalise betrayal. For now, I will remind the reader that the deflection of the first strike contributed to a later eventful state by storing up contradiction, thus intensifying expectation at the start of the second strike. This suggests a longer sequence of unresolved contradiction and subjective experiences may contribute to Events than implied by Sewell's discussion of an encapsulated Event. Identity eventfulness, I have suggested in this study, plays a key role in such sequences, as strike identities and other conflict-related identities may 'go underground' at the end of a particular encounter, only to become salient again later when a crisis remains unresolved.

Turning now to my contributions specifically to theorising identity formation, Chapter 7 in particular illustrated several elements to complicate existing literature. First, it showed that instrumentalist renditions of 'us and them' and justifications for strikers' demands tended to *refract classed imagery*, so that strikers ideated themselves, the strike collective, the government-employer and the conflict itself in ways that enable class. The differences in the needs and interests of the classed contenders were rendered strategically salient in the strike. Class, in short, 'shone through' the strike even in the absence of explicit class identity and consciousness. This supports the assertions of several authors mentioned in Chapter 3, notably Skeggs as well as Savage, but takes us a step beyond Bourdieu, because the class boundaries thus implied were no longer internalised and 'played', but challenged (for example, by the demand that strikers deserve what politicians have).

Moreover, these particular strikes reflected class and classed experience in ways which resembled but overflowed the widespread consumptional, hierarchical or difference models. Especially but not only via the 'power flip', they introduced *relational* elements, resembling concepts of exploitation and incorporating *power* (ranging from

the idiom of the bloodsucker-renter to the voting queue). Further, the 'strike-ready' identity, I argued, required strikers to assign value to their own work, enabling one version of what I called 'the power flip'. This supports the argument that strikes have special possibilities for the formation of working class identity, and, in this case (perhaps mostly through the political element) for a wider proletarian identity, in that some strikers placed themselves in a broader 'community of fate' with delivery protestors, patients and pupils against their opponent, government-employer.

Additionally, and contrary to much of the literature on new social movements, which regards their mobilisation to arise from shared identity, collective action here *called forth* the collective identity 'all the public sector workers', rather than resulting from it – and also broke it on the wheel of the interdicts and some unions leaving the strike early. In both instances, the emergence of the collective identity was integrated with the action, rather than preceding it. Similarly, identities with patients and pupils were expressed, particularly in the second strike, in relation to the 'needs' of the strike.

Another form of the power flip was also present in relation to the alliance, sometimes entwined with the workplace power flip and generally more pronounced. This political version of the power flip emphasised accountability and democracy, and in fact *pivoted on the strikers' original misidentification* with government ministers. I demonstrated that these identifications moved from supplication through wanting an equalisation of the alliance to turning it on its head in the demand for 'a government that listens to the workers', a flip which had not evaporated for all workers by the end of the second strike.

Here too, structural contradiction is foregrounded within the interpellative approach I used to unpack the power flip, the restoration of the alliance ('re-misidentification') and the partial re-identification[159] of the alliance at the end of the second strike. This analysis emphasised that identities may undergo damage through exposure of disjuncture between who we think we are and who we actually are in relation to people positioned differently in terms of class and other forms of power. This supports my contention in Chapter 3 that volatile identities reforming in contradictory materialities may 'condense' abruptly; identities are therefore not only fluid and in process. They may also be contradictory and punctuated.

[159] By which I mean not re-identification *with* the alliance but *of* the alliance.

I have demonstrated, contrary to mechanistic analyses wherein the alliance was considered able to endlessly let off steam, that it was both a mechanism for control but also, by its nature – through the very same device that held it together - *stored up contradiction.* Macroscopically, the repeated restoration of the alliance (albeit in new configurations) despite the strikes indicates only the former. Taken at the less visible, subjective level of the strikers, however, I have shown that there was microscopic damage to the alliance.

I proposed the working concepts misidentification (related to mystification) and de-identification to deal with the punctuated shifts in identity witnessed in the strike. I showed that the strikers' original misidentification was a pivot of the power flip which pierced it, although the place thus opened was liminal: a door to see out of the alliance, which yet kept open the door to its restoration, as we saw in the re-misidentification at the end of the first strike and again, but differently, at the second strike. However, I have also demonstrated that the *repetition* of betrayals (first under Mbeki and then under Zuma) incurred wear and tear on the alliance's integrity. Strikers' identifications did not merely flip and then flop back into place twice; for most of the strikers, something was lost or learned in the repetition, illustrated by the subtle desiderata described at the end of Chapter 9, and this was true even for strikers who wished to defend the outcome, such as the shift from understanding negotiations as a compromise to the win-lose understanding described in Chapter 8. In that chapter, I described several specific devices which a minority of interviewed strikers used to reconcile dissonance at the end of second strike, including a re-inversion of the power flip, an inversion of mandates within the union, excusing the president by blaming government more broadly, and wishing for 'a president with a communist mind'. The first represents a simple return to the alliance-as-it-was, but required compartmentalisation, I suggested, to avoid contradiction. The others are more complex: the inversion of mandates was 'sour', blaming government suggests structural explanations, and wishing for a 'communist minded' government re-identified Zuma as insufficiently sympathetic to the working class. So there was movement even for those strikers who ended the two strikes wanting to retain the alliance.

This brings me back to the liminality of the de-identification pivoting on a betrayed misidentification. In Chapter 3 I called for a recognition of *identity damage* in studies of identity. My study has demonstrated that it is necessary for the study of collective

identity, mobilising identity and class identity to pay attention not only to the *construction* of identities but also to the way that conflictual mobilising may *destabilise* identities, and not necessarily simply because new identities displace old identities. It was necessary to develop the concepts misidentification and de-identification because identity destruction is as important as identity construction in high-stakes conflicts. Importantly, *old identities may become damaged before new ones are available*; this state of suspended normality and uncertainty is, by its nature, a state of eventfulness (though not inevitably an Event) which simultaneously explains the Janus-faced de-identification in the first strike: the damaged identity was matched by a readily available alternate identity except the temporally limited encounter-bound identity 'all the public sector workers'.

In summary, then, I have illustrated how these strikes refracted class in peculiar ways, and I suggest that strikes in general lend themselves more readily to surfacing (a particular register of) class and to recognising exploitation in ways that are less readily available to people thinking about class in every-day contexts. I have emphasised the role of contradiction in creating eventful states, and developed the concepts misidentification and de-identification to trace how strikers' attitudes to the alliance and the strike responded to unfolding contradictions in the alliance. I suggest that all studies of identity formation (and deformation), especially study of collective-mobilising identities, should consider these. Although I expect that they will not apply to, for example, race or gender identity formation in the same fashion, if at all, pinpointing differences would in itself cast light on how various dimensions of identity form in interaction with materiality and each other. Crucially, I proposed the concept of identity damage, a concept which crosses into the study of rupture, lending itself to a state of eventfulness. I proposed eventfulness as a concept to refine understanding of rupture which re-centres agency in the maturation of Events or their failure to mature, which makes possible the near Events. Finally, the thread running through all is the contention that not only Events but also near Events may produce events in subjectivity – the 'hidden element' in the strikes, and a possible precursor to later rupture.

To conclude, let me return to specific activist propositions regarding the specific strategic encounters in their immediate moment. I have shown that the strikes, far from being run-of-the-mill routines, were an early manifestation of strains in the alliance which further strained it, although it would be two more years before it truly ruptured.

Although the alliance appeared to restore itself after the public sector strikes, my study has shown that the restoration was achieved at the cost of thousands of tiny, invisible lacerations, and that one factor which allowed its restoration was the absence of alternate identities in the face of identity damage. The contention, therefore, that there was no place for left activists in such a strike is called into question by my study. I will end more or less where I began, in a manner true to an open-ended view of history: would things have turned out differently if we, the APF, had done more to relate to the strikes?

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Appendix A: Summary description of strike meeting – the struggle for 12%

In what follows I have typed my handwritten notes taken in the meeting as they appear in my notebook. I was standing next to Trevor Ngwane and he translated for me in the meeting where necessary.

20th of June 2007. Careers centre, Soweto. Nehawu meeting attended by some members of the AntiPrivatisation Forum.

Song to the tune of *Aletu umshimiwami* (Bring me my machine(gun) – 'bring me my money. You are holding us back'.

Viva SACP viva. Viva ANC…. Silence. Insults. [!]

Platform: we are angry. We elected this government. (floor interjects 'if they do shit we remove them!') The working class must benefit'

Platform puts forward '8%' as our 'fallback' position. Howls from the floor.

Floor:

'This strike is all about now or never. If we don't win we will be poor for ever. We know where we are going'.

'The issue is how are we going to sustain. Our demands have not been addressed.'

'Never mind 'weakening of strike'. We also want to watch the world cup. Its not our fault if the government is behind

'Don't go there and tell those people we want 8%

'If we are saying 10% let it be 10%. If our demands are not met then we are saying as Nehawu there is no policy congress. Mandate is 10% but are we going to sustain for 6 months? I don't think so.

'How will deductions work? One thing we have to talk to today is how do we intensify. KZN is moving – we don't need to be so diplomatic

'No work no pay – well then they must deduct everyone because everyone will get the increase. If union is saying fallback is 8%,

'This is our government. We want 10%. We are the leaders of the ANC – asinyapho! The leaders must listen to us.

'It's a crucial stage – I'm worried about time. I want to deal with rights. Those inside (not striking) if they decide to stay, they must stay inside forever.

‘If we are going forward, we must be the same number. 80% are still working. 10% is 10% - asijiga (we don’t turn around)

Platform:

‘Thanks to APF and community of Soweto. We can’t sustain this alone. We must walk side by side. We are also thankful to communist party and Young Communist League because this is the party of the working class.’

Appendix B: Photographs

B1. Strike one photos (2007)

The early part of the strike



Photo 4: The 25 May action culminated at the union buildings in Pretoria. Source Mosa Phadi or Claire Ceruti



Photo 5: leaders of various unions at the front of the march in Pretoria, May 25 source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 6: Festive mood in Pretoria, 25 May. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 7: Pretoria 25 May: a festive mood. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 8: festive mood in Pretoria, 25 May. The placard (clearer in film footage) reads 'Moleketi don't mess with us we only want 12%' (Muleketi musa ukusijwayela sifuna 12% na). source:: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 9: 'Moolikheid', which means 'trouble; in Afrikaans, was a popular pun on 'Moleketi'. (The other white placard reads 'We demand 12% or uthini? [Zulu, 'what do you say?] Never!' The brown placard reads simply '12% not 6%' with what looks like 'unfair' in lighter letters beside the 6% Source: Claire Ceruti

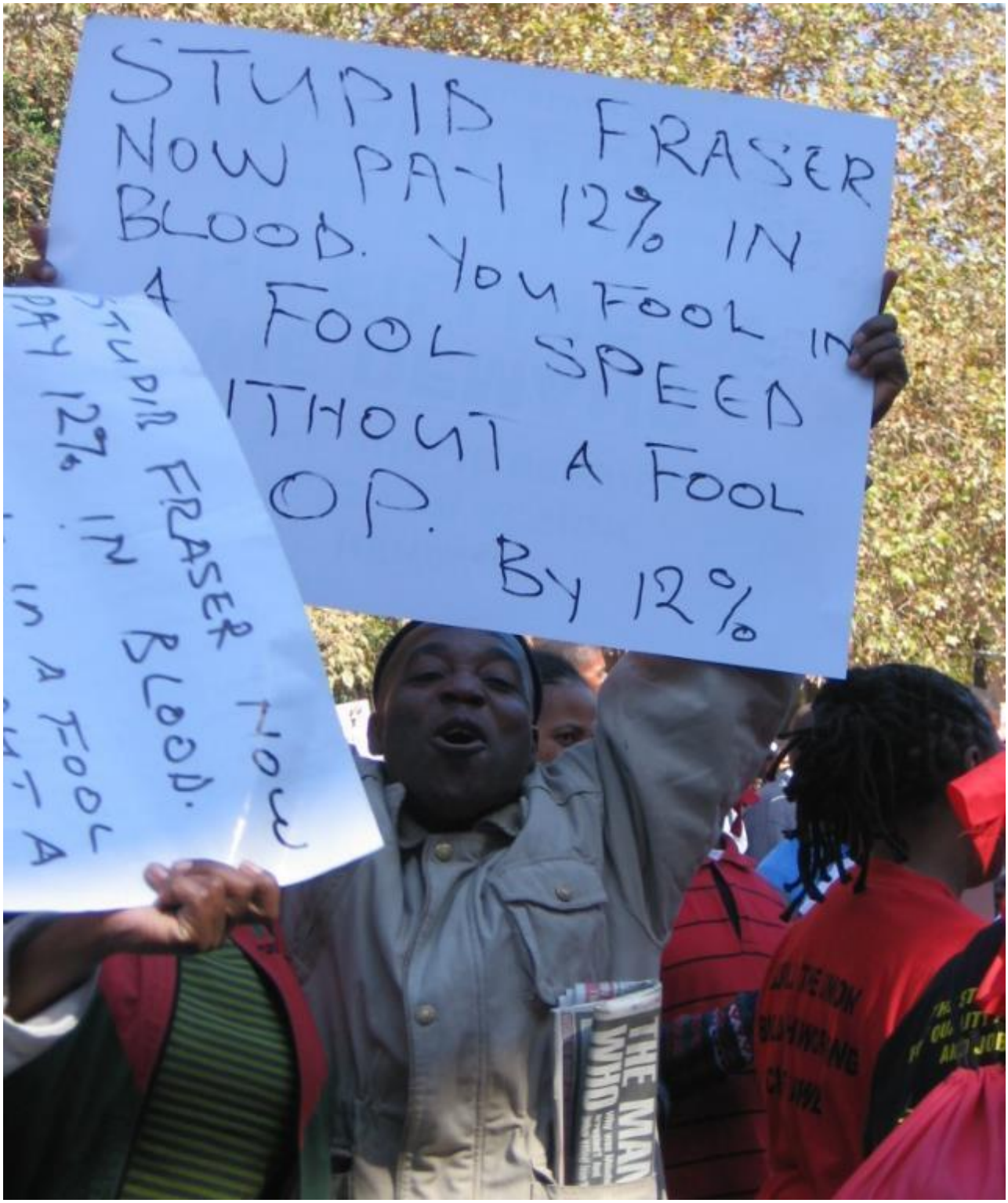


Photo 10: 'Stupid Fraser ... now pay in blood', placard in Pretoria May 25. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 11: marchers squat while toyi-toying in Pretoria May 25. They are most likely singing that they will not work, just sit.. (The song appears again on June 1). The poster at the back shows Fraser as a mouse and Sadtu as a fist hovering over the mouse. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 12: 'Six percent is good in your toilet'. Fologong means 'go down'. Pretoria, 25 May. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 13: 'Moleketi, do you want to see the trouble? Just pay 12%' (original in Afrikaans, playing on the similarity in sounds between Moleketi and the Afrikaans for trouble, 'moeilikheid'. Source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 14: Pretoria, 25 May. A poster containing several 'basic' themes for the march – the contraposition of government and strikers summarised in the percentages, the suggestion of inequality in the '57%' (recommended for cabinet ministers) and the sense of personal injury conveyed in the personal insult to the minister. Source: Kamelah Rasheed.



Photo 15: Placards in Pretoria 25 May including an official placard (bottom right) and a slightly obscured placard reading 'Fraser Fatcats 57% Proletariat 6% you are indeed impediment to a better life for all'. The Hospersa placard at the back translates roughly (from Setwsana, with the last word in Afrikaans) as 'We are tired of thank you!' perhaps meaning that thanks is no longer enough recognition. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 16: Pretoria, 25 May. Placard reads 'We want 12% not peanuts (6%). Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 17: Pretoria, 25 May, a striker makes a popular gesture for 'Chelete' (pay) indicating money by rubbing her thumb against forefinger. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 18: Pretoria, 25 May. A woman in a Cosatu t-shirt carries a home-made Hospersa placard (the label is clear in another photo). The placard in Zulu reads (we think) 'Give your 6 percent to the dogs and your guinea fowl. Photo: Kameelah Rasheed

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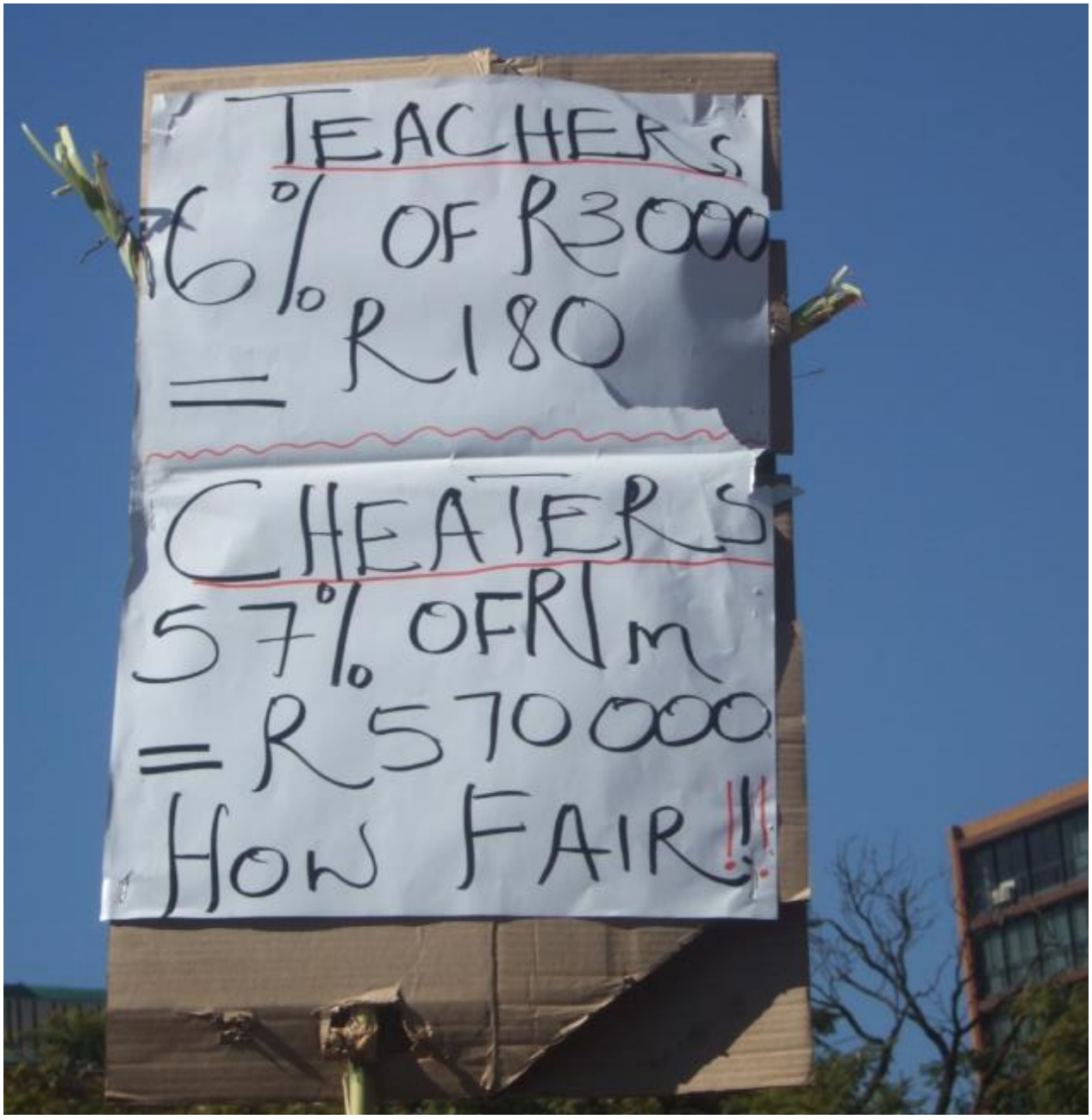


Photo 19: 'Teachers vs Cheaters'. source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 20: Pretoria, 25 May: a placard contrasts 'heavyweight' Tito Mboweni (the Reserve Bank governor of the time) with 'poor teachers'. The placard reads Down with 6% down (Phansi nge 6% phansi) Tito says 12% will affect inflation, what about 57%, won't it affect inflation? Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 21: An insult. Source Kameelah Rasheed

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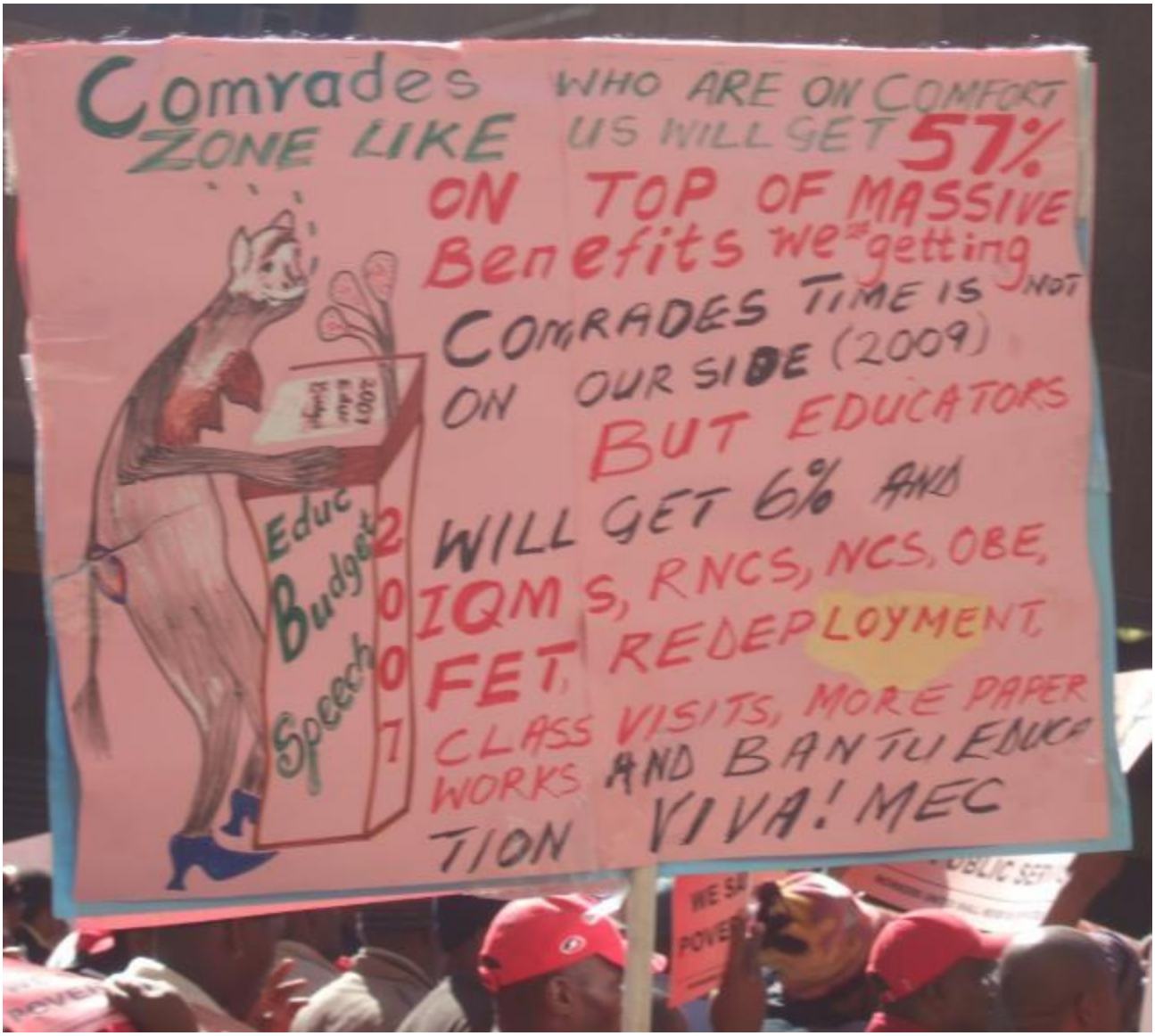


Photo 22: Placard, Pretoria 25 May, which implies that Fraser Moleketi is a baboon while contrasting proposed increases for cabinet ministers with the wage offer. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 23: Three ranks of police, some heavily armed, separated the strikers from steps of the union buildings. Source: Clare Ceruti

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Photo 24: Hospersa placard in Pretoria, 25 May. 'The people have spoken'. source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 25: Hospersa placard Pretoria 25 May: 'Dictators don't belong in our democracy' source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 26: Placard Pretoria 25 May: Fuck the capitalists (top left corner) source:: Claire Ceruti



Photo 27: Pretoria 25 May. These Hospersa placards link salaries with corruption and poverty. source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 28: implications of corruption and inequality. source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 29: A member of the police union Popcru carries a placard in Pretoria on May 25th which reads '2010 disaster - We demand 12%', implying that a successful world cup depends on workers. The other side of the placard reads 'Zuma for president' (see next photo). source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 30: 'Zuma for president' – the reverse of the placard in the previous photo – gets a thumbs up from a health worker during the march in Pretoria on May 25. source: Kameelah Rasheed

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Photo 31: Marchers cram the street outside the Gauteng Legislature in Johannesburg, 1 June 2007. The poster in the centre foreground caricatures Fraser Moleketi and translates roughly as 'You are stingy with money' (from isiZulu, uthanda kabi ukuncishana ngemali, where ukuncishana means roughly holding onto something even when there is plenty). The large banner in the background, with the slogan superimposed over '57%', is one of very few which mentioned Mbeki specifically in this strike. Zooming in on the picture, I discovered that it has a frame designed for it to be carried by one person, who appears to be white.



Photo 32:A group of teachers toyi-tyoi energetically in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Credit Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 33: The same group of teachers toyi-toyi energetically in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Credit Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 34: a group of women teachers 'perform' the phrase 'sohlala' (we will sit) while toyitoying in Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Credit Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 35: A demonstration by 'social movement' activists in 2011, illustrating the tactic, by then well-established, of sitting in the road briefly to draw attention to an issue and to assert control of the street (sometimes while chanting 'Whose streets? Our streets!', borrowed directly from the Seattle movements. Alternately the action can be achieved with an older chant used to bring people to order in a meeting: 'Hlala phansi, bamb'umtheto (Sit down, hold to the rules/law). Actual road blockades, a popular tactic for delivery protests, tend to involve greater use of inanimate objects such as tyres. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 36: 'This time I must strike' placard in Johannesburg, 1 June 2007. Source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 37: This placard represents the Afrikaans word for 'hole' literally, to read 'Ons is gatvol, 6.5% se gat'. The phrase loses much in translation to English: roughly, 'We are fed up, 6.5- percent's arse' Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b)



Photo 38: 'Some animals are more equal than others', an Orwellian reference to the proposed pay rises for parliamentarians. The poster in the middle reads 'Sorry my kids daddy is at WAR for 12%. Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 39: Middle placard reads 'My house, my salary, my medical, my goodness!', (original in Afrikaans) with the logo of the Suid Afrikanse Onderwysers Unie, South African Teachers Union. The placard on the left is from Naptosa, the National Professional Teachers Association of South Africa. Neither were Cosatu affiliates. The placard on the right is from Nehawu. Johannesburg 1 June 2007 (Screenshot from Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).



Photo 40: Marshalls from the Public Servants' Association, a non-Cosatu union, and Nehawu, a Cosatu affiliate for health workers, in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed.

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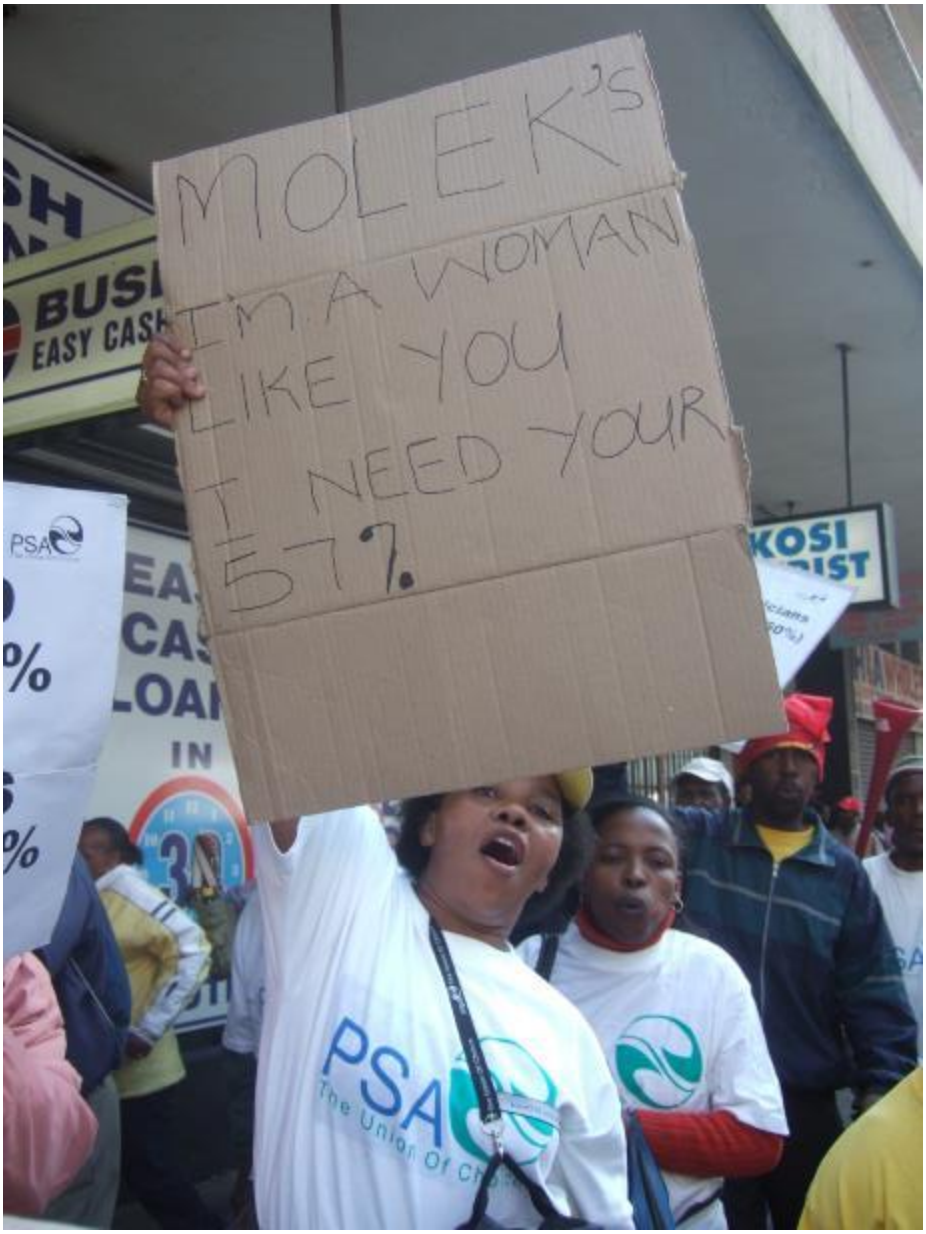


Photo 41: Identity and disidentity: 'I'm a women like you', placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source Claire Ceruti



Photo 42: 'Moleketi look now, the time has arrived. We are hungry and thirsty. Give us what we ask, don't just think of yourself [?] (remainder of line obscured for entire shot). Enough is enough.' From Afrikaans, Moleketi, kyk nou, die tyd het aangekom. Ons is honger en dors gee ons wat ons vra, moenie net dink van jouself [?]obscured for entire shot] Genoeg is genoeg.Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 13m06)



Photo 43: 'Government should look out for their own', placard in Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 44: This long placard carried by a teacher is like an outline of common placard themes on 1 June 2007. It reads 'We are the mother of all professions [our work is valuable]. Today you can write your name [because of us] and the difference between 6% and 57% [differential treatment]. We did not teach you to lie to be greedy selfish and untrustworthy [disappointed expectations of common humanity]. We are very angry [Self explanatory]. You are not human! [My emphasis] Sis [an expression of disgust]. We are not sure what Wa bosa (or wa boxa) werfa! means. (Original mixed English, sms-shorthand, Afrikaans and Sesotho. Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 4m21)



Photo 45: A pair of placards which read 'Give that 6 percent to Jabu' (original in Afrikaans) Jabu Moleketi, in the pasted picture, is Fraser Moleketi's former husband. Johannesburg, 1 June 2007, Source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 46: the large placard on the left implies that public workers deserve as much as the minister and her (former) cabinet minister husband. The placard on the right appeals to Naledi Pandor, then minister of education, as a mother. It also implies that public workers must get what she gets ('you can photocopy your cheque for me). 'Pandortjie' is a diminutive which could imply affection, but also disrespect or a put down. The small placard at the back left, 'no to 6% [obscured] yes to 12% has been annotated: 'Your mother's 6% (arse)hole 6.5% (from Afrikaans. I am assuming that gaat here is intended as 'gat', (arse)hole).



Photo 47: Give that 6 percent to Jabu (Moleketi, Fraser Moleketi's former husband who was also a cabinet minister.

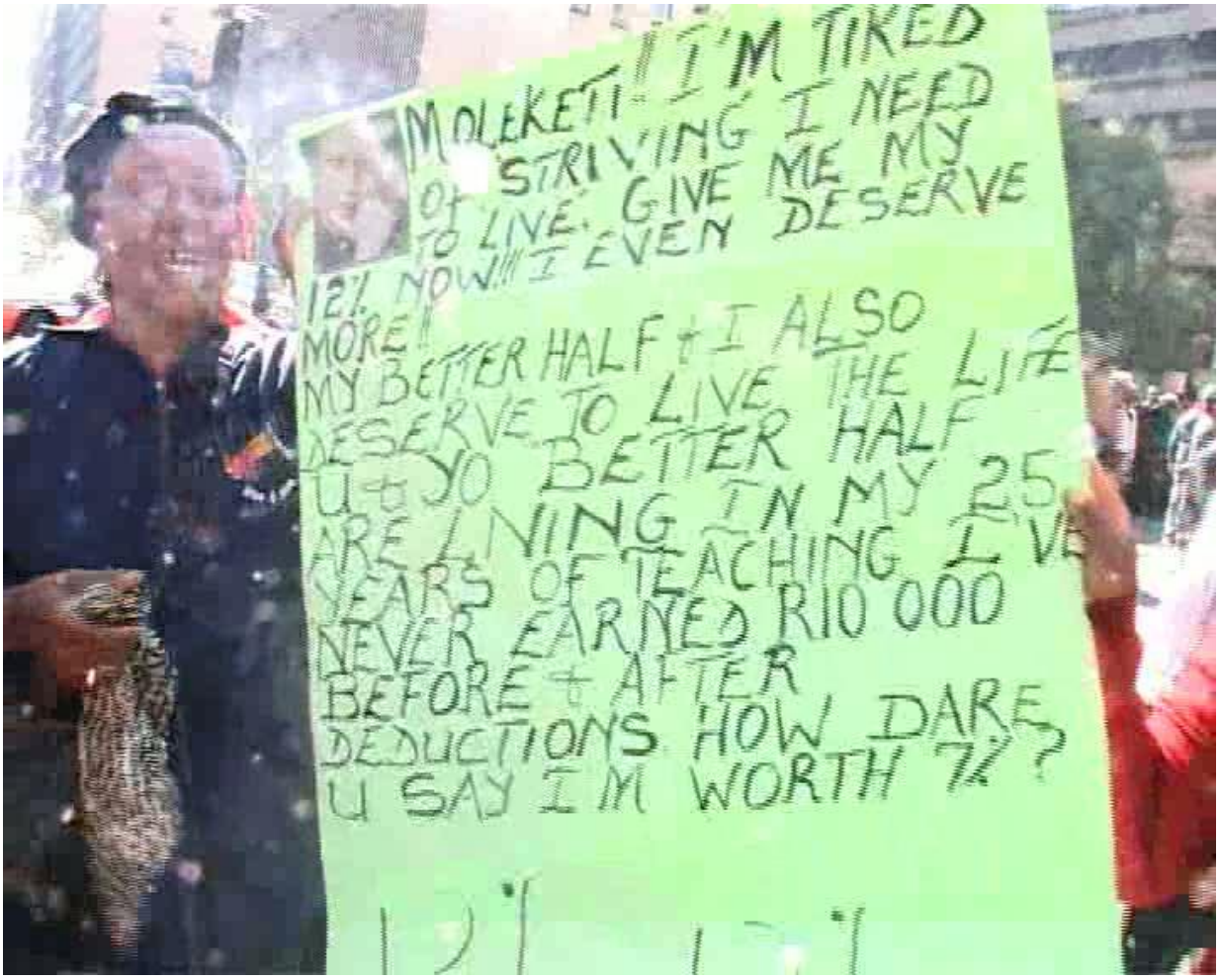


Photo 48: Two women carry a placard which captures deprivation, dignity and worth, building to the demand for 12% to 'live the life you and your better half are living'. There are layers and layers of commentary in the reference to Moleketi's (former) marriage but the basic association was most likely that married teachers cannot both receive the housing allowance. Once this is taken into account, we can then reflect on how the fact that the minister was a woman not only encouraged male and female strikers to sometimes frame the dispute in gender stereotypes, but also invited women strikers to compare and contrast themselves with Moleketi while appealling to their commonality. Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 8m07)



Photo 49: "Give your mom 6%"



Photo 50: The placard reads Phambili 12% Phansi 6% (in Zulu, forward 12% down 6%) and shows a picture of Moleketi with a baboon's tail, shitting 6%. 'Let's exchange our salaries' is written next to the large bag of cash she is holding in front of her. She seems to be smoking a cigar, perhaps to imply that she is a fatcat, and her gender is indicated through symbolic breasts and heels. Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 31m45)



Photo 51: 'Fraser you are whoring with our money! Today you are going to be soft like tomato, [meaning of next to words unclear] (You) mess!' (The meaning of 'veil pop' is unclear. It could either intend dirty pap or 'vuil pop', dirty doll in Afrikaans (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 33m50).

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Photo 52: Placard equates the government offer with poverty in Johannesburg, 1 June 2007. Source: Kameelah Rasheed.

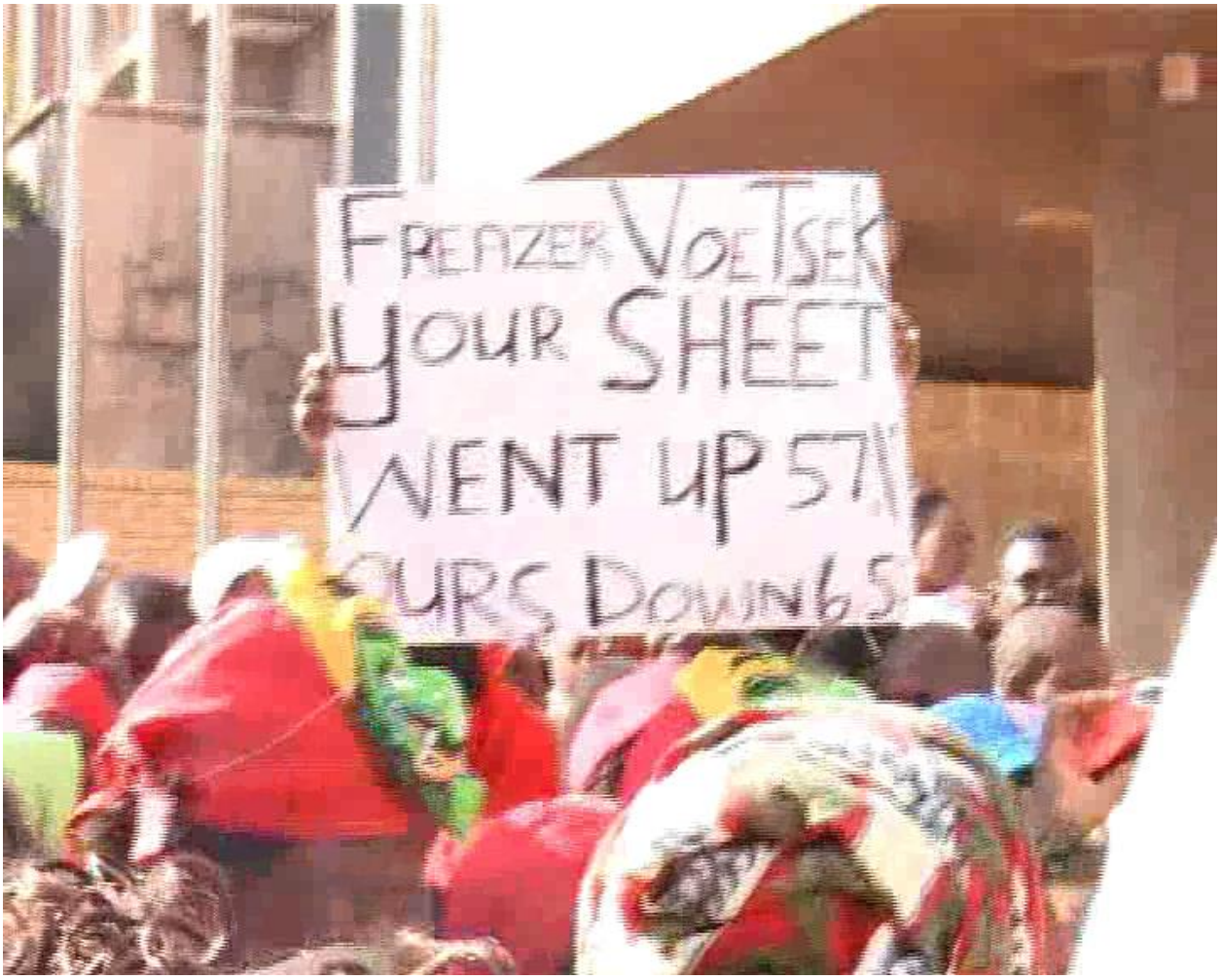


Photo 53: 'your sheet went up 57% ours down'; screenshot of placard in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).



Photo 54: the pink placard contrasts the government's proposed increase with inflation ('the economy') and with the proposed increases for 'president'. Fourth line, obscured, refers to the 12% demand. Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).



Photo 55: Placard, 'Take your 6 percent to your bum' (original in Zulu, thanks to Gloria Mphekgwane for translation). There is also something on the reverse of the placard about Fraser-Moleketi's husband. The placard at top left, too small to read clearly here, reads '6% is for unskilled, unprofessional, unreasonable people like yourself!' Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed

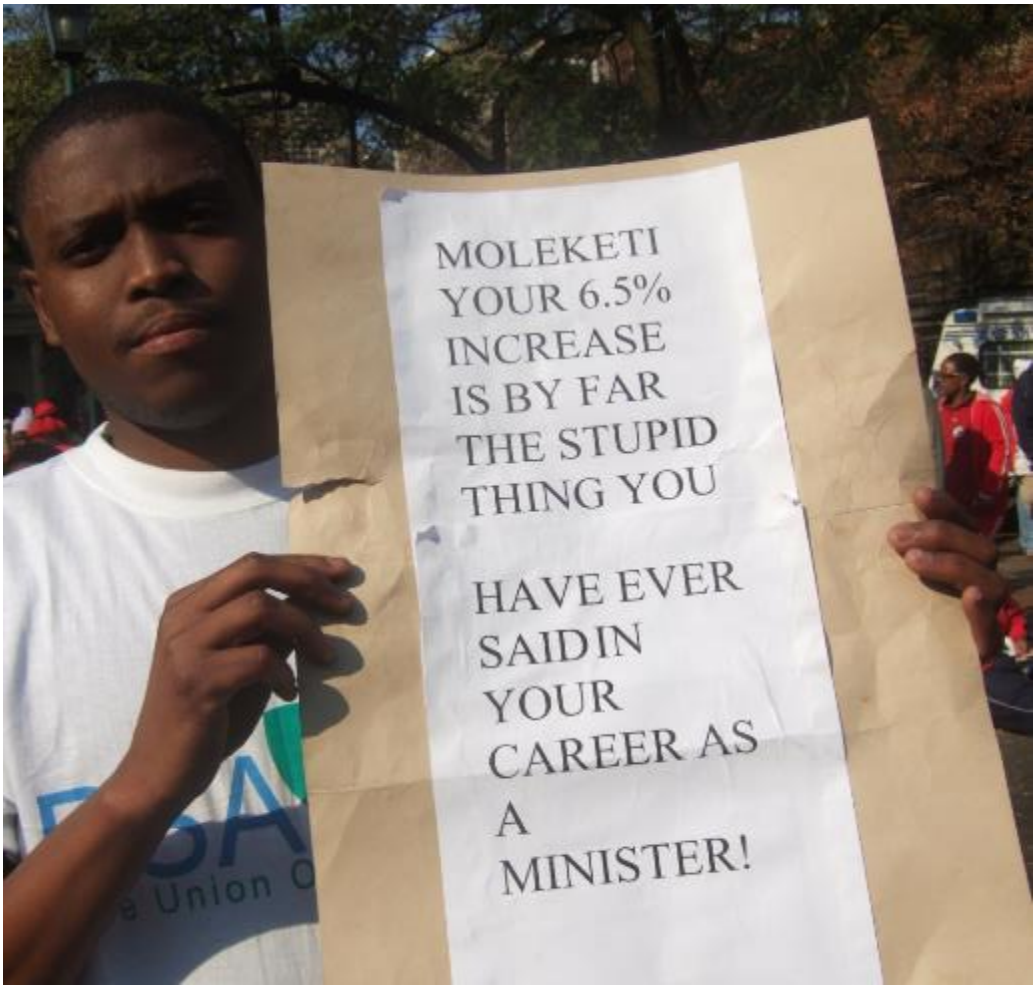


Photo 56: 'By far the stupid thing' – placard, Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source Claire Ceruti



Photo 57: A visual representation of 12% and 6% in Johannesburg 1 June 2007, picking up the theme from a placard shown in Photo 12. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).



Photo 58: 'Shit is shit!' (from Afrikaans) placard, Johannesburg 1 June 2007 (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b)



Photo 59: Placard carried by a medium aged woman (in the white hat), moving with a Nehawu group, translates roughly as '6% cunt, man! [Man in this context is an expression of emphasis or disgust] 6.5 percent (arse)hole man! 12% Nice Thank you! We are fed-up!' From Afrikaans, 6% moer man! 6.5 % gat man. 12% mooi dankie! Ons is gatvol! (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 31m49)



Photo 60: 'We demand respect', Moleketi get lost' - placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007, which captures nicely the intertwining of respect and insult at the heart of the insulting placard. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).

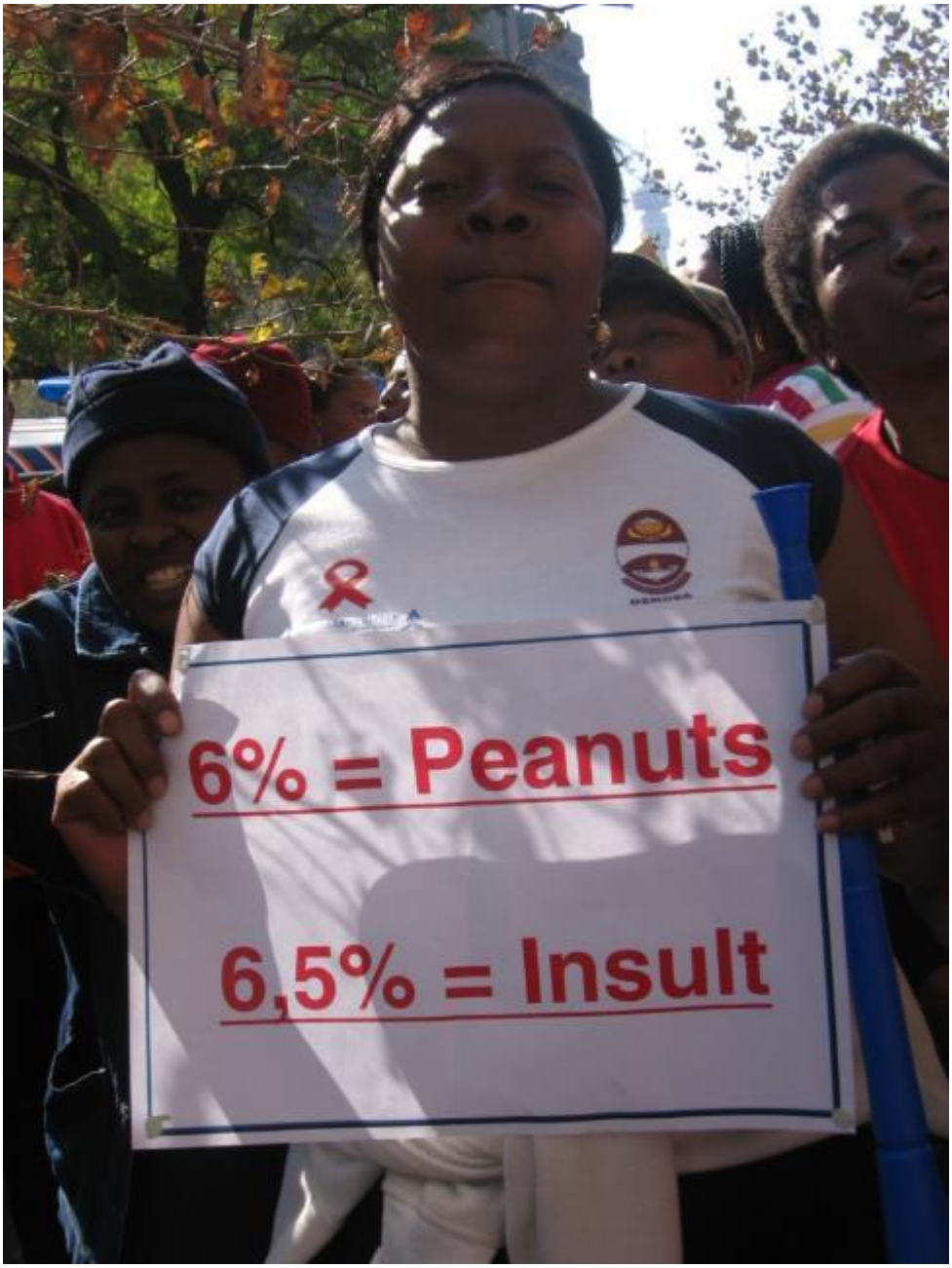


Photo 61: 6 percent, the original offer, compared with the 'new offer' in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed.



Photo 62: 6 % is an insult, 6.5% no work placard in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed

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Photo 63: 'Want loyalty, get a dog'. Placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 64 'Peanuts are for monkeys' placard in Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Credit Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 65: Rats and monkeys – placard in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. (It looks like the author of this placard originally wrote 6.5 % is for baboons and then scribbled that out – 'baboon' is a racially loaded insult in South Africa). Source Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 66: 6% for monkeys, 12% for workers, to hell with Geraldine. Placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c)



Photo 67: Placard front left reads 'The lord looked at my work and was pleased and looked at my salary and cried. What a shame!! [obscured]% please'. Johannesburg, 1 June 2007. (The other two placards are described elsewhere.) The marshalls holding the rope include Nehawu, the health workers' union, and Denosa, a nurses organisation, both affiliated to Cosatu Source: Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 68: Two placards asserting the importance of teaching. The one of the left –'Educators are the cornerstone of society' - was produced by SAOU, a non-Cosatu teachers' union, but the woman carrying it, who is wearing a Sadtu t-shirt, has folded the logo out of sight. Through its contrast, the placard in the middle implies the question, who is really doing the work? It reads '57% for MPs, 6% for spadeworkers, why?' Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source: (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 28m57)



Photo 69: A poster carried by a man from Sadtu contrasts the qualifications of ministers and educators. In the educators' column he has listed 'diplomas, degrees, honours, MA, PhD and 'struggle with 6%' while the ministers' column has just one qualification – 'the liberation struggle' – which brings them 20-57% (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 16m59)

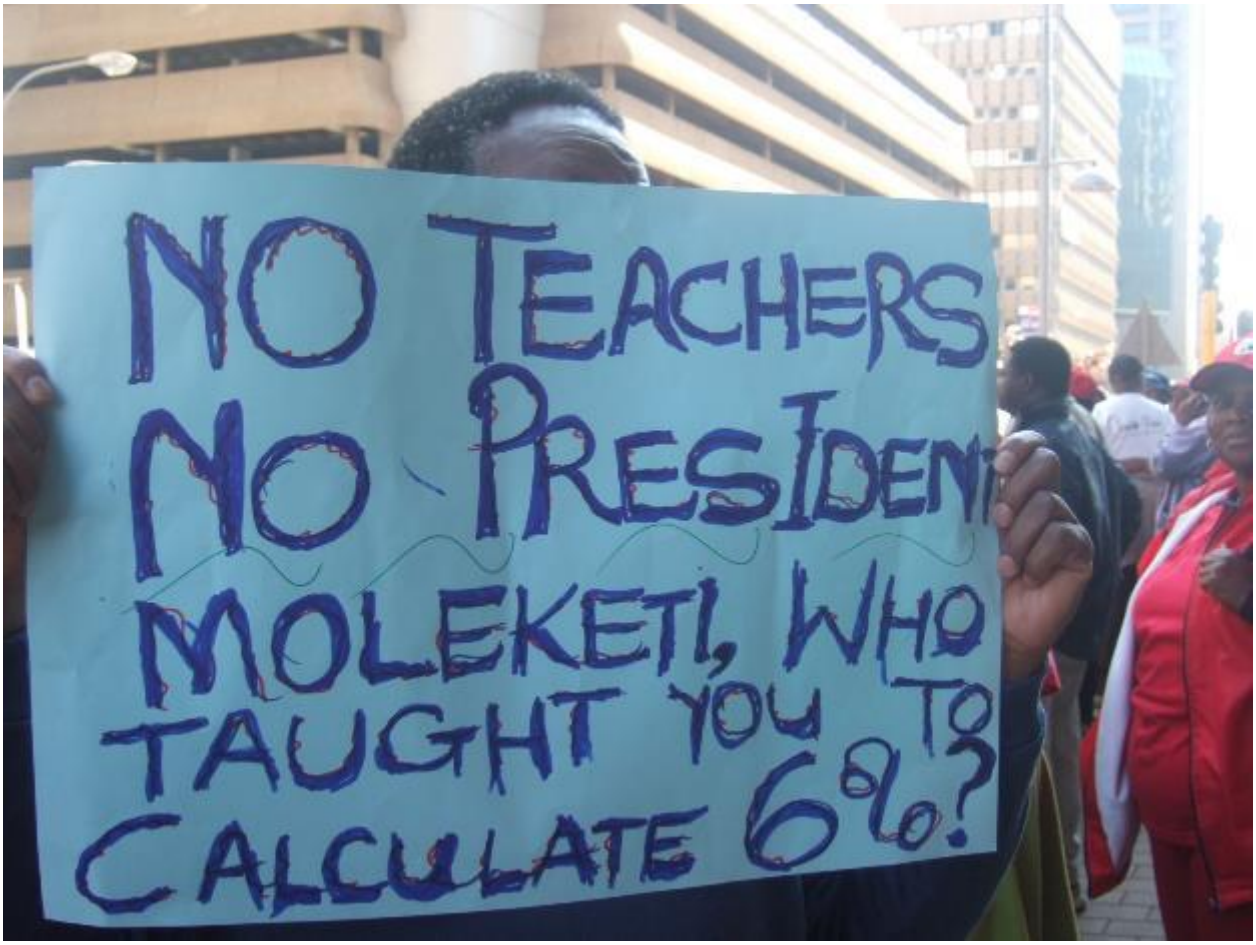


Photo 70: 'No teachers, no president' Johannesburg 1 June 2007 – an early version of those placards emphasising the teachers' contribution in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source: Kameelah Rasheed

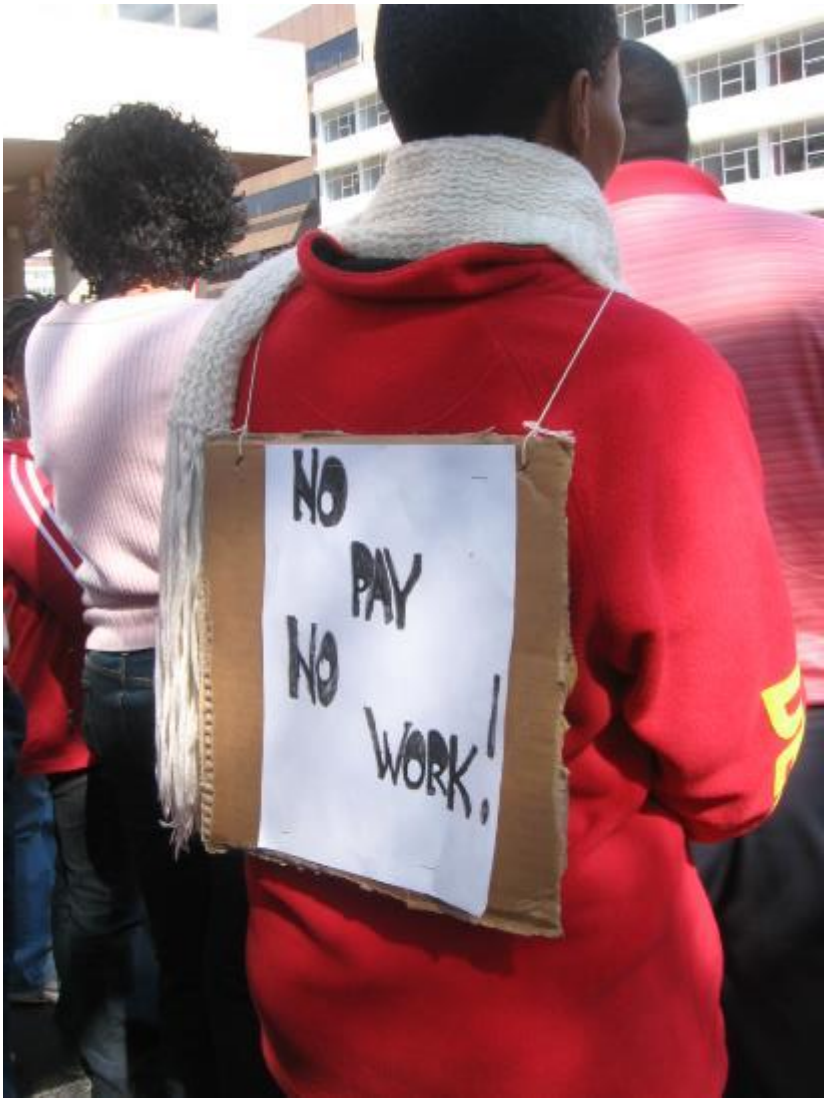


Photo 71: a placard turning on its head the employer's injunction that there would be 'no work, no pay' during the strike in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 72: 'No 12% no work', remainder obscured. A placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Claire Ceruti

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Photo 73: Threat placard punning on Moleketi and the Afrikaans word for trouble. Johannesburg 1 June 2007. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007b).



Photo 74: 'An empty stomach...' – placard hints at defiance if the demands are not met. Johannesburg 1 June 2007 Source Kameelah Rasheed



Photo 75: placard implying that 'hungry teachers' will not do a good job, in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed.

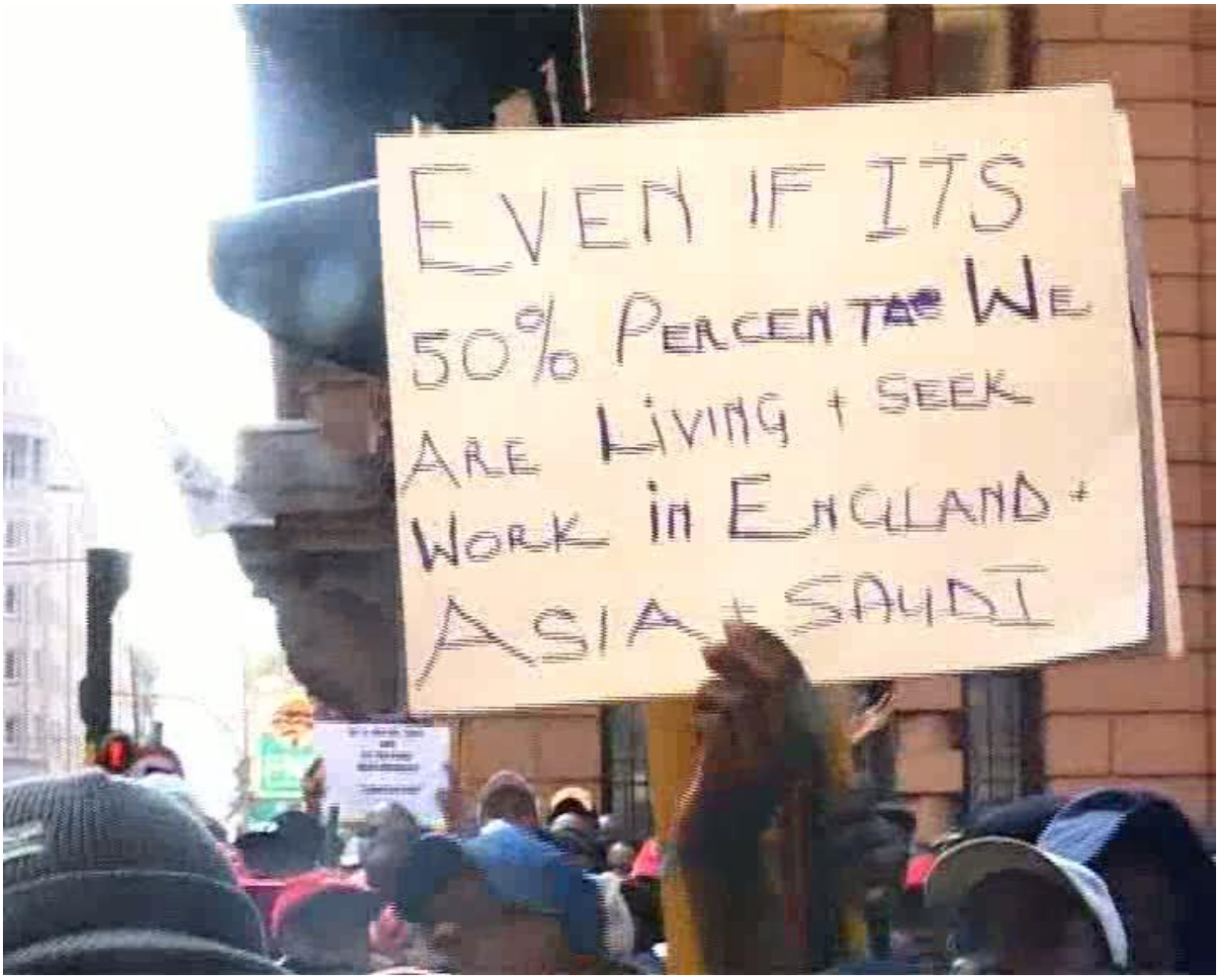


Photo 76:Strikers threaten to withdraw their labour totally to other countries. (Footage, 33m27).



Photo 77: Threat: 'Moleketi you have overstayed your welcome' – screenshot of placard carried in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Claire Ceruti.



Photo 78: 'Our demands must be met [??by force??] 12 percent or out of the office'. Placard Johannesburg 1 June 2007. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c)



Photo 79: 'Madisha [Cosatu president] stop Moleked [possibly a pun on Moleketi's name, sounding like 'moeilikheid', trouble] with Apartheid salaries. 6% is crap' from the Afrikaans 6% is kak. (Ceruti and Phadi 2007c, 19m31).

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Photo 80: 'When educators demand 12% there is outcry from the public but when the president is promised 57% there is silence amongst the public, parliament, opposition parties, politicians and so-called analists (sic)!' Note the very small writing at the top 'Satawu (transport workers' union) support Sadtu (teachers union). Other self-made placards (centre and bottom centre) read 'Public servants' pay = Zim $' and '57% for fat cats and 6% for poor (obscured) workers' Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Claire Ceruti.

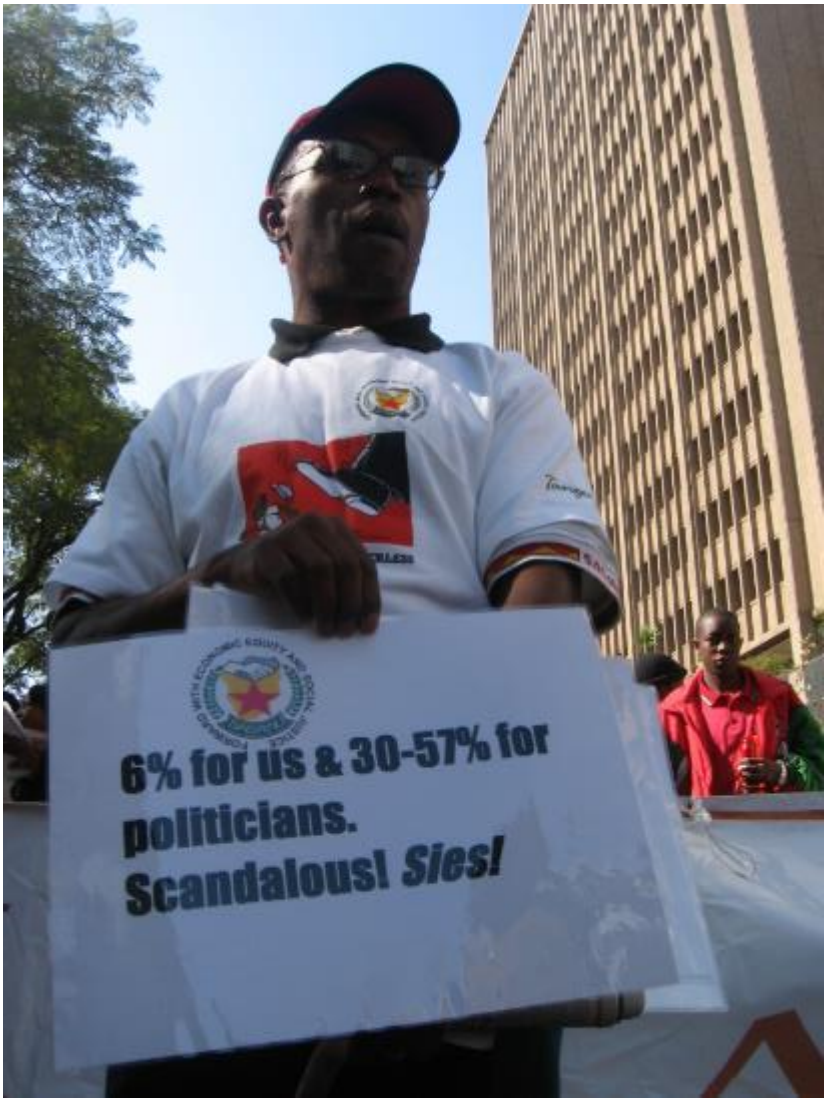


Photo 81: a poster contrasts politicians and public servants increases in Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source Kameelah Rasheed.



Photo 82: 'Those who are in parliament are earning high salaries compared to us as trainers (teachers)

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The challenges of striking



Photo 83: Teachers joined health workers to picket CHB hospital. Source: Claire Ceruti.



Photo 84: Teachers joined health workers to picket CHB hospital. Source: Claire Ceruti.



Photo 85: a placard written on the back of an official poster claims a continuity with past struggles. It reads '1976 it was us, 2007 we're back'. Source: Claire Ceruti.



Photo 86: 'grasshopping' teachers and health workers disrupt the traffic outside CHB hospital. Source: Claire Ceruti.

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Photo 87: Police separate strikers from the offices of the Gauteng provincial government, Johannesburg 1 June 2007. Source: Claire Ceruti.

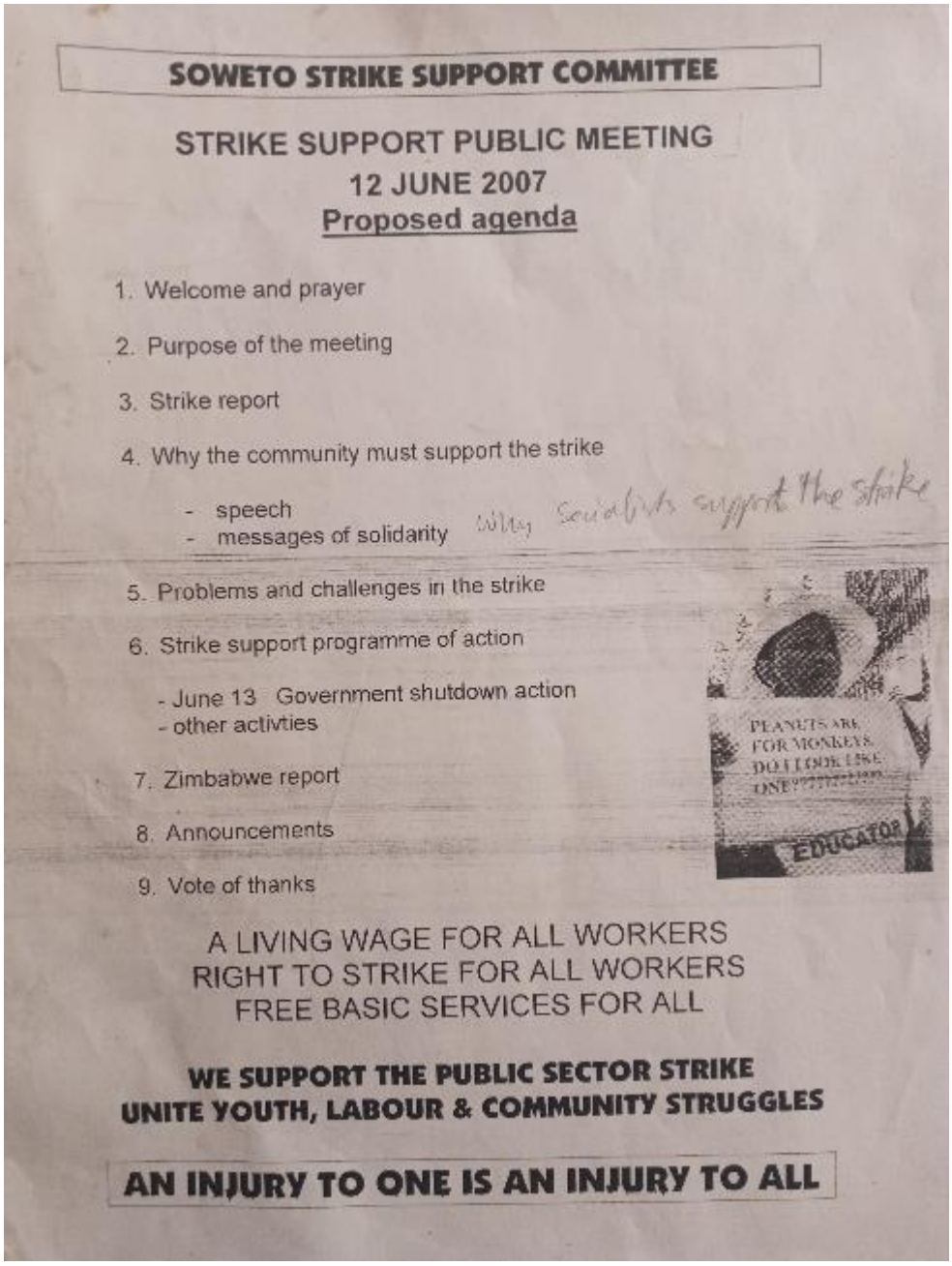


Photo 88: a heavy police presence in Johannesburg 1 June 2007 – but the police are not defensive in this case: look at the doors standing wide open, anti-riot grills up. Source Kameelah Rasheed.

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Photo 89: Soweto Strike Support public meeting. Source: Claire Ceruti.



SOWETO STRIKE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

STRIKE SUPPORT PUBLIC MEETING
12 JUNE 2007
Proposed agenda

1. Welcome and prayer
2. Purpose of the meeting
3. Strike report
4. Why the community must support the strike
   - speech
   - messages of solidarity

Why Socialists support the strike

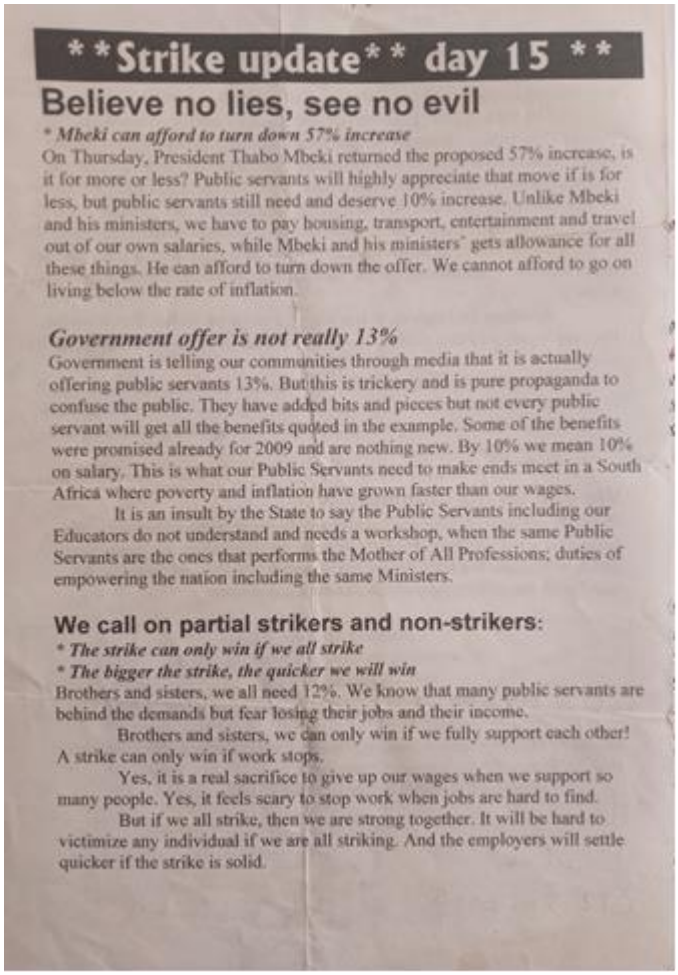
5. Problems and challenges in the strike
6. Strike support programme of action
   - June 13 Government shutdown action
   - other activties
7. Zimbabwe report
8. Announcements
9. Vote of thanks

A LIVING WAGE FOR ALL WORKERS
RIGHT TO STRIKE FOR ALL WORKERS
FREE BASIC SERVICES FOR ALL

WE SUPPORT THE PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE
UNITE YOUTH, LABOUR & COMMUNITY STRUGGLES

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Photo 90: Soweto Strike Support committee public meeting agenda. Source: Author's personal archive.



****Strike update** day 15 ****

Believe no lies, see no evil

** Mbeki can afford to turn down 57% increase*

On Thursday, President Thabo Mbeki returned the proposed 57% increase, is it for more or less? Public servants will highly appreciate that move if is for less, but public servants still need and deserve 10% increase. Unlike Mbeki and his ministers, we have to pay housing, transport, entertainment and travel out of our own salaries, while Mbeki and his ministers' gets allowance for all these things. He can afford to turn down the offer. We cannot afford to go on living below the rate of inflation.

Government offer is not really 13%

Government is telling our communities through media that it is actually offering public servants 13%. But this is trickery and is pure propaganda to confuse the public. They have added bits and pieces but not every public servant will get all the benefits quoted in the example. Some of the benefits were promised already for 2009 and are nothing new. By 10% we mean 10% on salary. This is what our Public Servants need to make ends meet in a South Africa where poverty and inflation have grown faster than our wages.

It is an insult by the State to say the Public Servants including our Educators do not understand and needs a workshop, when the same Public Servants are the ones that performs the Mother of All Professions; duties of empowering the nation including the same Ministers.

We call on partial strikers and non-strikers:

** The strike can only win if we all strike*

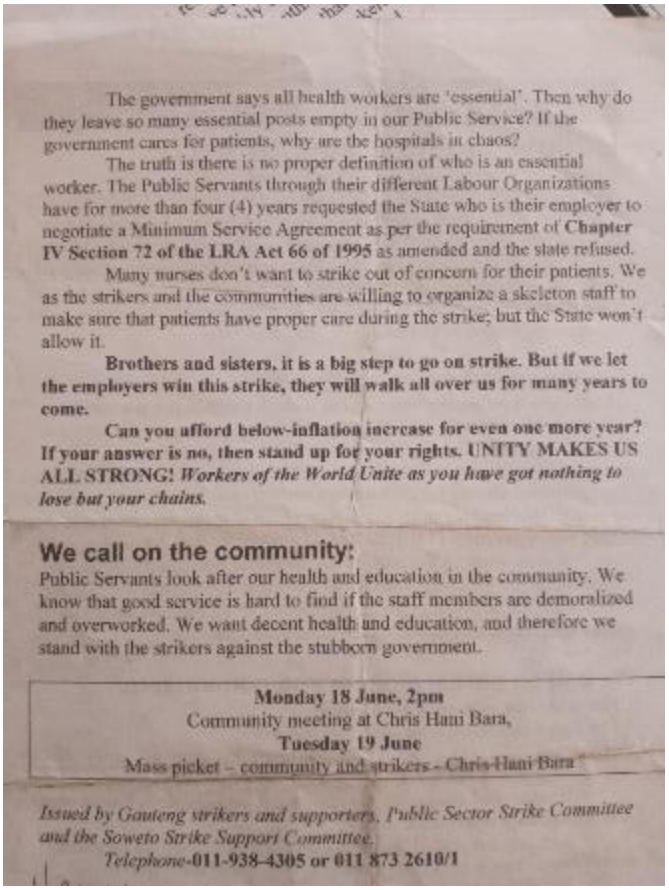
** The bigger the strike, the quicker we will win*

Brothers and sisters, we all need 12%. We know that many public servants are behind the demands but fear losing their jobs and their income.

Brothers and sisters, we can only win if we fully support each other! A strike can only win if work stops.

Yes, it is a real sacrifice to give up our wages when we support so many people. Yes, it feels scary to stop work when jobs are hard to find.

But if we all strike, then we are strong together. It will be hard to victimize any individual if we are all striking. And the employers will settle quicker if the strike is solid.



The government says all health workers are 'essential'. Then why do they leave so many essential posts empty in our Public Service? If the government cares for patients, why are the hospitals in chaos?

The truth is there is no proper definition of who is an essential worker. The Public Servants through their different Labour Organizations have for more than four (4) years requested the State who is their employer to negotiate a Minimum Service Agreement as per the requirement of **Chapter IV Section 72 of the LRA Act 66 of 1995** as amended and the state refused.

Many nurses don't want to strike out of concern for their patients. We as the strikers and the communities are willing to organize a skeleton staff to make sure that patients have proper care during the strike; but the State won't allow it.

Brothers and sisters, it is a big step to go on strike. But if we let the employers win this strike, they will walk all over us for many years to come.

Can you afford below-inflation increase for even one more year? If your answer is no, then stand up for your rights. UNITY MAKES US ALL STRONG! ***Workers of the World Unite as you have got nothing to lose but your chains.***

We call on the community:

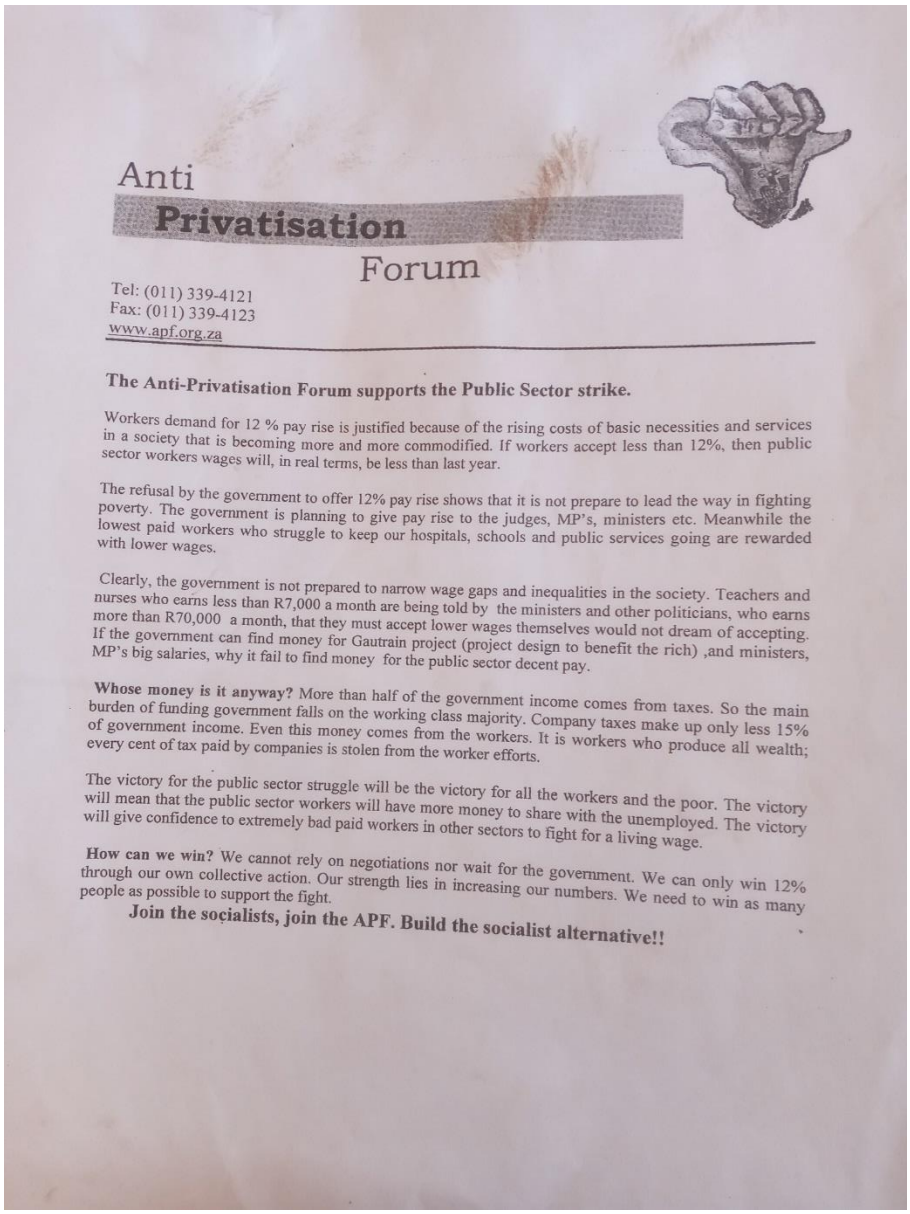
Public Servants look after our health and education in the community. We know that good service is hard to find if the staff members are demoralized and overworked. We want decent health and education, and therefore we stand with the strikers against the stubborn government.

Monday 18 June, 2pm
Community meeting at Chris Hani Bara,
Tuesday 19 June
Mass picket – community and strikers - Chris Hani Bara

Issued by Gauteng strikers and supporters, Public Sector Strike Committee and the Soweto Strike Support Committee.

Telephone-**011-938-4305 or 011 873 2610/1**

Photo 91: Soweto Strike Support committee leaflet issued on day 15 of the strike. Source: Author's archive.



Anti
Privatisation
Forum

Tel: (011) 339-4121
Fax: (011) 339-4123
www.apf.org.za

The Anti-Privatisation Forum supports the Public Sector strike.

Workers demand for 12 % pay rise is justified because of the rising costs of basic necessities and services in a society that is becoming more and more commodified. If workers accept less than 12%, then public sector workers wages will, in real terms, be less than last year.

The refusal by the government to offer 12% pay rise shows that it is not prepare to lead the way in fighting poverty. The government is planning to give pay rise to the judges, MP's, ministers etc. Meanwhile the lowest paid workers who struggle to keep our hospitals, schools and public services going are rewarded with lower wages.

Clearly, the government is not prepared to narrow wage gaps and inequalities in the society. Teachers and nurses who earns less than R7,000 a month are being told by the ministers and other politicians, who earns more than R70,000 a month, that they must accept lower wages themselves would not dream of accepting. If the government can find money for Gautrain project (project design to benefit the rich) ,and ministers, MP's big salaries, why it fail to find money for the public sector decent pay.

Whose money is it anyway? More than half of the government income comes from taxes. So the main burden of funding government falls on the working class majority. Company taxes make up only less 15% of government income. Even this money comes from the workers. It is workers who produce all wealth; every cent of tax paid by companies is stolen from the worker efforts.

The victory for the public sector struggle will be the victory for all the workers and the poor. The victory will mean that the public sector workers will have more money to share with the unemployed. The victory will give confidence to extremely bad paid workers in other sectors to fight for a living wage.

How can we win? We cannot rely on negotiations nor wait for the government. We can only win 12% through our own collective action. Our strength lies in increasing our numbers. We need to win as many people as possible to support the fight.

Join the socialists, join the APF. Build the socialist alternative!!

Photo 92: Anti Privatisation Forum's statement on the strike. Source: Author's archive.



Photo 93: In this strike, criticism of then-President Thabo Mbeki (pictured in the button here), the ruling party and its policies was muted. This photo is from a picket of CHB workers supported by teachers. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Towards a stalemate



Photo 94: Cosas members at the march in Johannesburg, 13 June



Photo 95: An Anti-Privatisation Forum member is visible on the far left of the picture from the logo on his black cap. Johannesburg, 13 June

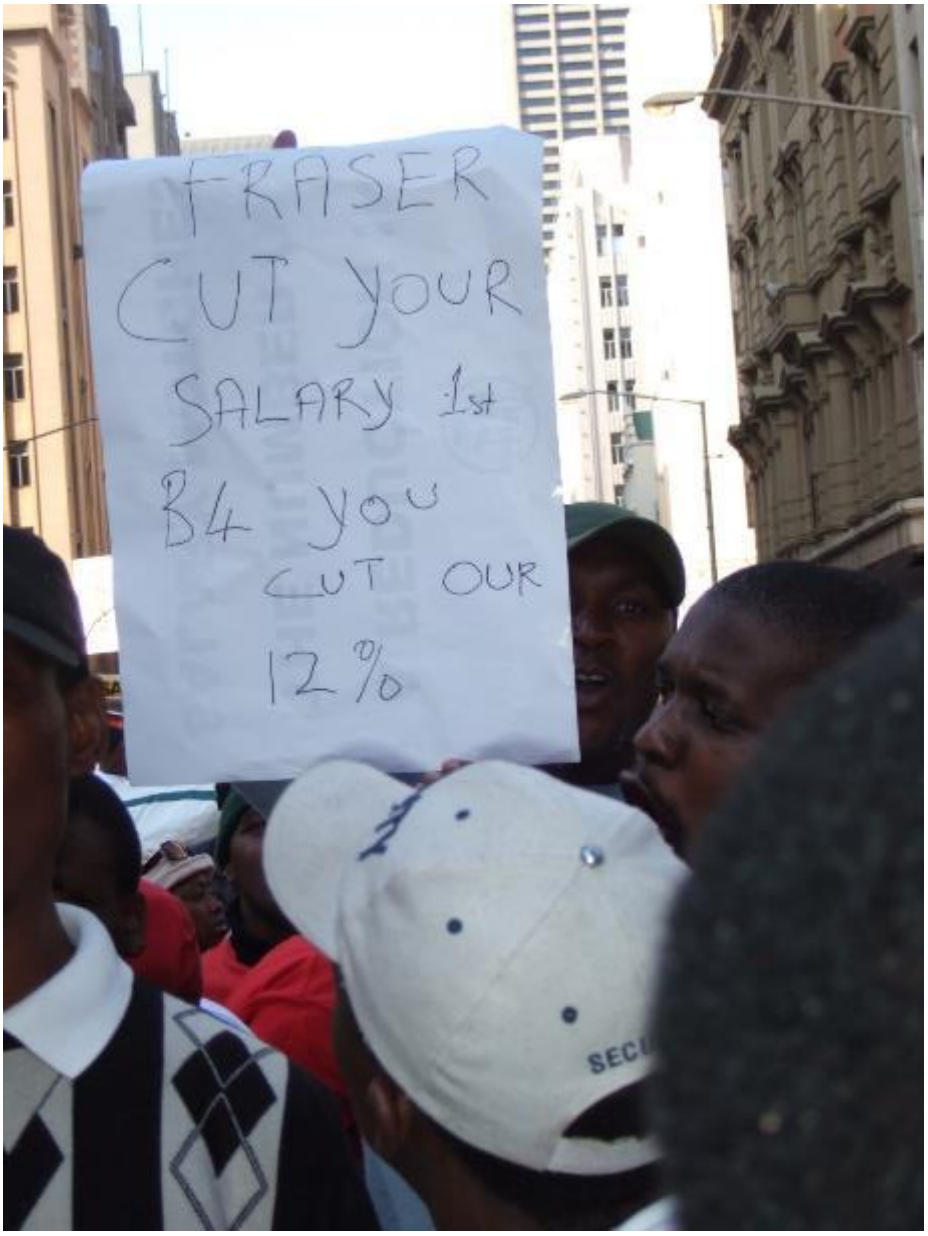


Photo 96: comparing Fraser-Moleketi's salary with the proposed increase.

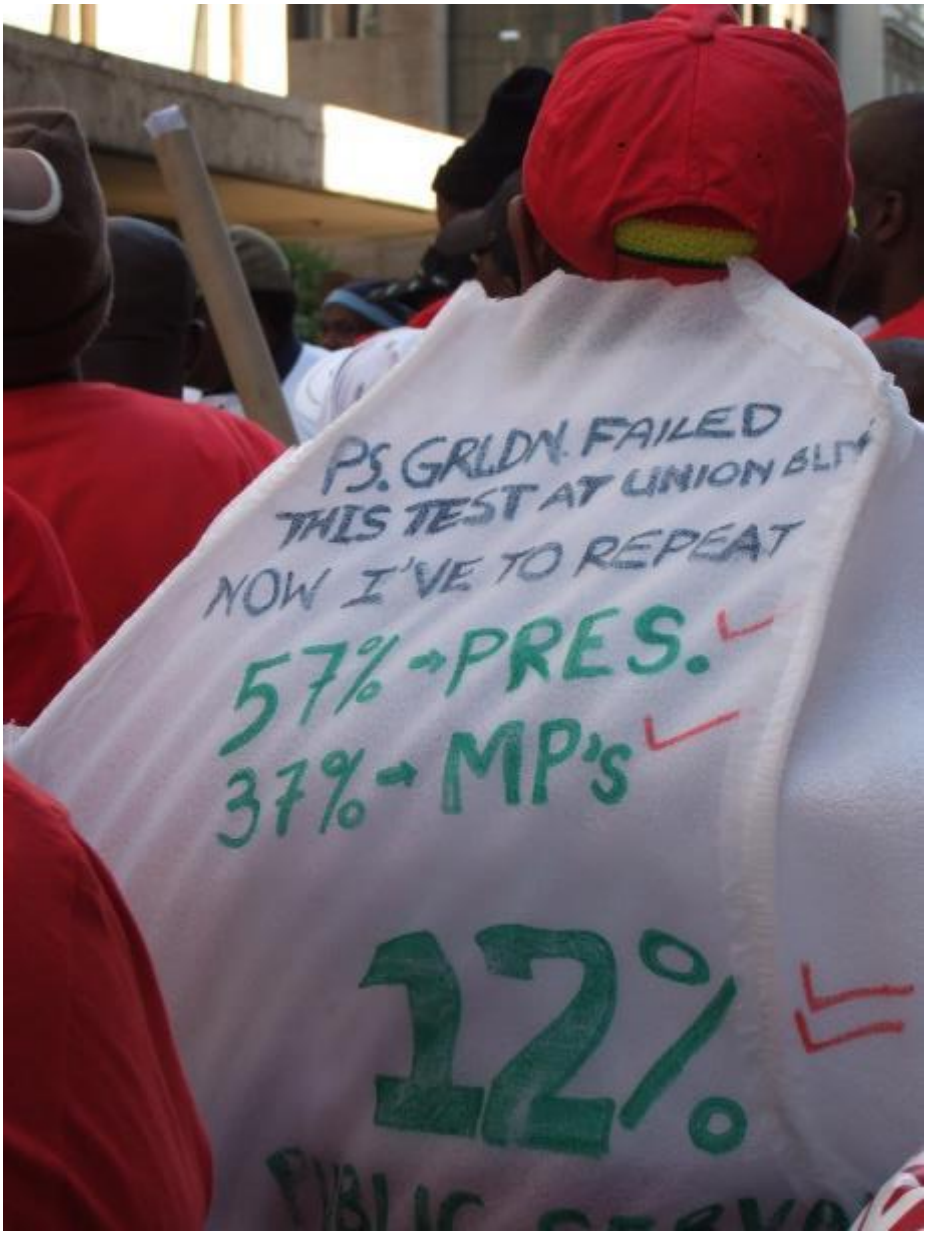


Photo 97: Fraser-Moleketi is represented as a stubborn child forcing the teacher to repeat the lesson about inequality in wage rises.

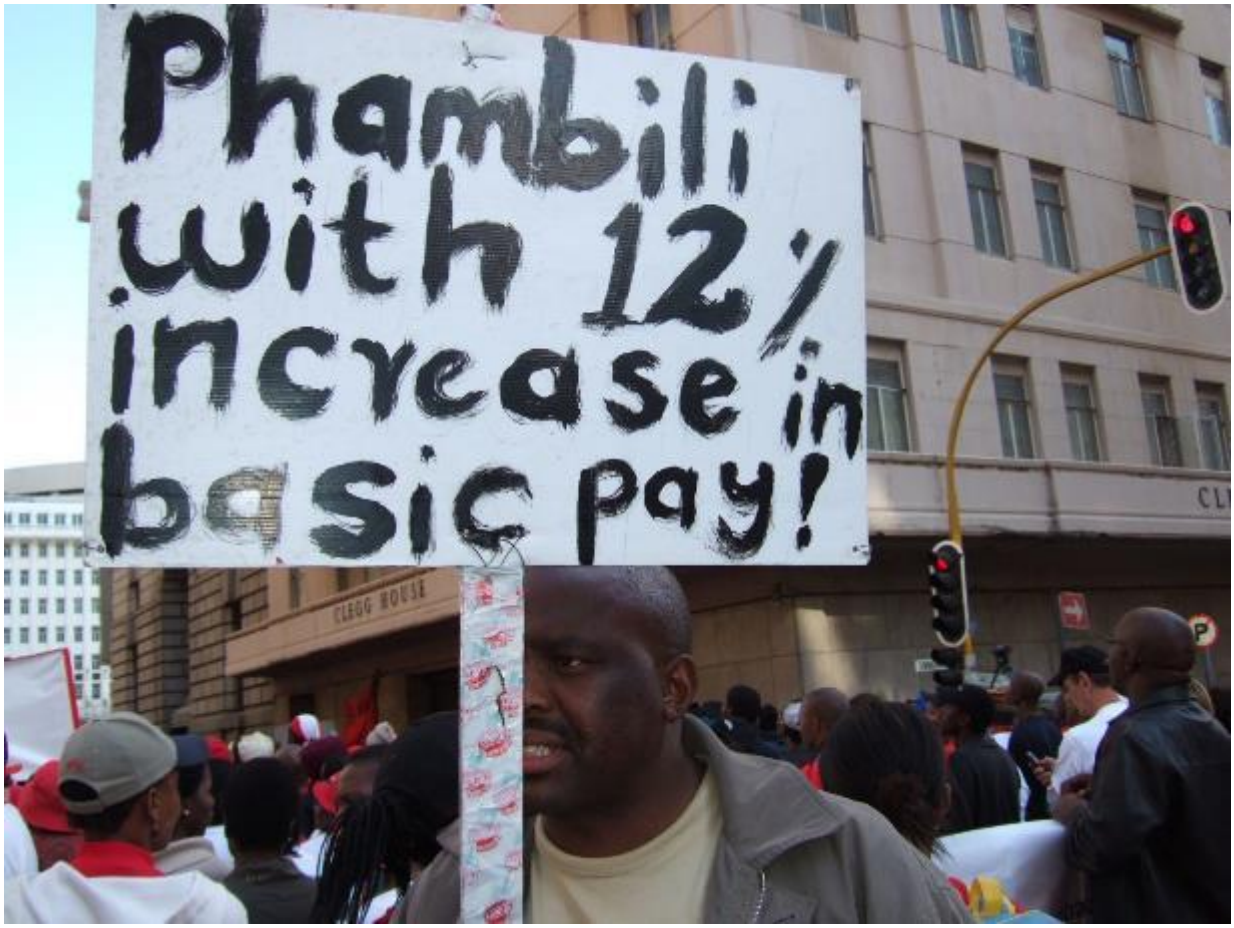


Photo 98: side one of a two sided placard – forward with 12% increase…

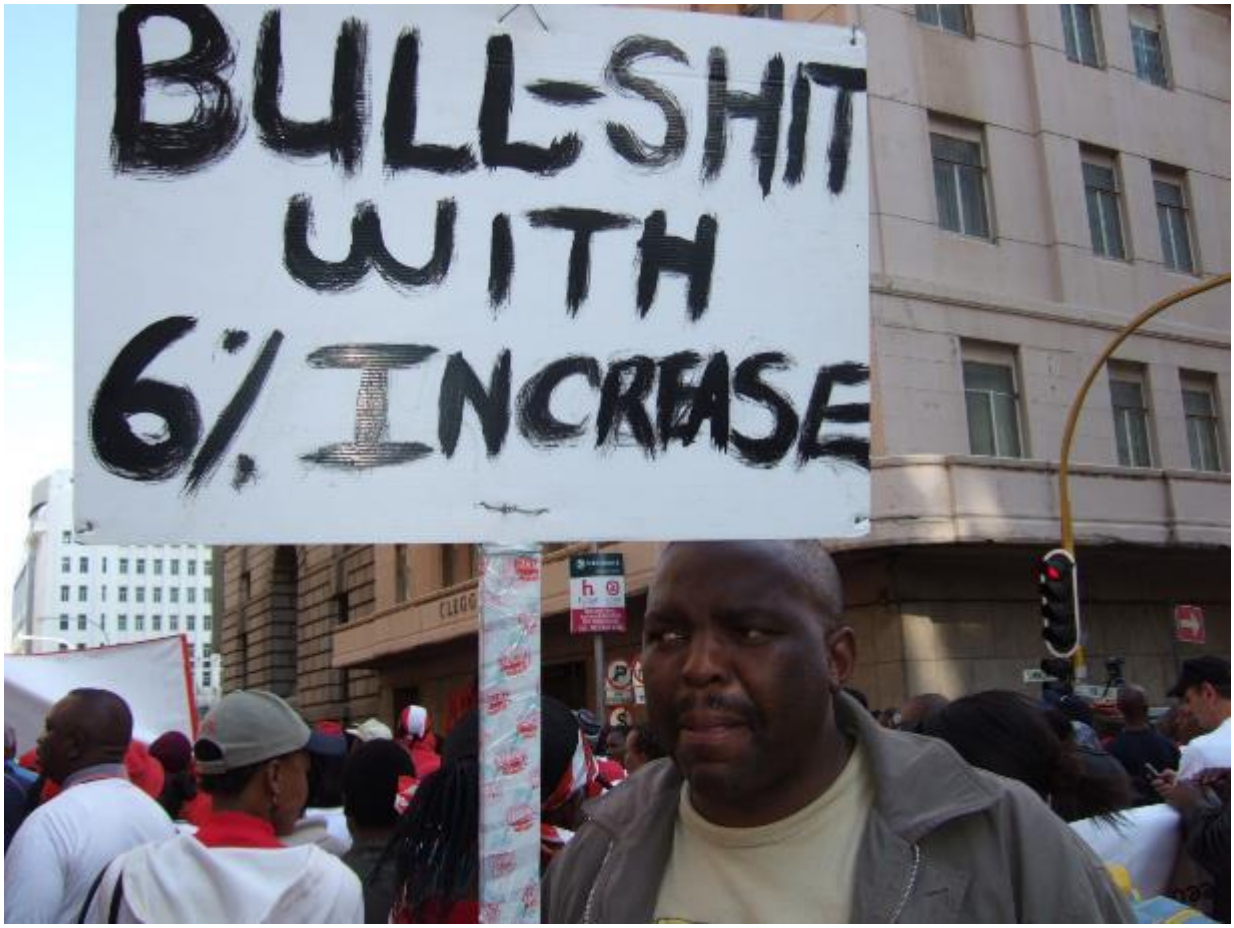


Photo 99: side two of the placard dismisses the 6% offer.



Photo 100: an essay-placard, covering grievances, teachers' dedication to the work, and offers the employer a carrot when it links the 12% to better results. The first section also presents a monetary increase (a decent wage) as a compensation for non-monetary grievances.



Photo 101: public workers' salaries compared to Zimbabwe dollars, implying they are worthless

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Photo 102: a placard in Johannesburg on 13 June in the form of a sum – possibly recycled since from an earlier march - threatens to take a poor wage offer to the ballot box. The placard implies that the ANC's alliance partners would be better in government than the ANC. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 103: increasingly political conditionals: no 12%, no election and no world cup.



Photo 104: a placard imploring Mandela implies that Mbeki and Moleketi have broken with liberation tradition



Photo 105: the government is likened to apartheid in this placard as Gauteng premier, Mbhazima (Sam) Shilowa, received the memorandum



Photo 106: One of very few allusions to Jacob Zuma during the strike: written on a car windscreen in white shoe polish, 'No surrender' and then in Zulu, 'take my machine gun', a reference to an anti-apartheid liberation song re-popularised by Zuma.



Photo 107: an unspecified-conditional placard on the left, and a purely insulting placard which translates roughly from the colloquial Afrikaans, 'Moleketi, your cunt, your (arse)hole, your underneath, your everything'.



Photo 108: This placard – probably spur of the moment - is a humorously intended sexual representation of the wage demand, showing a limp penis at 6.5% and an erect one for 12%



Photo 109: The reverse of the placard in the previous photo plays on a school report, suggesting that Moleketi is not thinking straight and needs parental supervision, the latter implying perhaps that she is being childish or reflecting a belief amongst some strikers that Moleketi's superiors were more reasonable than her as reflected also in a placard from a previous march implying that Moleketi was withholding money provided by Manuel, then minister of finance.



Photo 110: A woman carries a placard attributing Fraser-Moleketi's stubbornness to her childlessness.

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Photo 111: 'Dr. Beetroot' refers to Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, minister of health at the time, who had recommended 'traditional' remedies such as beetroot as a treatment for Aids. She had a liver transplant in March 2007.



Photo 112: Another riff on the liver theme



Photo 113: This placard refers to Manto Tshabalala Msimang's threats to dismiss striking nurses.



Photo 114: A teacher refers to the importance of her work while insulting the government negotiators, alongside a worker who has adapted a Cosatu poster.

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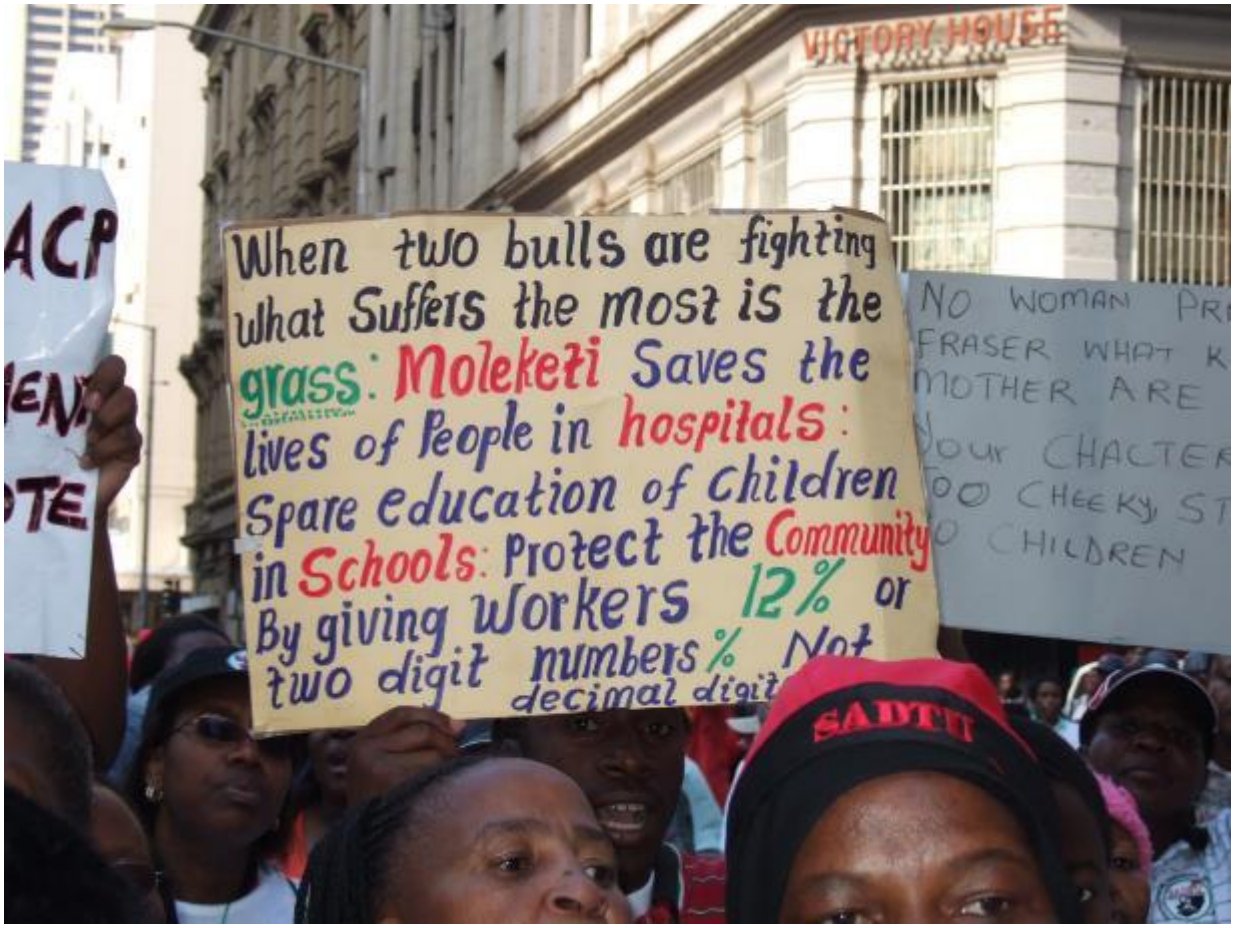


Photo 115: This placard in Johannesburg on 13 June blames Fraser Moleketi's intransigence for the 'suffering' caused by the strike. I am unsure whether the two bulls are government and the unions, or whether it references the succession battle in the ANC.



Photo 116: teachers appeal to parents for support



Photo 117: The pink placard situates teachers emotively on the same side as learners. The other multiplacard repeats that theme together with a cutout of an official union placard referring to the importance of teachers work. The other side of this placard appears in the next photo.

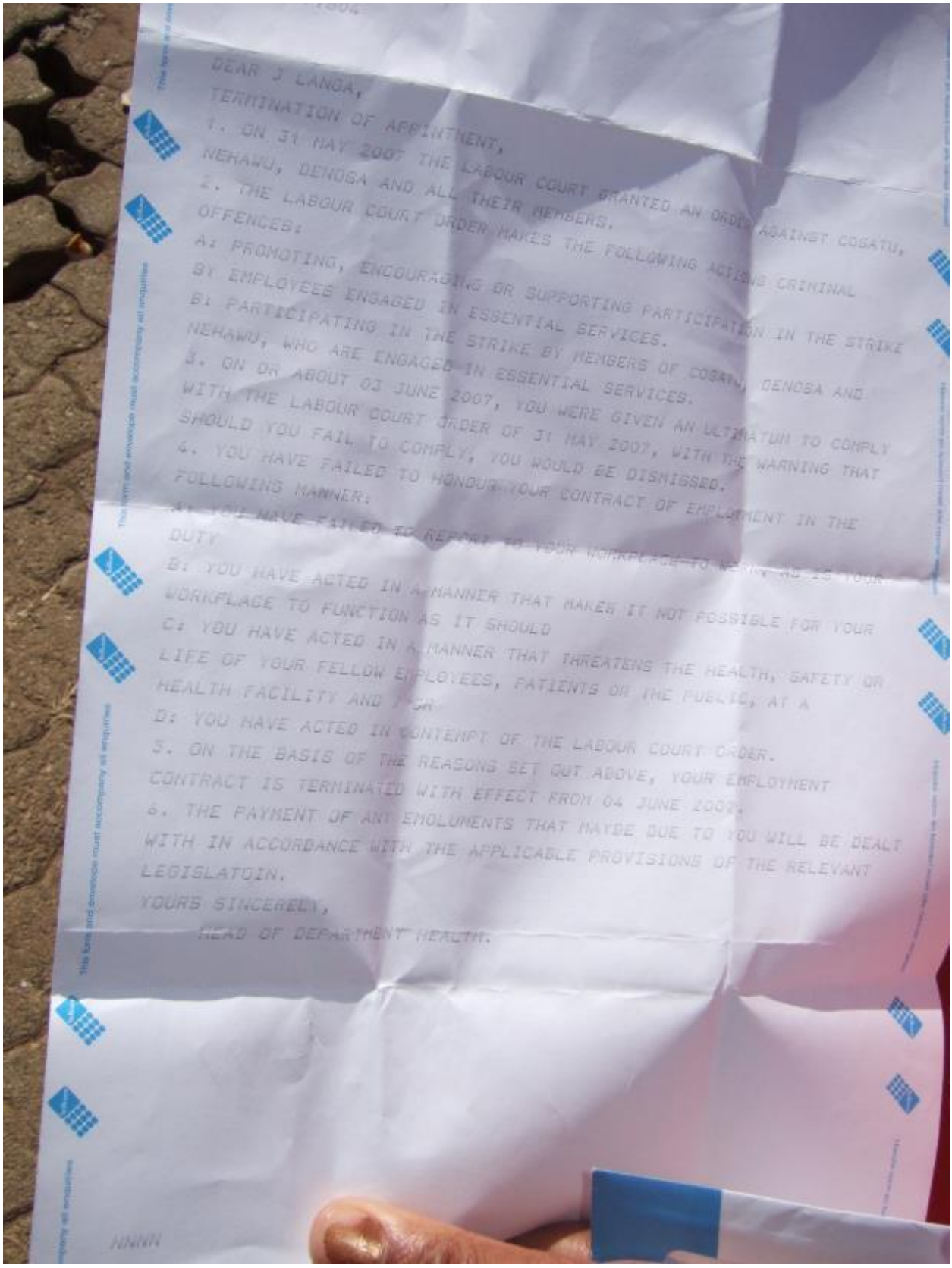


Photo 118: a dismissal letter, issued on 12 June 2007, photographed at CHB on 14 June. Source Claire Ceruti

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B2. Strike two photos (2010)

10 August: warning strike in Pretoria



Photo 119: Strikers gathered at the union buildings at the end of their march through Pretoria on the pre-strike day. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 120: A Sadtu contingent at the pre-strike day in Pretoria Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 121: Public Servants Association banner at the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong

or Botsang Moepe



Photo 122: Popcru (police and prison warders' union) group and banner at the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 123: Sadtu local branch banners at the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Limpopo is a province far north of Johannesburg. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe

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Photo 124: Strikers with official placards at the pre-strike day, 10 August, in Pretoria Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 125: Shack vs house. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 126: Home-made placard stating the demands at the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 127: 'U budget for train, what about education?'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 128: 'Stop wasting money on ever changing policies'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 129: 'Ministers big houses, big salaries, fancy cars…' At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe

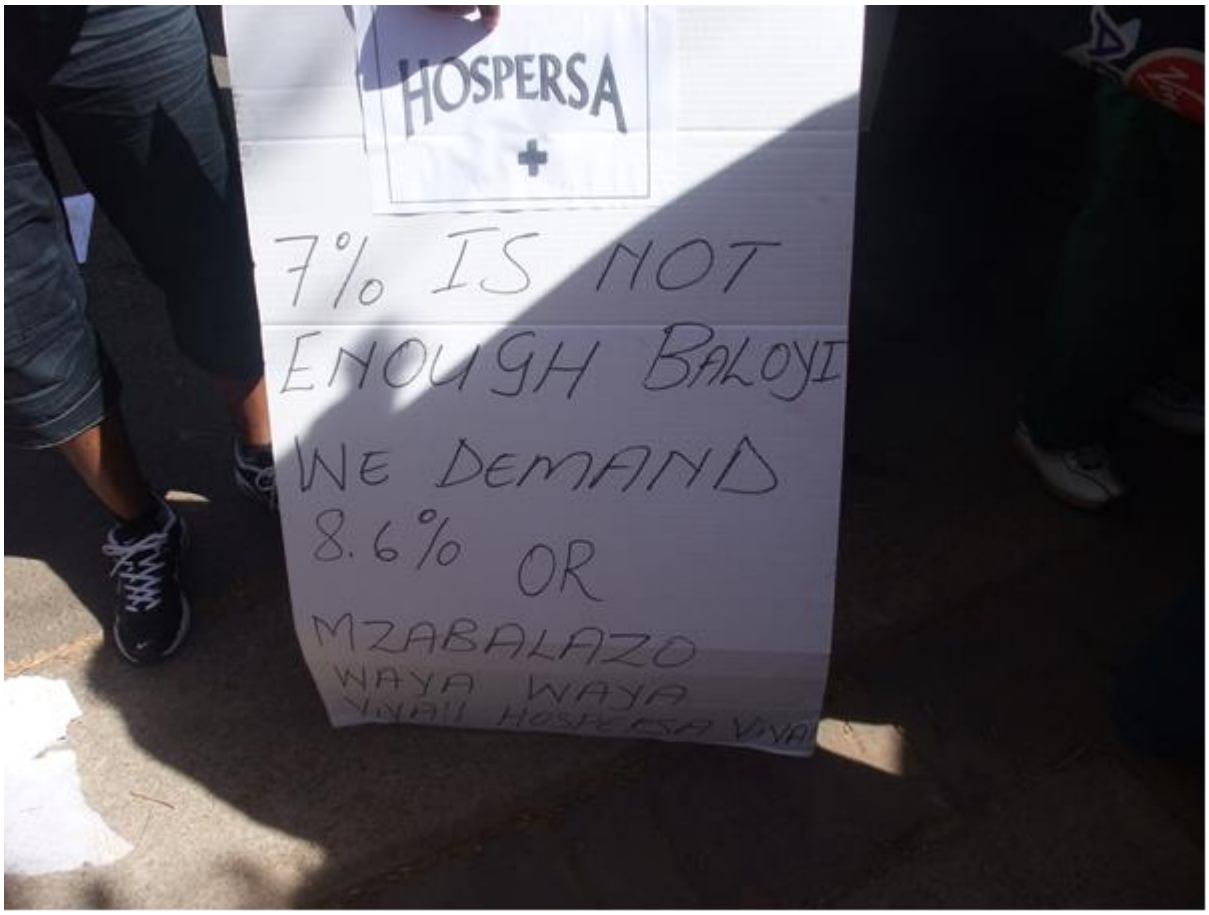


Photo 130: 8.6% or mzabalazo [struggle] waya waya [all the time]. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 131: 'God is above/better than Baloyi'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 132: 'We are gatvol [fed up] Baloyi'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 133: Composite photo of two colleagues with matching placards: 'Baloyi keep u R10' and 'I am also gatvol [fed up] with this small change'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 134: '7% is peanuts… 'Moleketi mmolelele [Moleketi, tell him/her]'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 135: 'A puppet … just like Moleketi' at the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe



Photo 136: 'Baloyi, stop playing hard to get'. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe

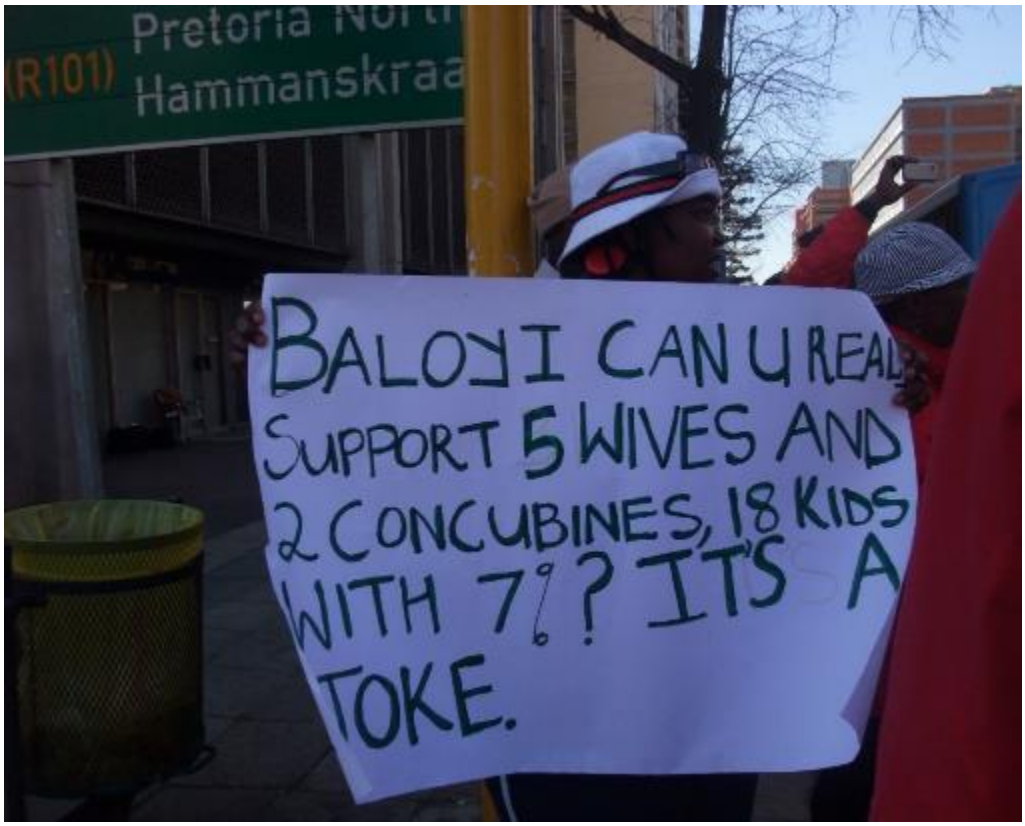


Photo 137: 'Baloyi can you really support 5 wives…with 7%? It's a joke'. Zuma had five wives at that time. At the pre-strike day in Pretoria. Source: Tabitha Nong or Botsang Moepe

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18 August, day 1, Teachers' meeting and demonstration, late am to early pm



Photo 138: A packed Sadtu meeting in Soweto, 18 August. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 139: 'Teaching: a call to poverty'. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 140: 'I teach the future … pay me what I deserve'. A double sided placard at a teachers' meeting in Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 141: Sadtu t-shirt rejecting the state's offer on the front and stating the union's demands on the back. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 142: 'Respect … for our future', Soweto, first day of strike. Source: Claire Ceruti

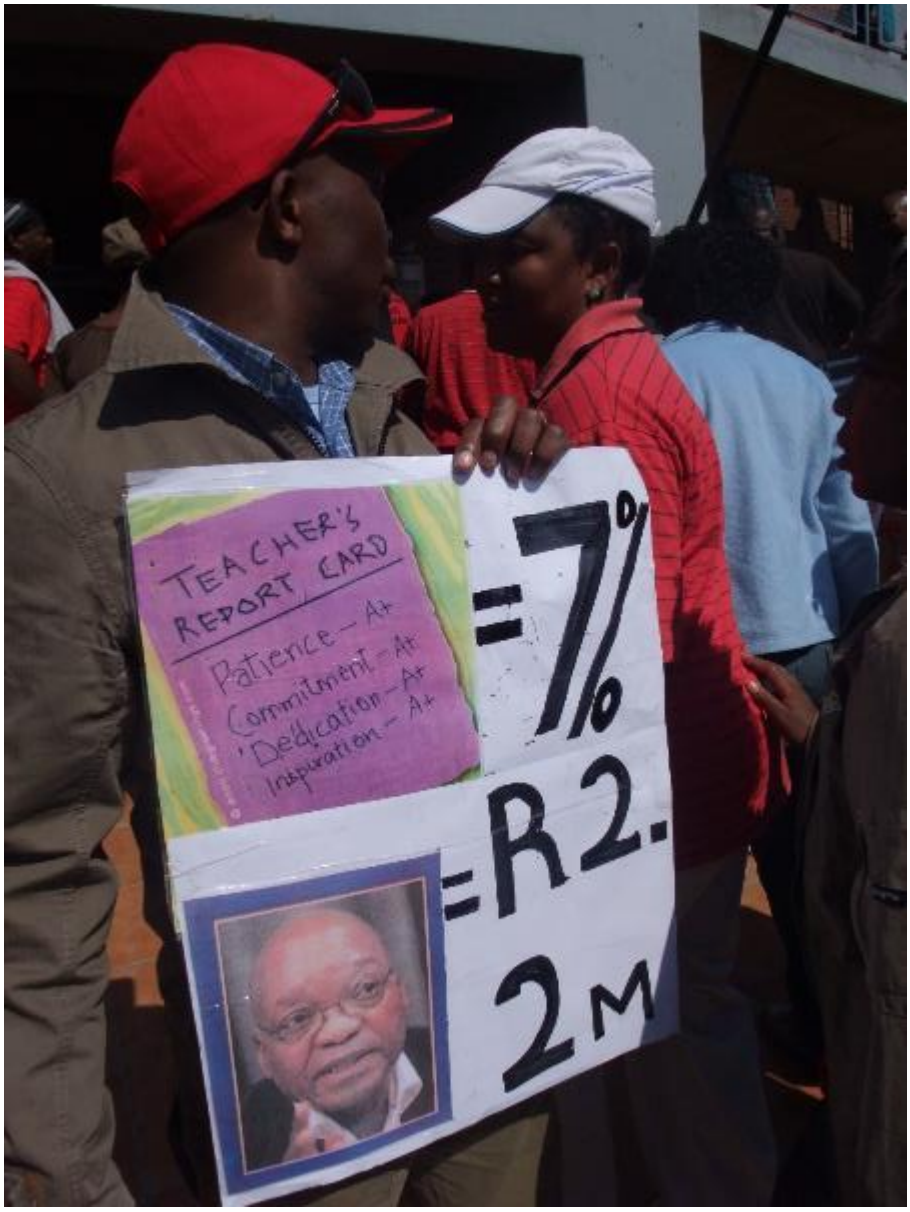


Photo 143: Teacher's report card contrasting the low reward for teachers' dedication with Zuma's millions. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 144: 'Noble salary – what a joke!' A double-sided homemade poster hanging from a vuvuzela, a plastic noise-maker popularised during the world cup and based (in principle, not in shape) on the kudu horn used by some famous soccer fans. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 145: 'Struggle continues': A home made placard restating the demand for the 1 April implementation. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 146: 'Defend democratic gains'. Sadtu t-shirt in Soweto. In the background, a newspaper advertises its popular jobs supplement: 'Find your dream job here' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 147: 'Baloyi, sebonono sa 7% [7%'s bum], give it to your ass! MF!', held by a woman. Teachers' meeting in Orlando hall, Soweto, 18 August. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 148: 'Hey you Angie [Motshekga, then minister of Basic Education], be quiet.' 'Mazinyo' means someone with protruding teeth and .com is probably a play on the abbreviation for 'comrade'. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 149: Teachers after a Soweto meeting singing about Baloyi's testicles. (Picture blurred to preserve anonymity) Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 150: Teachers sit in the road. Soweto, day 1. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 151: World cup paraphernalia (composite). Left, A teacher blows a blue vuvuzela while another teacher in the background sports a yellow shirt with an SA flag. Right, teachers take over the road; One of the teachers in the foreground is wearing a hat with soccer balls on it, while visible in the background is the old Orlando stadium, which was revamped at a cost of R208 million to serve as a practice ground for the world cup. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti





Photo 152: (Composite) World cup reminders: top, the Orlando stadium, visible from the teacher's meeting, which also hosted a massive concert during the world cup. Bottom, teachers toyi toyi past a brand new bus station, part of the rapid transit network developed specifically for the World Cup. Soweto. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photostory 1: 19 August, day 2, Helen Joseph hospital picketing tactics



Photo 153: Helen Joseph Hospital, day 2, at the main gate. A home-adapted placard, adding the words 'Ayoba! Kenako!!! to an official Nehawu placard. Ayoba is slang for 'cool', and kenako (from seSotho) means 'It is time!' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 154: Helen Joseph Hospital, day 2: a City Power truck tries to enter a side gate. Stikers called out to the driver without actually blocking the gate. The truck then parked on the apron outside the hospital. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 155: Police then call some strikers inside, probably to talk about picketing rules. Helen Joseph Hospital, day 2, at the side gate. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 156: (Composite) Strikers' shared drinking water while one eats a snack. In the background, people are going through a hole in the fence which was also being used by patients. Helen Joseph, day 2, at the side gate. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 157: Other strikers from Hospersa and Nehawu inside the fence. Helen Joseph Hospital, day 2, at the side gate. Source: Claire Ceruti





Photo 158: (Composite) Strikers from the east-side gate run into the road to greet an encouragingly sized contingent rounded up from other gates. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 159: The combined groups moved into the apron near the side gate to hold a meeting. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 160: A striker wears a cap in gold 'ANC for sure'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 161: Composite taken from the same point looking around the meeting. Clockwise from top left, looking south-east through south, west, north and east. Source: Claire Ceruti





Photo 162: (Composite). From the meeting, strikers headed back to the main entrance... Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 163: (Composite). … and went in the main gate to the hospital. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 164: They toyi toyed in the grounds… (Picture blurred to preserve anonymity). Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 165: (Composite). A few went inside while others did Ya rona! *around the door. Note the hospital's appeal to patients' responsibility (a fixture not to do with the strike) which includes adapting health needs to 'limited funds' for many people and paying, because 'Health is our business'.*
Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 166: A Hospersa notice near the entrance of the hospital thanking members 'for their mandate' to reject the offer, and announcing the strike. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 167: (Composite). They then withdrew from the hospital grounds. The two people in the foreground are a film crew. Source: Claire Ceruti





Photo 168: They continue toyi toying in front of a water cannon that is waiting for them outside.

Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 169: Someone – very likely students from UJ – threw eggs at the strikers from a car speeding past. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photostory 2: 20 August, day three, Helen Joseph Hospital



Photo 170: 'Away with reckless, stupid, irresponsible state-ment from any leaders in top positions'. Strikers gathered around the main entrance of Helen Joseph hospital early on day three. It was still winter. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 171: (Composite). They toyi-toyied toward the sunrise down Kingsway Road, a main road the hospital is on, leaving the bus lane and one other lane free for cars. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 172: (Composite). Strikers came to the east gate and someone closed it. Police opened it again, while the hospital's own security guard stood at some distance watching through the fence (behind the wooden structure in the first picture). Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 173: (Composite) Photo blurred to protect identities. Then strikers from various unions poked at the debris of the tyres burned across this gate the previous day, making a small fire in it for warmth, and toyi toyied across the gate, but stood aside for the battered green car trying to leave. The debris was nevertheless formidable and two of the strikers are showing the people in the battered pale green car ways to go around the barricade…. Source: Claire Ceruti.



Photo 174: Strikers were much more persistent when a BMW (top left corner of the photo) tried to pass; some sat in the way for a time. Source: Sam Amakoa





Photo 175: (Composite) Then a white police person comes out to watch while the black police are sent to remonstrate with the strikers. After the white bakkie pushed through to go out, a police nyala (an armoured 'crowd control' vehicle used since apartheid times) pushed in, scattering parts of the debris barricade to join other police on the hospital premises. Police now stood near the gate with shotguns. About 20 minutes later, they gatherered. Source: Claire Ceruti and Sam Amakoa







Photo 176: (Composite) 'Let's blow vuvus [vuvuzelas] for 8.6%. Strikers toyi-toyied on either side of the gate., nervously Source: Claire Ceruti


POLICE







Photo 177: (Composite) Police, a little nervously, came out armed with shotguns and rubber bullets to clear the debris. Strikers kept toyi-toying; some turned their backs on the police…. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 178: … but were visibly nervous of the shotgun Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 179: The way was now clear for the vehicle Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 180: Strikers reluctantly stood back to let the vehicle pass… Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 181: …singing 'you know what you are doing is wrong'. Police had now formed a line across the gate to signal their control. Source: Claire Ceruti






I ♥
SA

Photo 182: Police come out again to clear debris, remonstrating with strikers to keep back. Source: Claire Cerut

i



Photo 183: Strikers sing a popular commercial song by Mafikizola, 'Why are you calling police when the party is so very very nice?'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 184: Strikers stand aside for a police vehicle and a mortuary van Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 185: At the main gate, which was closed by the hospital, a few strikers hang around a small fire
Source: Claire Ceruti

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20 August, day three, CHB, morning



Photo 186: Strikers gathered around a secondary gate of Chris Hani Bara hospital, the Eye Clinic gate. This gate is also on the main road. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 187: A large contingent then came down the road from the main gate…. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 188: One person carried a mop, probably signifying his work. The buildings in the background are the taxi rank. Source: Claire Ceruti







Photo 189: Effervescence Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 190: As at Helen Joseph, strikers obstructed the entrance but did not actually block it. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 191: To hell with 6.5%...' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 192: 'Take your 7% and shove it to your ass'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 193: 'You come and work Baloyi…' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 194: 'Corrupt government, please give us a share Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 195: 'We voted for you to give us decent salary…' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 196: 'It looks like Zuma has forgotten about us. Futseg! [Voetsak, get lost]: Claire Ceruti

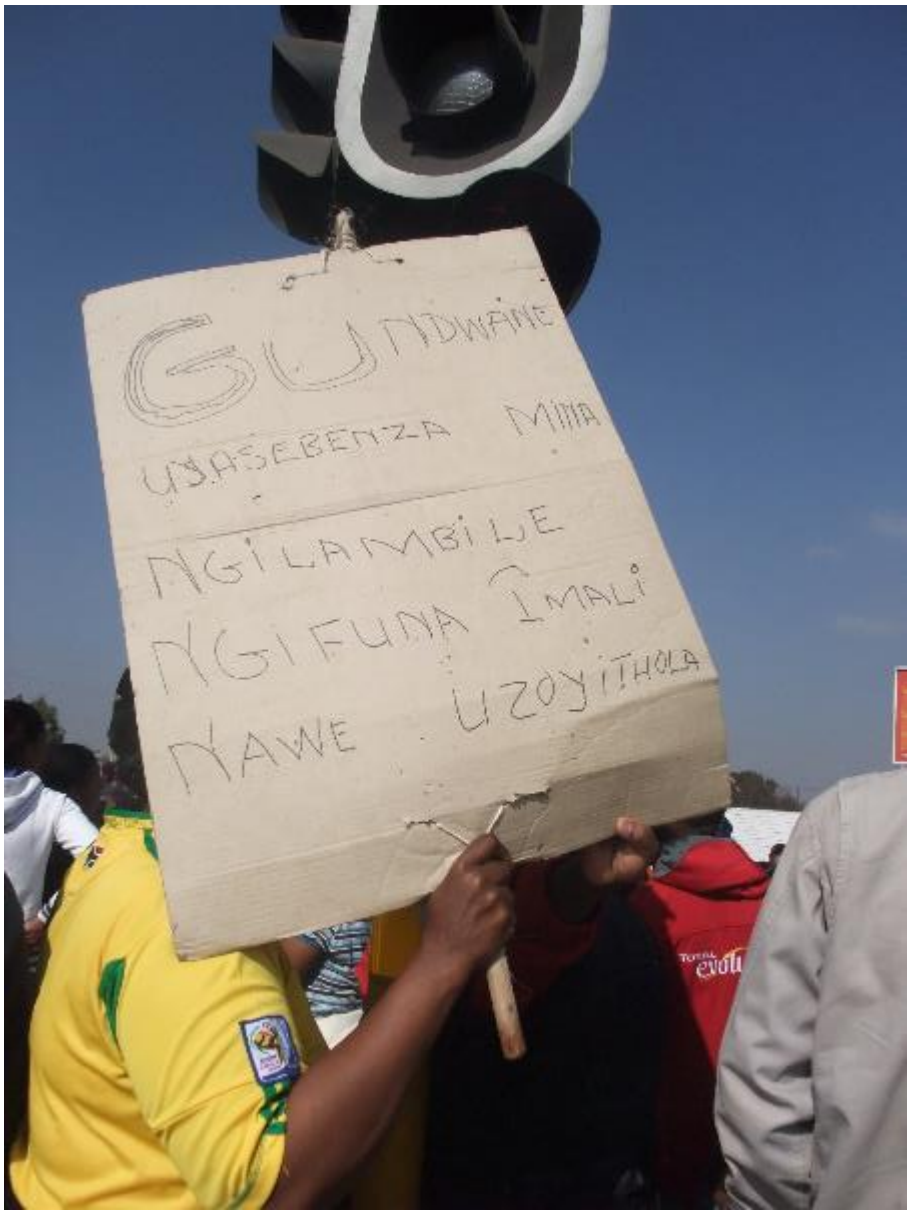


Photo 197: 'Rats/mice [non-strikers], you are working, I am hungry, I want money, and you will take it.
Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 198: 'Zuma, we were ready to bail you out…". Source: Claire Ceruti

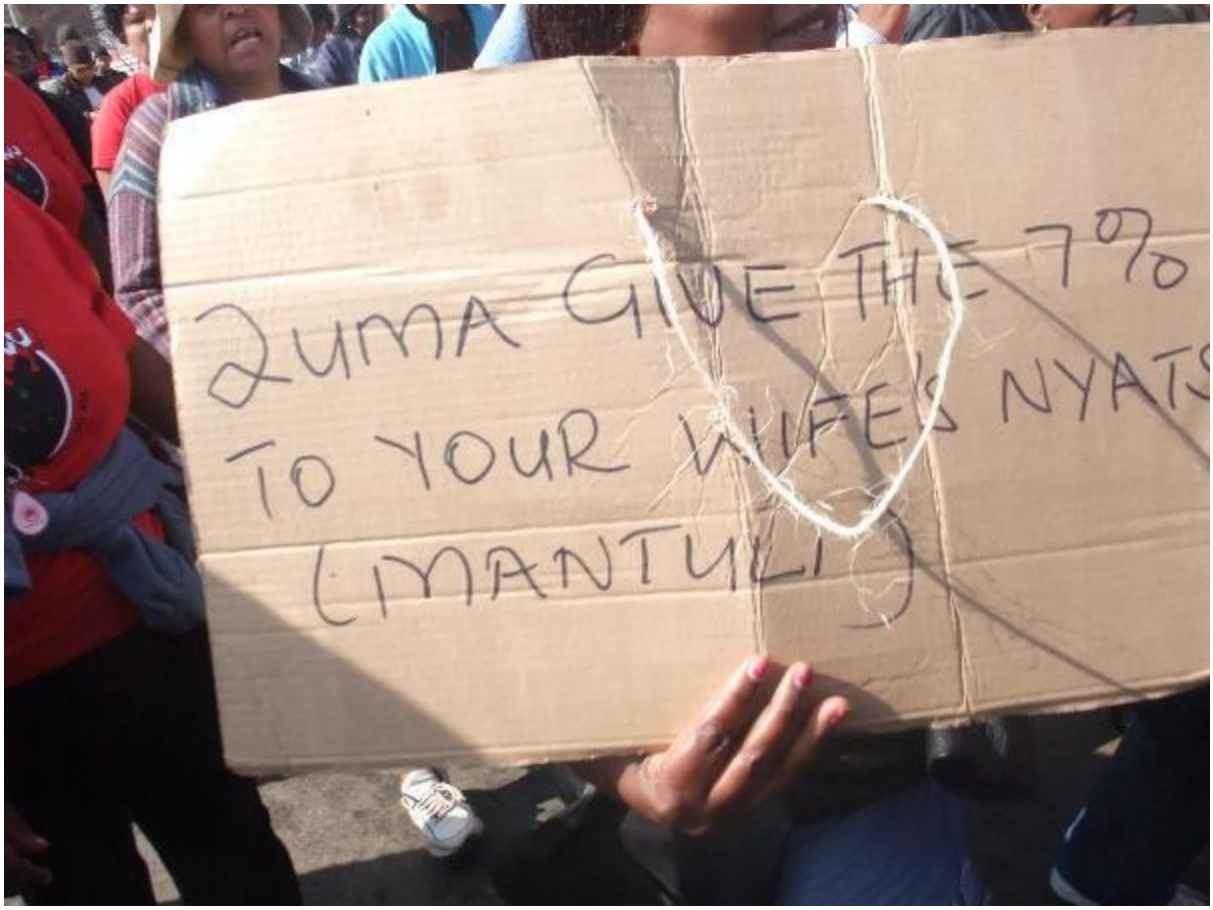


Photo 199: 'Zuma give 7% to your wife's nyatsi [backdoor husband, i.e. lover] Ma Ntuli'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 200: Threatening non-strikers. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 201: 'Baloyi give a builder R700 to fix your mom's house'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 202: Baloyi take that 7% and buy Shbelani for your mom'. Shbelani is a phonetic spelling of Xibelani, which is both a traditional Tsonga dance and the skirt associated with it. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 203: 'ANC thinks it owns us'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 204: A police helicopter circled overhead for some time. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 205: A Nehawu leader uses the police van's loudspeaker to address the crowd. Source: Claire Ceruti

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20 August, day three, Elke Stadium (Sadtu meeting)



Photo 206: Teachers meet at Elke stadium in Soweto. The crowd was very engaged, interacting with speakers, using vuvuzelas for things they especially approved of. Source: Claire Ceruti

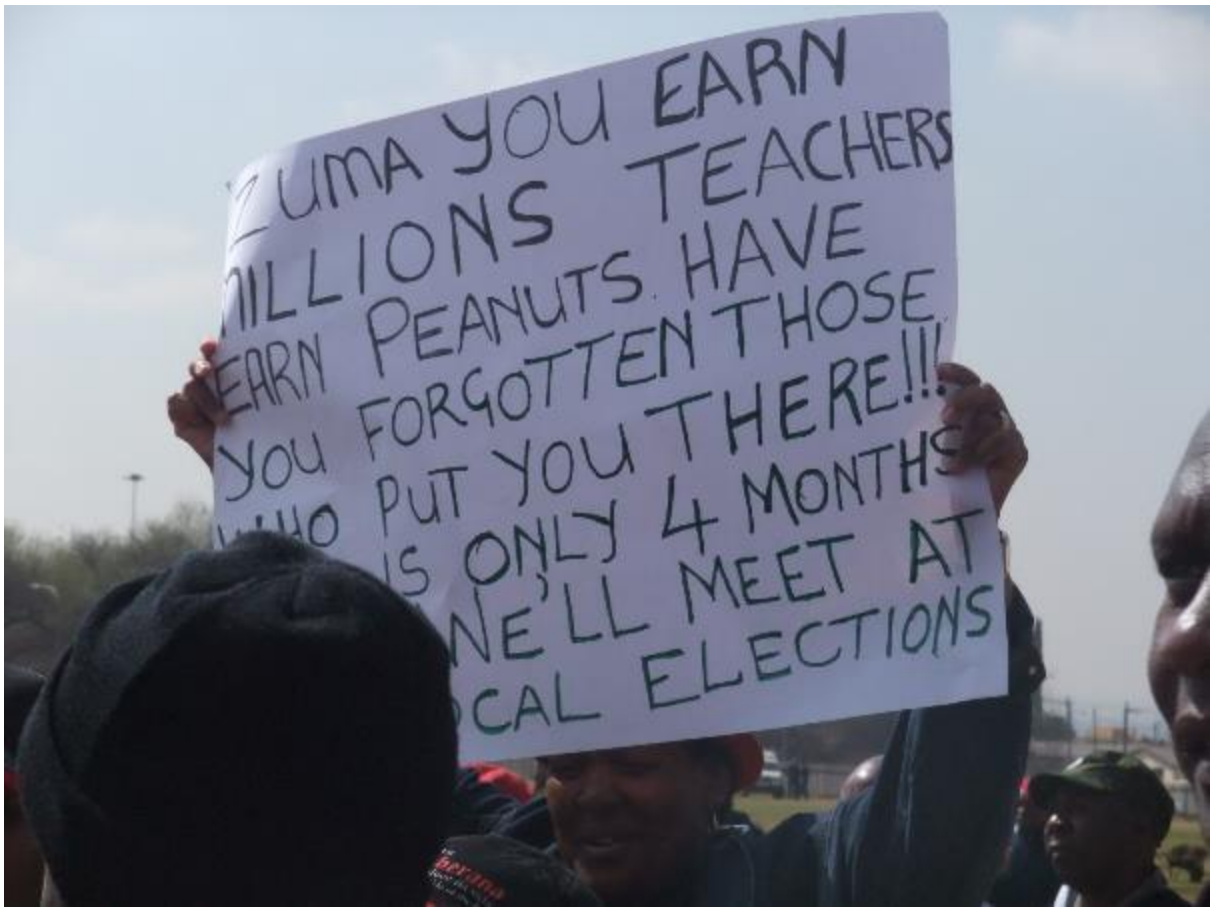


Photo 207: The obscured part of the placard reads '2011 is only 4 months away we'll meet at local elections'. Source: Claire Ceruti

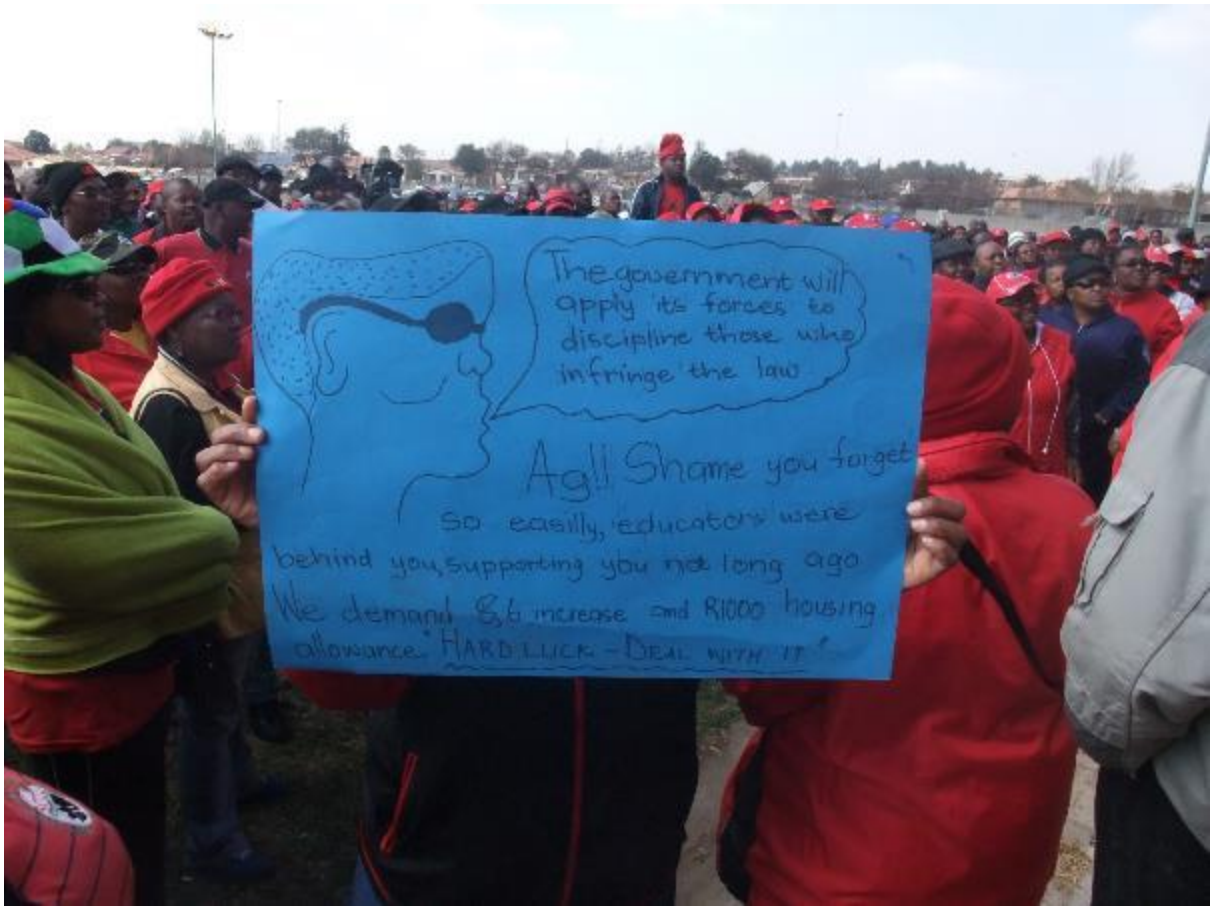


Photo 208: 'Ag shame you forget so easily…'. The placard quotes directly from Zuma's statement the previous day, caricaturing the shape of Zuma's head. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 209: Another direct quote from Zuma's statement. Source: Claire Ceruti

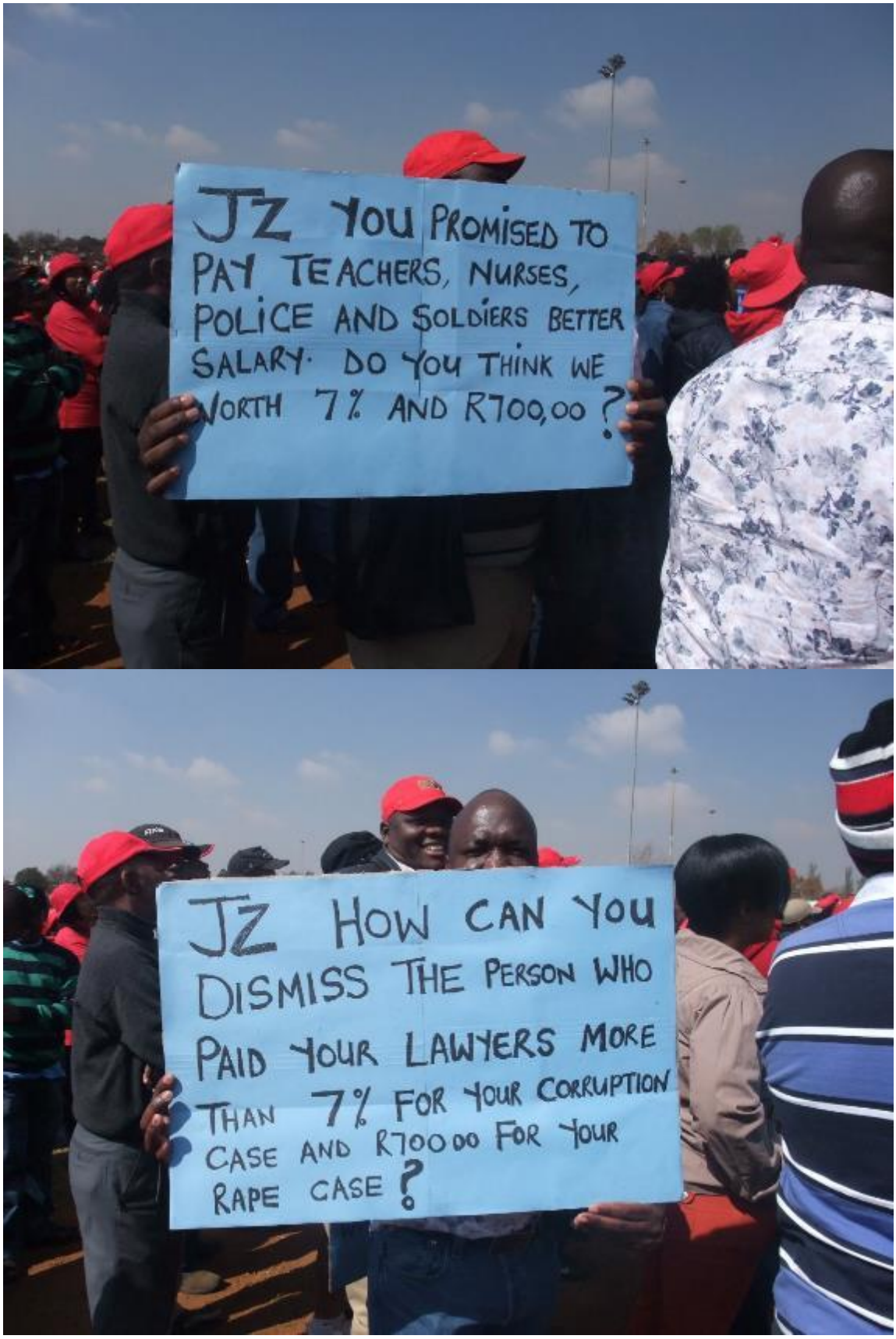


Photo 210: Receipts for Jacob Zuma (JZ). Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 211: 'At the end of broken dreams'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 212: 'Ons is gat vol'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 213: 'Mr. President speak d word...' Source: Claire Ceruti

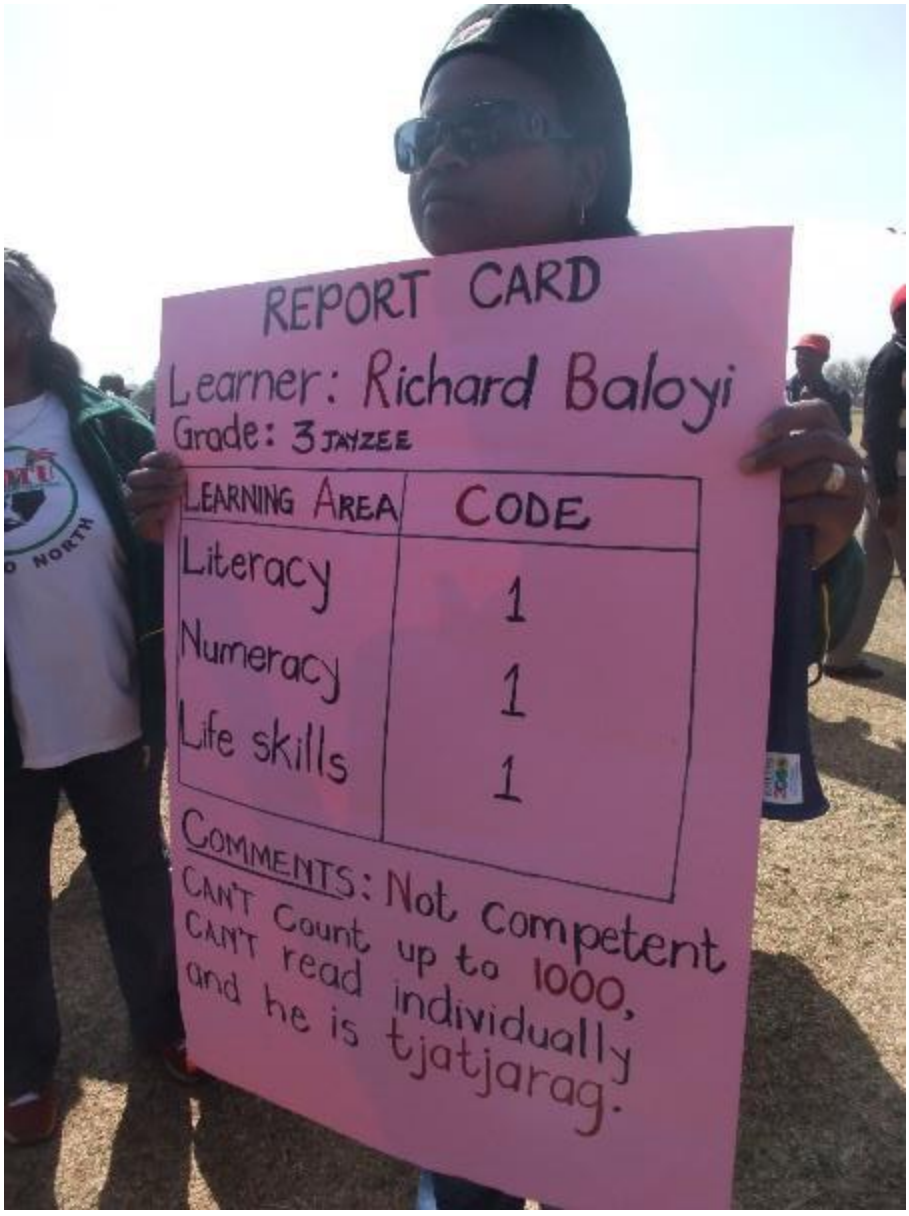


Photo 214: A report card for the minister in 'Grade Jayzee'. Tjatjarag is someone who talks too much or talks back. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 215: 'If you don't have money call FIFA'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 216: 'Masters' degree studying PhD… earning R9000 pm'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 217: 'Give that to the monkeys'.. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 218: 'Complete and sign' Source: Claire Ceruti

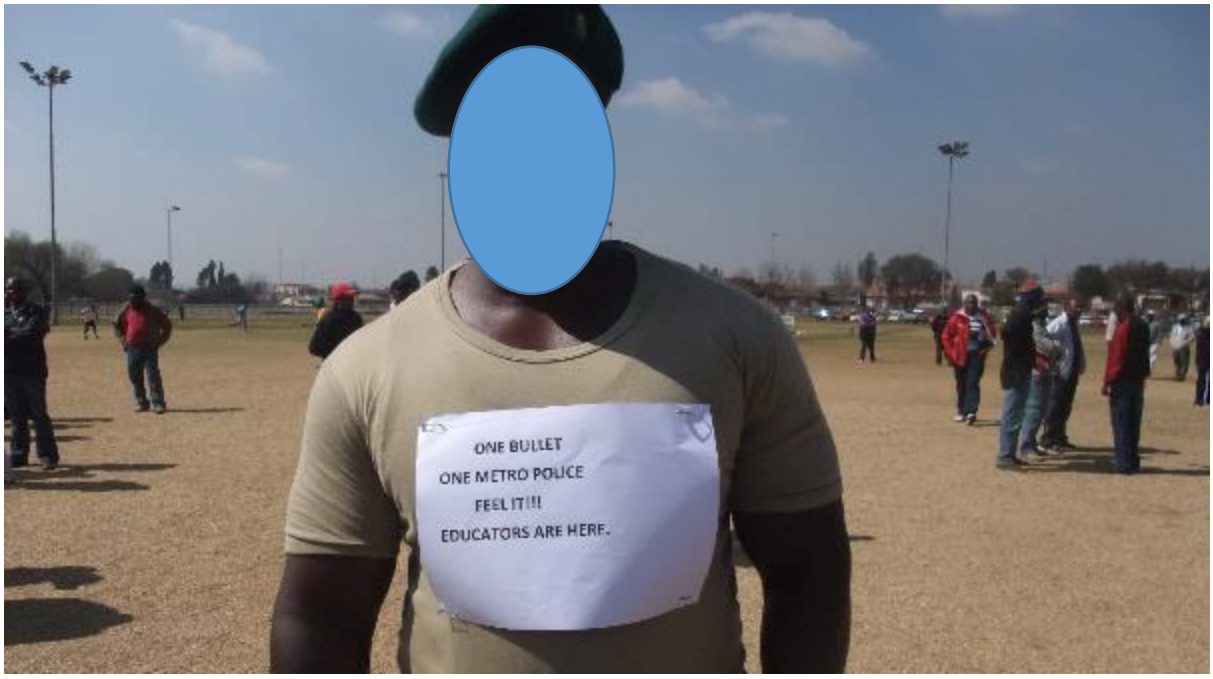


Photo 219: A reference to the 'Battle of Ormonde' which also plays on the World Cup advertising catchphrase 'Feel it, it is here!'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 220: Teachers leave Elke stadium to join the pickets at CHB hospital. Although a number had cars, many others were moving by foot and public transport. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 221: A placard in a modest car's window. Source: Claire Ceruti

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20 August, day three, back at CHB, afternoon



Photo 222: Waiting for the minister Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 223: 'We don't qualify for bond…'. Waiting for the minister Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 224: Waiting for the minister: 'Zuma the bad boy… Zuma, I work for this money'. CHB, afternoon of day three: Claire Ceruti



Photo 225: 'Baloyi, don't behave like a boy from homelands – ask Eskom where they got their money from': Claire Ceruti



Photo 226: Waiting for the minister, flanking the main gate (at that time, closed by the hospital). People crossing from the taxi rank and the hospital watch from the walkway in the background. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 227: 'Corrupt government, give us a share'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 228: Baloyi, wa penga…' [You are mad, from Xitsonga]. I don't know what is meant by the words below, which seem to say 'you meet head' in Xitsonga. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 229: 'It's better to be a prostitute…' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 230: 'Money for world cup has fallen into wrong hands' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 231: 'An injury to one…' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 232: Roughly, 'When will this endless thing get finished?' Indendene is a repetition of –de, which means lengthy, long or tall. Thanks to Tshepo Sam Shoai, 'Thiago Siya B. Jama' and Rashid Meer for help translating indendende. Taken during teachers' visit to hospital workers at Chris Hani Bara. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 233: Someone mimics a gun with a bottle inside a plastic bag, watched by people who were going to and from the hospital via the pedestrian bridge Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 234: Strikers concentrate in front of the main gate to be addressed by a unionist using the police car's loudhailer (see next picture). But note the anti-riot vehicle parked across the road from the hospital in the top picture. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 235: People gathered around a police van where a unionist is using the van's loudspeakers to speak to everyone. Source: Claire Ceruti

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25 August, Elke stadium



Photo 236: Elke stadium, 25 August at a teachers' meeting. The picture is of a Helen Joseph Hospital health worker who tried to resist arrest that week . Source: Claire Ceruti

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26 August Johannesburg



Photo 237: 'Comrades stay together just like buttocks…', Johannesburg. The person in the front of the frame is wearing an SACP shirt and an ANC doek (headwrap). Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 238: Effervescence. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 239: Fedusa and Nehawu strikers



Photo 240: Denosa banner, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 241: 'Feel it, teachers are angry' – a reference to the world cup advertising slogan, 'Feel it, it is here'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 242: Official Hospersa placards, repeating the themes of dignity and respect which emerged in the previous strike Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 243: We demand a living salary. Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 244: 'We can't even buy 6 beers'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 245: 'To hell to hell'. A striker mimics a military pose with an uprooted plant. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 246: The correct answer is 8.6% Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 247: '7% - boude [buttocks]'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 248: (composite). A double sided placard. On one side, 'Attention false idols [a biblical phrase] If you can't listen with ears you will listen with your arse. Sharp Sadtu sharp' (sharp = good/thumbs up/on point). The drawing shows a bum being caned while shitting 7% and farting a caricature of Zuma and a bespectacled minister. The reverse shows 7% as a penis and R10 (the proposed housing allowance increase) as a women's genital area. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 249: The Hospersa placard on the right of the picture reads '8.6% or struggle [mzabalazo[all the time [waya waya] Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 250: A Sadtu t-shirt, altered by the striker to read 'Defending the rights of the working class for sure in 2010'. A Democratic Left Front banner is in the background. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 251: 'Zuma: Borrow money from China!' A reference to Zuma's state visit to China. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 252: 'Striking together, we can do more'. A play on the title of the ANC's 2009 manifesto framework, 'Working together we can do more'. Beneath that, the placard promises no vote in local government elections if strikers' demands are not met. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 253: 'SMS strike'. A play on SMS competitions Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 254: 'Less yada yada more ching ching' (Less talk, more money) – a play on a cellphone provider's advertising slogan. 'Stop buying expensive cars'. Recall Baloyi's indignant remark about riding on scooters. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 255: The old favourite, 'Ons is [gat]vol', a slightly crude way of saying, roughly, 'We are fed up'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 256: 'Why not publish parliament's salary scales? Johannesburg.. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 257: 'Poor prison warder'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 258: 'Richie Rich read this'. Directed at Richard Baloyi, it lists annual increases for parastatals, and government money spent on world cup tickets and hotels for specific ministers. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 259: 'Essential Services equals essential salaries'; Natalspruit hospital banner. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti

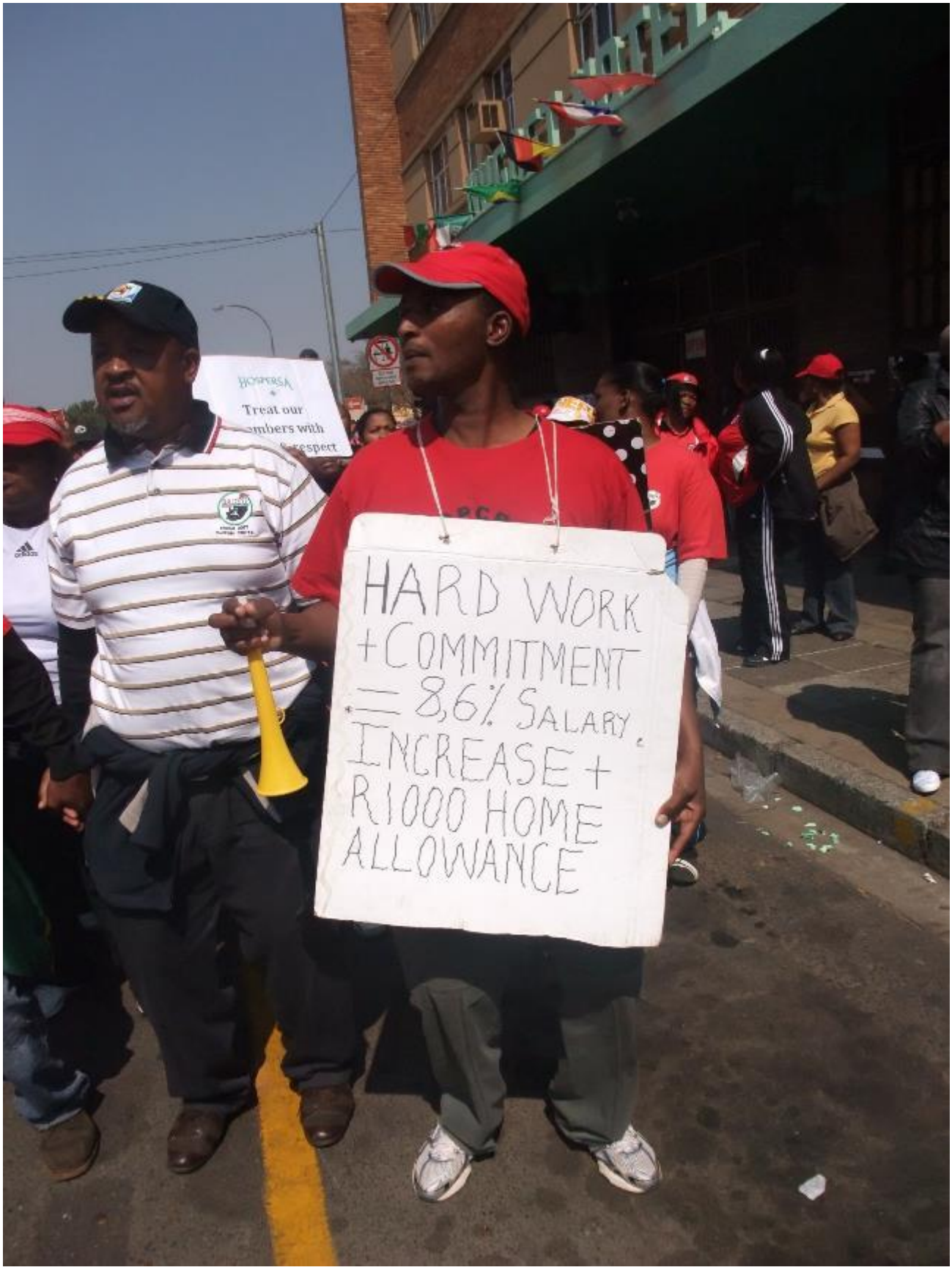


Photo 260: 'Hard work and commitment'. In the background, a Hospersa placard demands respect. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 261: The slightly obscured printed placards in the bottom photo read 'We produce all professionals, treat and pay us accordingly'; 'Sorry we don't want peanuts we are not monkeys' Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 262: Double-sided placard carried by someone wearing a Sadtu cap. Side one, 'A disgrace to this noble profession'. Side two, textbook mathematics. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 263: 'Baloyi you are a product of a teacher. Your wisdom is well measured and assessed' . Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 264: Johannesburg . This likely refers to deaths of learners in road transport accidents. School transport is not provided by the state in South Africa Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 265: 'Jay-Zee [Zuma] feel it we are here' . Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 266: 'Feel it, it is war!' Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 267: Unofficial placard conveying the demands, referencing the world cup and 'our children's future' and another referencing the demands of the previous strike about medical aid schemes. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 268: Johannesburg. 'Millions on world cup tickets for family and girlfriends. Nonsense. Feel it. The workers can't take any shit anymore. 8 [Crude Afrikaans, Get lost].' Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 269: 'Billions were there for world cup, why should 8.6% be a problem' . Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti

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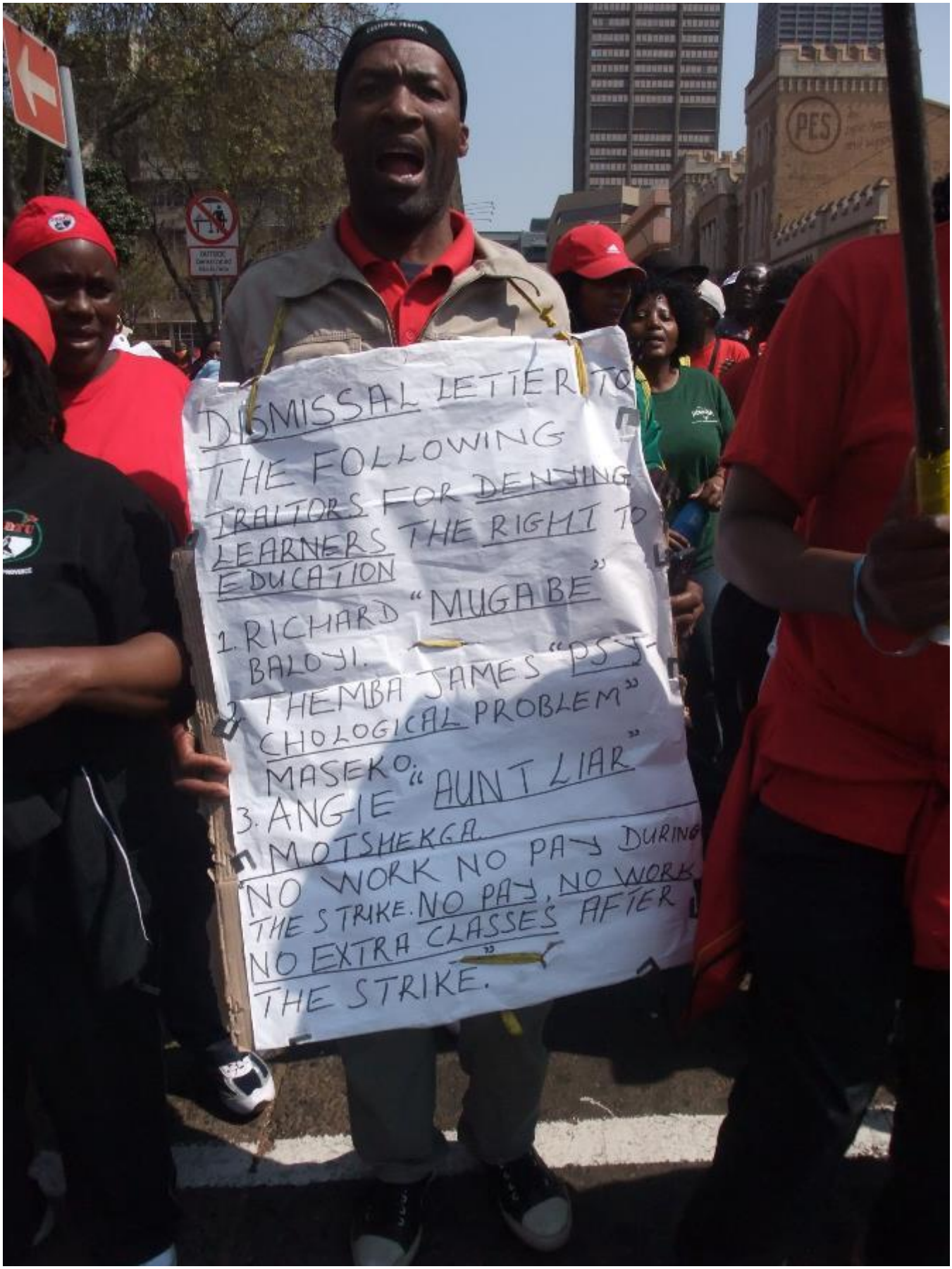


Photo 270: 'Traitors'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 271: Less is more. A placard politicising workers' grievances and implying unfinished struggle with the conclusion, 'aluta continua'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 272: 'A rat' with a 'fat MP' baiting the trap. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 273: Johannesburg. 'Baloyi we are tired of you! What is 7%? Can you maintain your kids with it? Phezulu nge 8.6% [Up with 8.6%]'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 274: 'Baloyi you are a dismal failure'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 275: 'Attention Baloyi'. A teacher's placard. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti

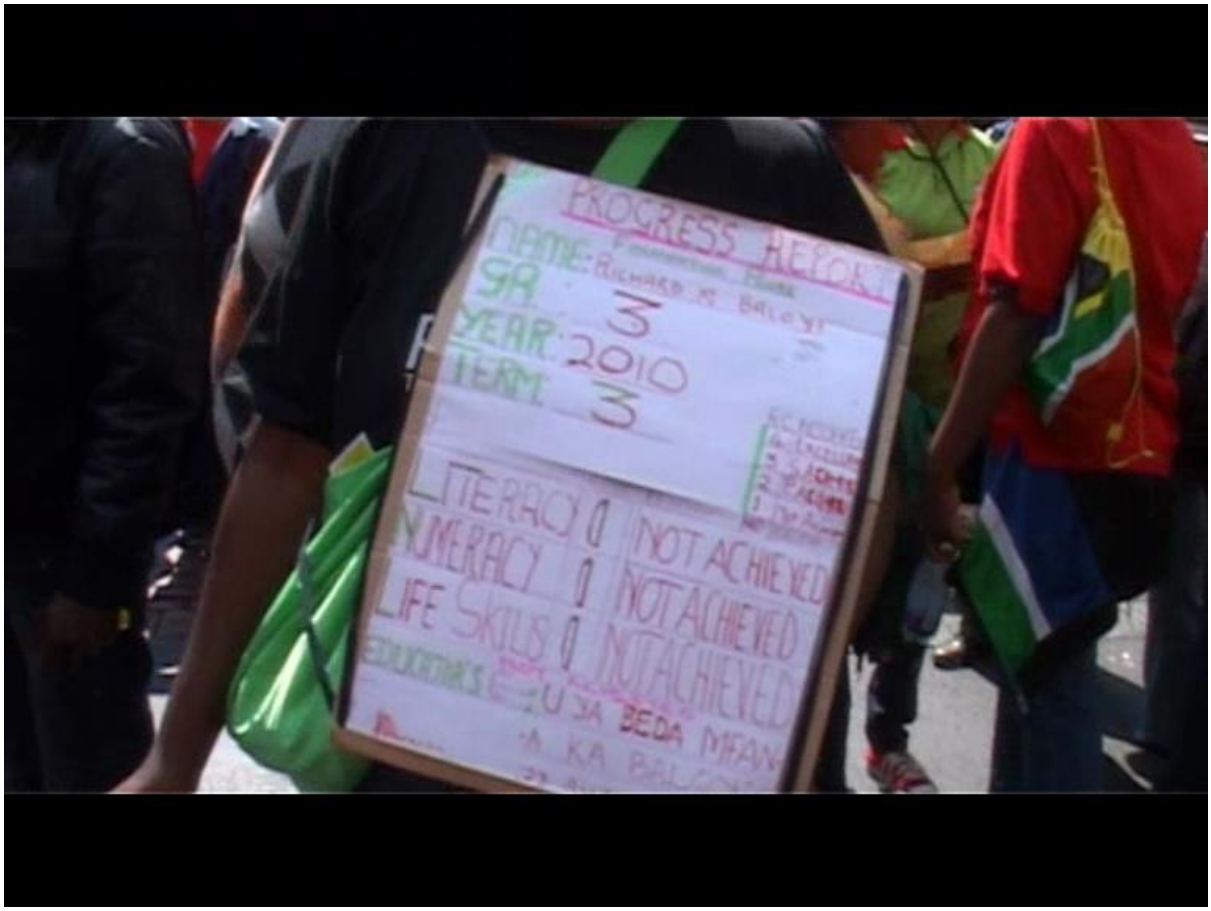


Photo 276: Another report card for Baloyi. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 277: 'Baloyi… buy your mother g-string and shipelani. This placard repeats one from CHB Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 278: 'Go buy xibalani'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 279: Insult and personalisation: 'Baloyi is a menstrual rag, he refuses to pay. Get lost!' Johannesburg. [Sesotho, Afrikaans] Source: Claire Ceruti

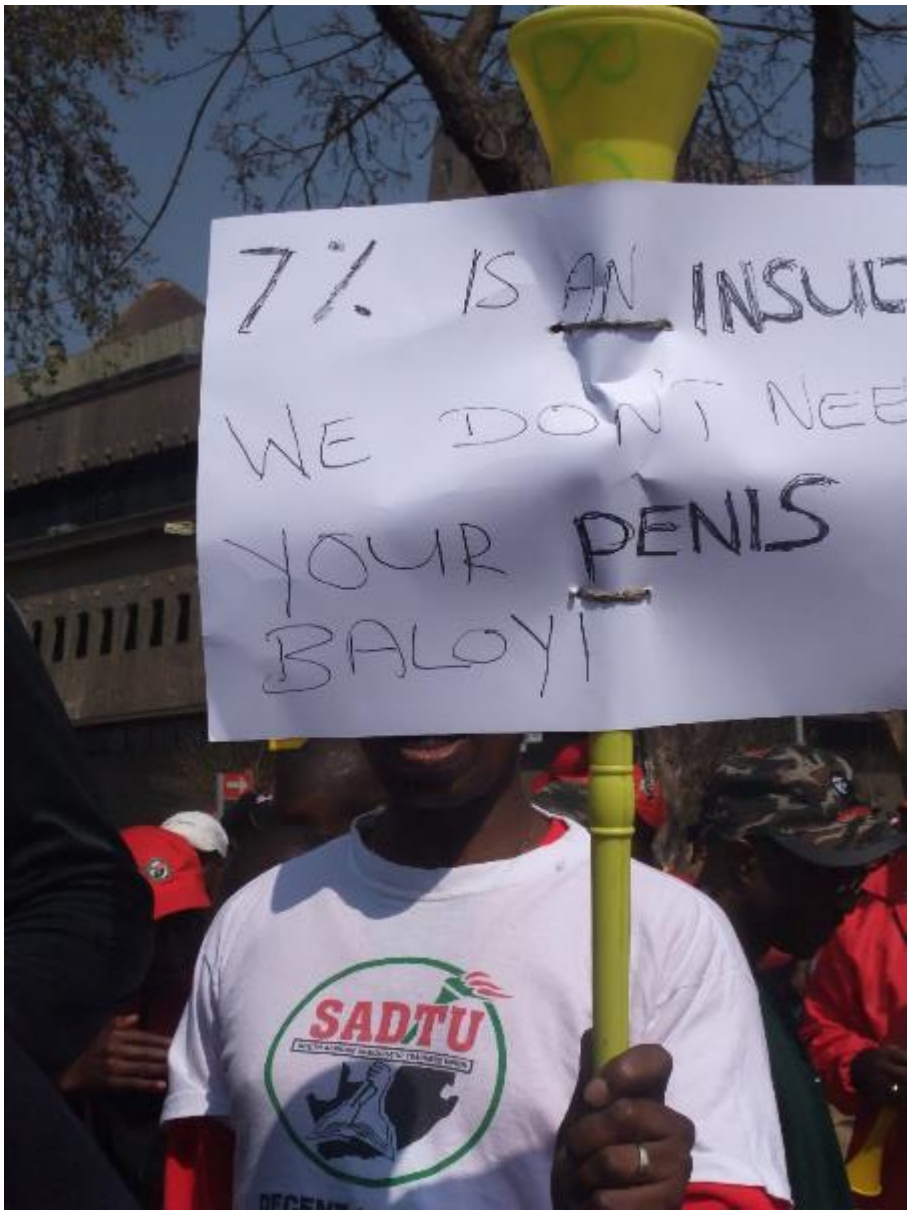


Photo 280: Mutual insults: 'We don't need your penis, Baloyi' Source: Claire Ceruti

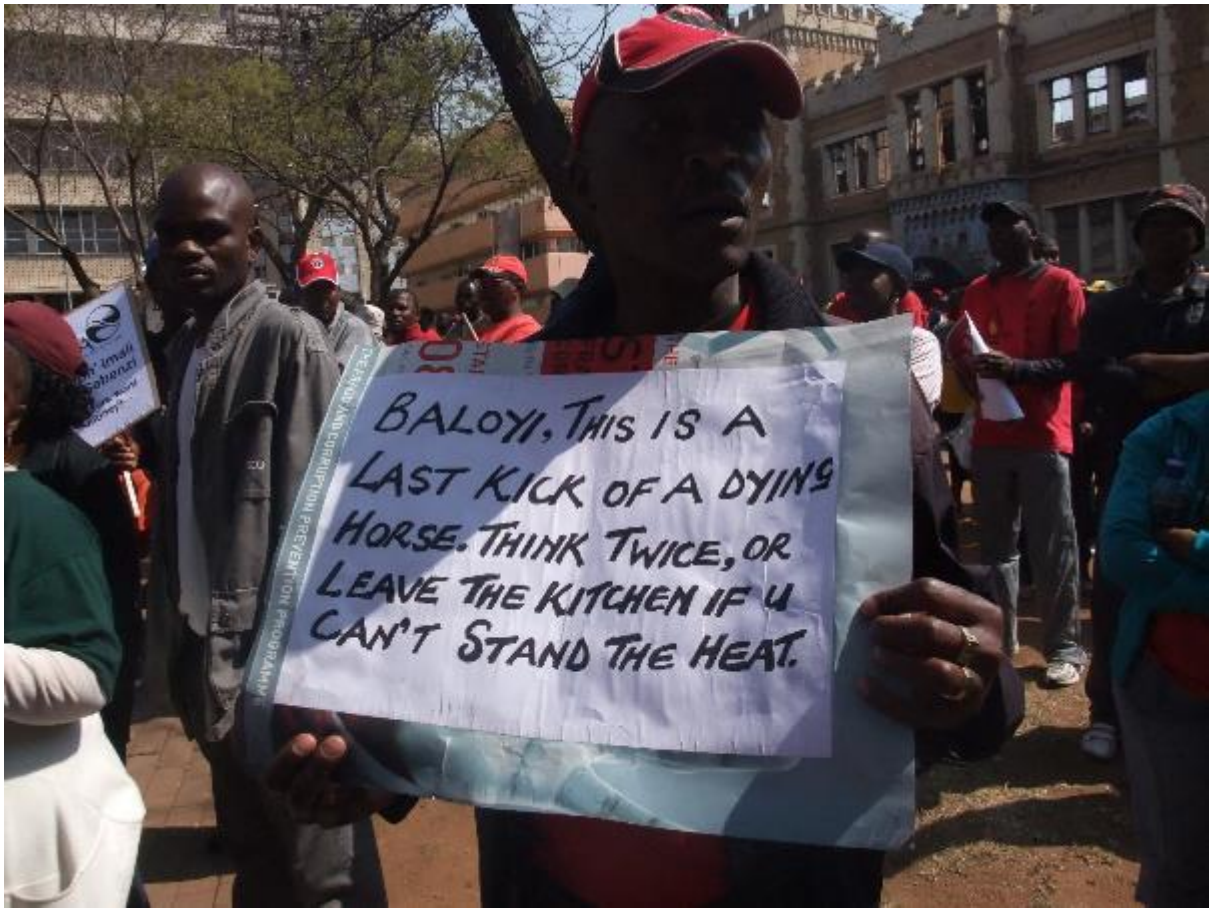


Photo 281: The last kick. Source: Claire Ceruti

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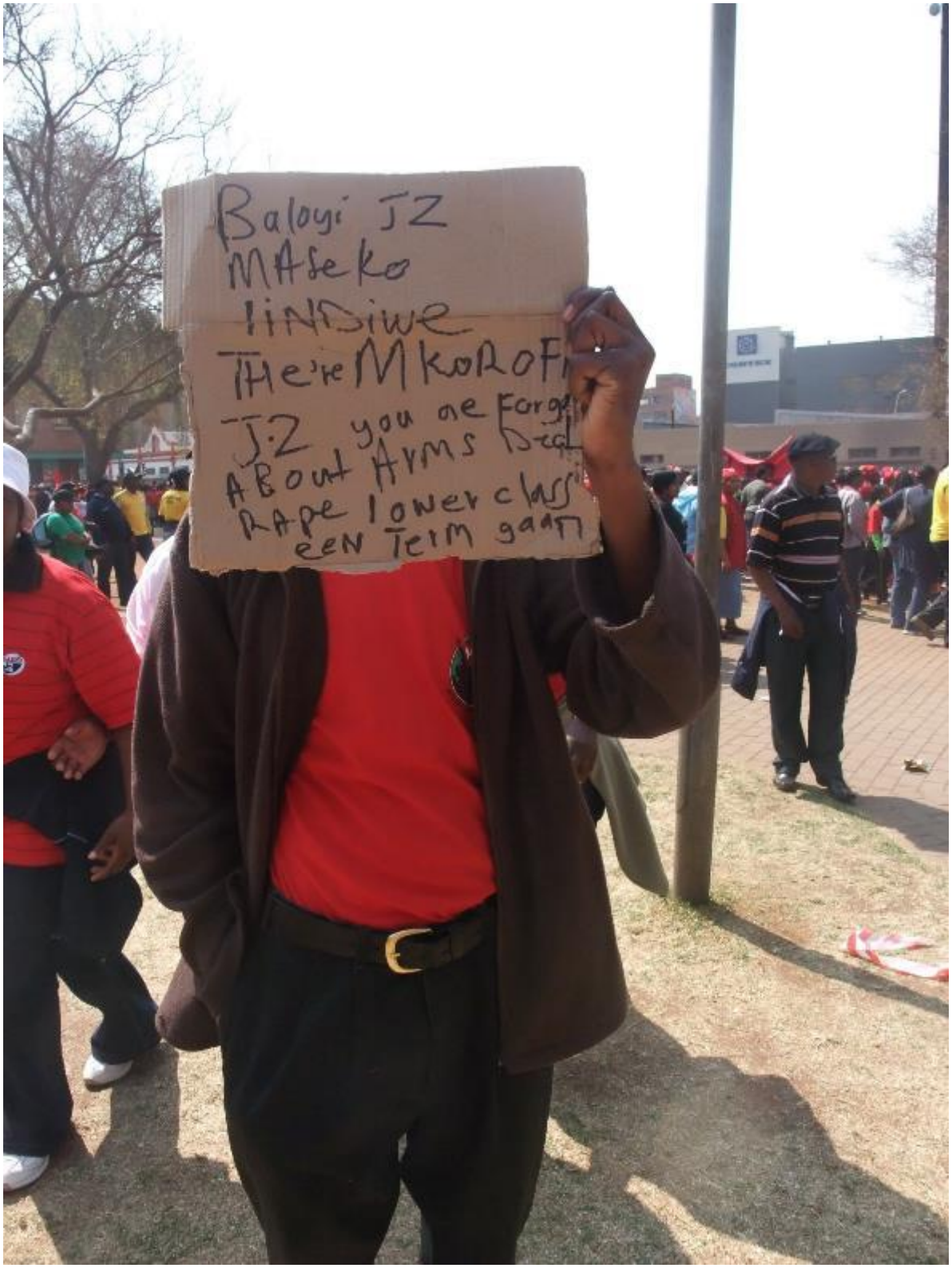


Photo 282: 'Mkorofi' means rude or ill-mannered. 'Een term gaan' (at the bottom) is Afrikaans for 'One term, go!'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 283: 'We supported you through your corruption and rape case and now you are against us… Zuma for which [people]??', Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti

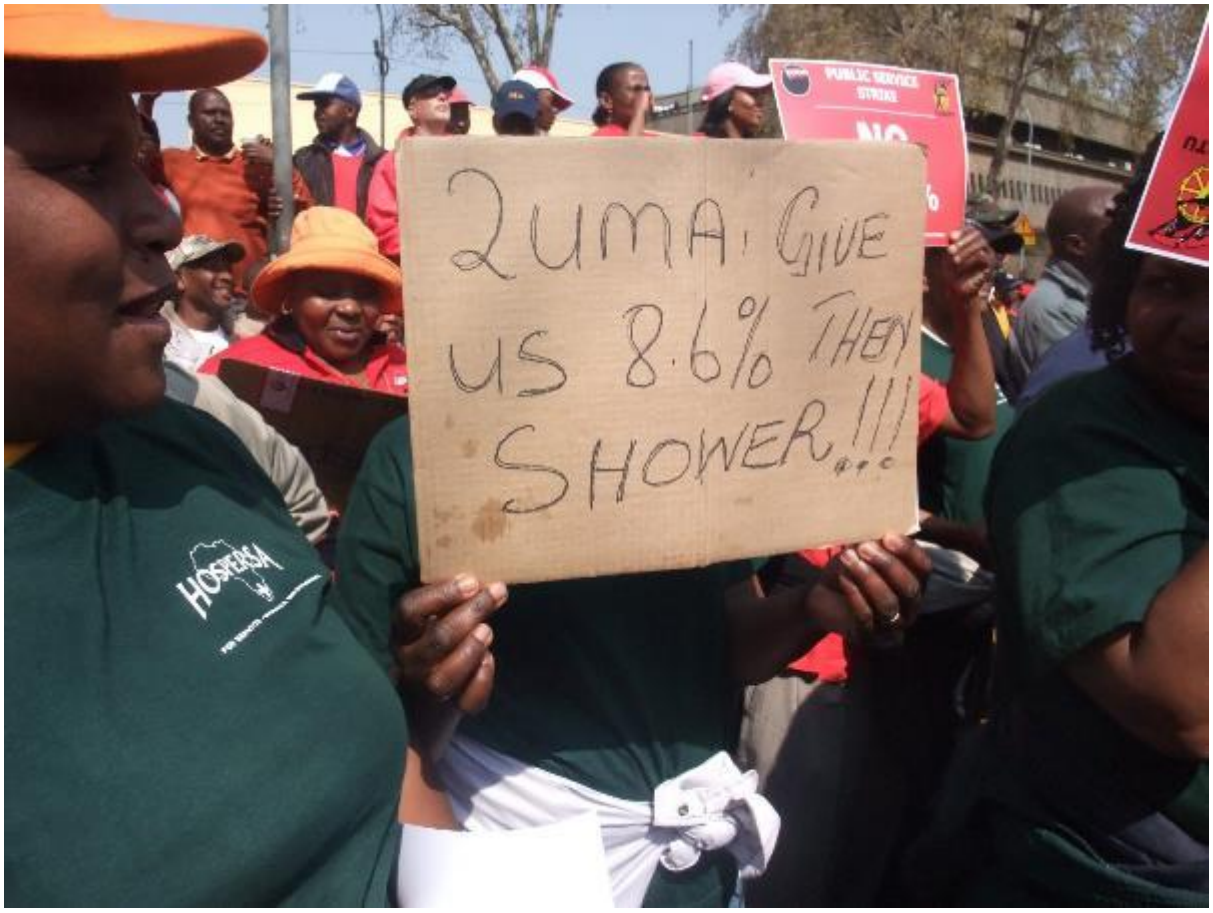


Photo 284: 'Zuma: Give us 8.6% then shower'. A reference to Zuma's trial. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 285: 'We don't want shares in Aurora gold-mine,' Johannesburg. Another thinly veiled reference, this time to one of Zuma's sons' business interests Source: Claire Ceruti

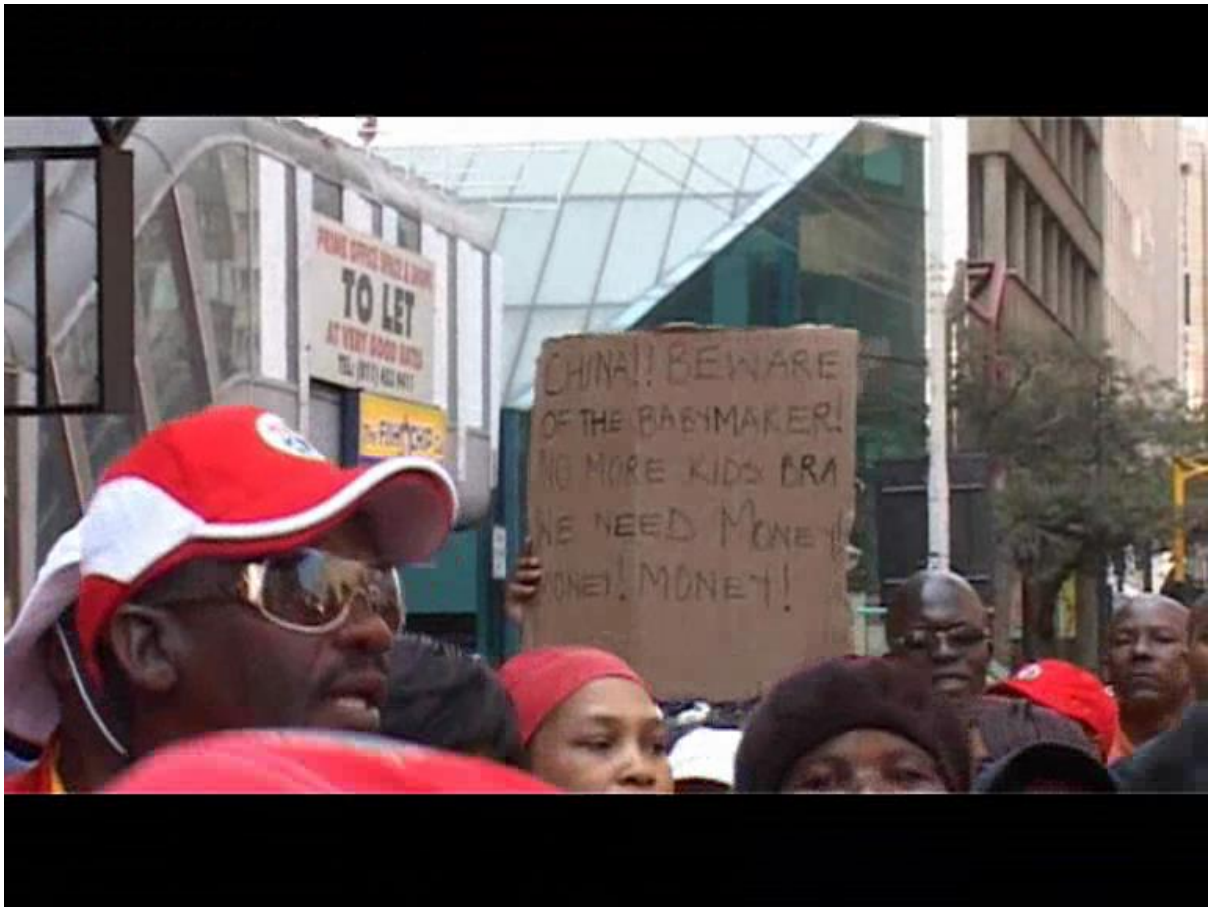


Photo 286: 'China! Beware of the baby maker'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 287: ''Beware China girls, no children this time'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 288: 'Fire your skebereshe [slut]'. 'Ma Ntuli', one of Zuma's wives, was recently accused of having an affair with one of her bodyguards. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 289: 'Zuma your wives deplete state funds'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 290: 'One president, one wife, one term,' Johannesburg. A thinly veiled reference to Zuma, and a vote of no-confidence, suggesting that he should not be president again. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 291: '1 president 1 wife 1 term'. A placard asserts the strike demands while suggesting that Zuma should not run again. The pink placard to the left, in the form of a report card for Baloyi, appeared already at a teacher's meeting at Elke stadium. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 292: ''One term one tender'. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 293: Threatening accountability: 'Zuma: Arrogant. Serve one term or recalled.' The poster references Zuma's court case and suggests Fikile Mbalula 'for 2012'. Mbalula was the former Youth

League president and deputy minister of police at that time. By the end of the year, he would be serving on Zuma's cabinet as Minister of Sport and Recreation Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 294: 'Vavi and Malema for president'. Malema was then still in the ANC Youth League. The reference to Jesus is probably a reference to Zuma's repeated statements that the ANC would 'rule until Jesus Christ comes back'. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 295: 'Zuma out, Vavi for president in 2012' Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti

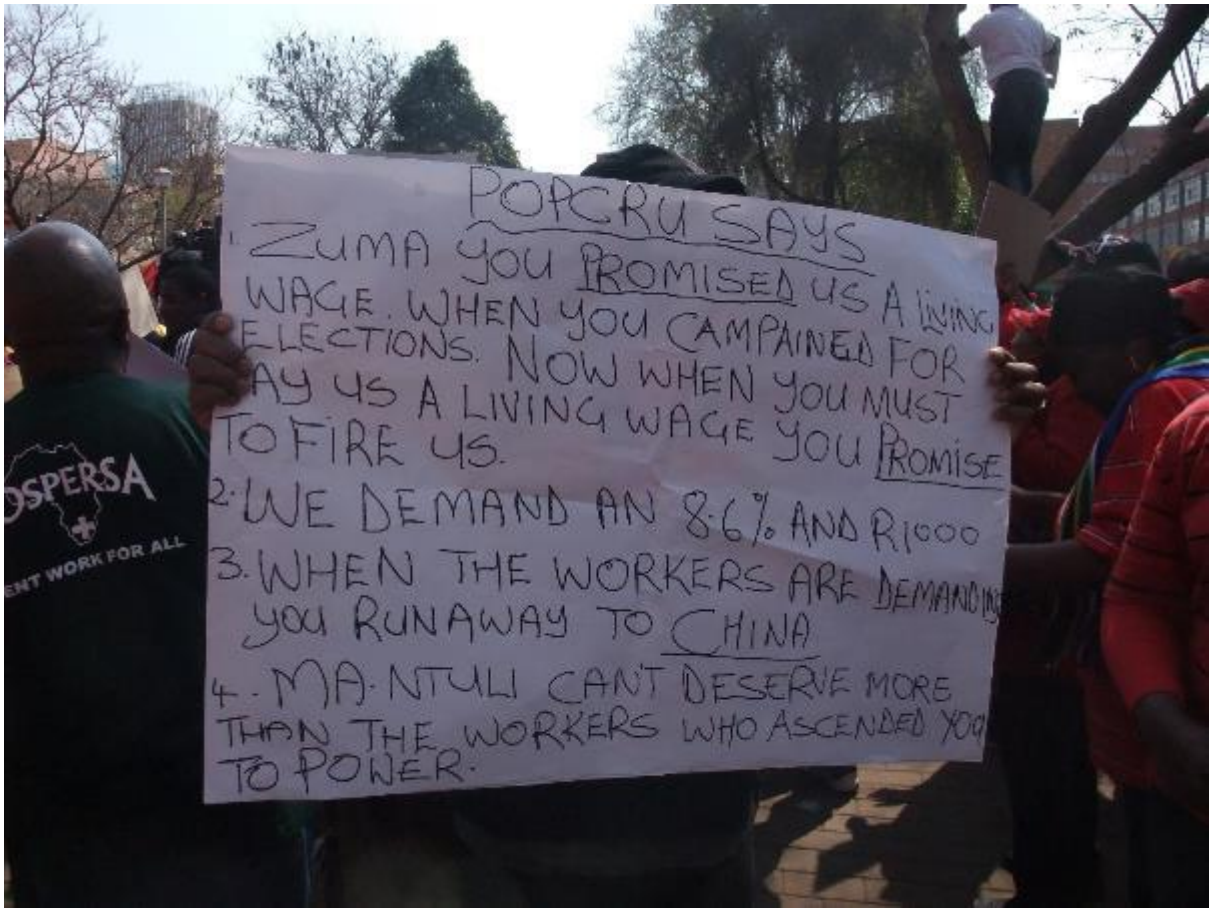


Photo 296: Zuma's unfulfilled promises. The placard references Zuma's threat to fire strikers, implies Zuma's distance through the reference to 'running away to China' and highlights workers as the source of Zuma's ascendency Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 297: 'JZ: Man of talks no actions'. Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 298: A host of placards suggesting expectations unfulfilled. The two on the left express political disappointment. The top right one ('It was Geraldine') makes an explicit continuity with the previous strike and government. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 299: A contingent from the Professional Educators' Union. The handwritten placard in the top photo refers to Zuma's statements after the 2007 strike. The reversed yellow and red placard to the right of the frame reads 'Msholozi [Zuma's pet name] say something'.

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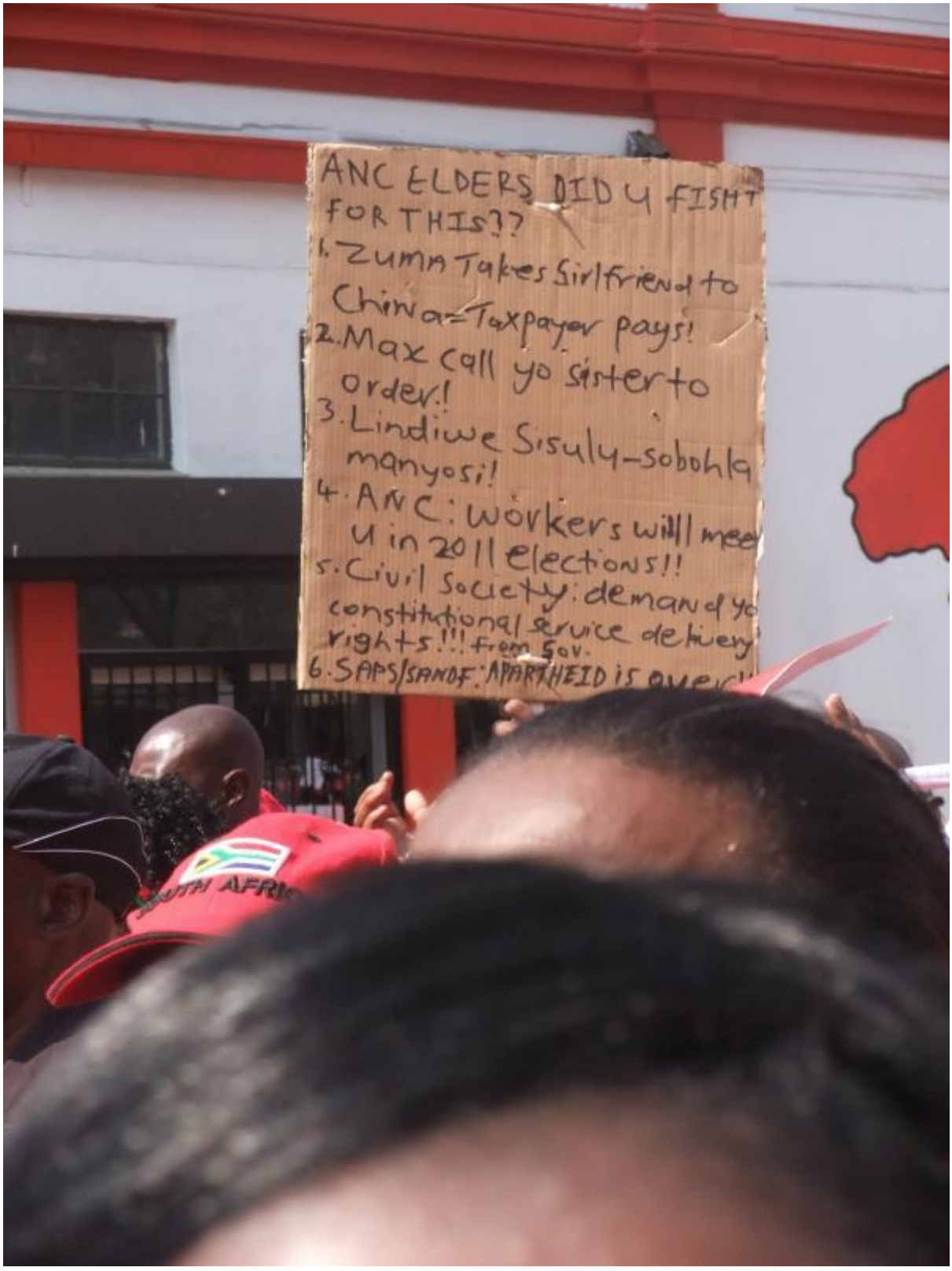


Photo 300: 'ANC elders did you fight for this?' Sobohla Manyosi means idiomatically 'your prosperity will abate'. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti



Photo 301: A placard uses a photo of Chris Hani on a t-shirt to declare 7% 'an insult', and referencing a betrayed struggle. Johannesburg. Source: Claire Ceruti

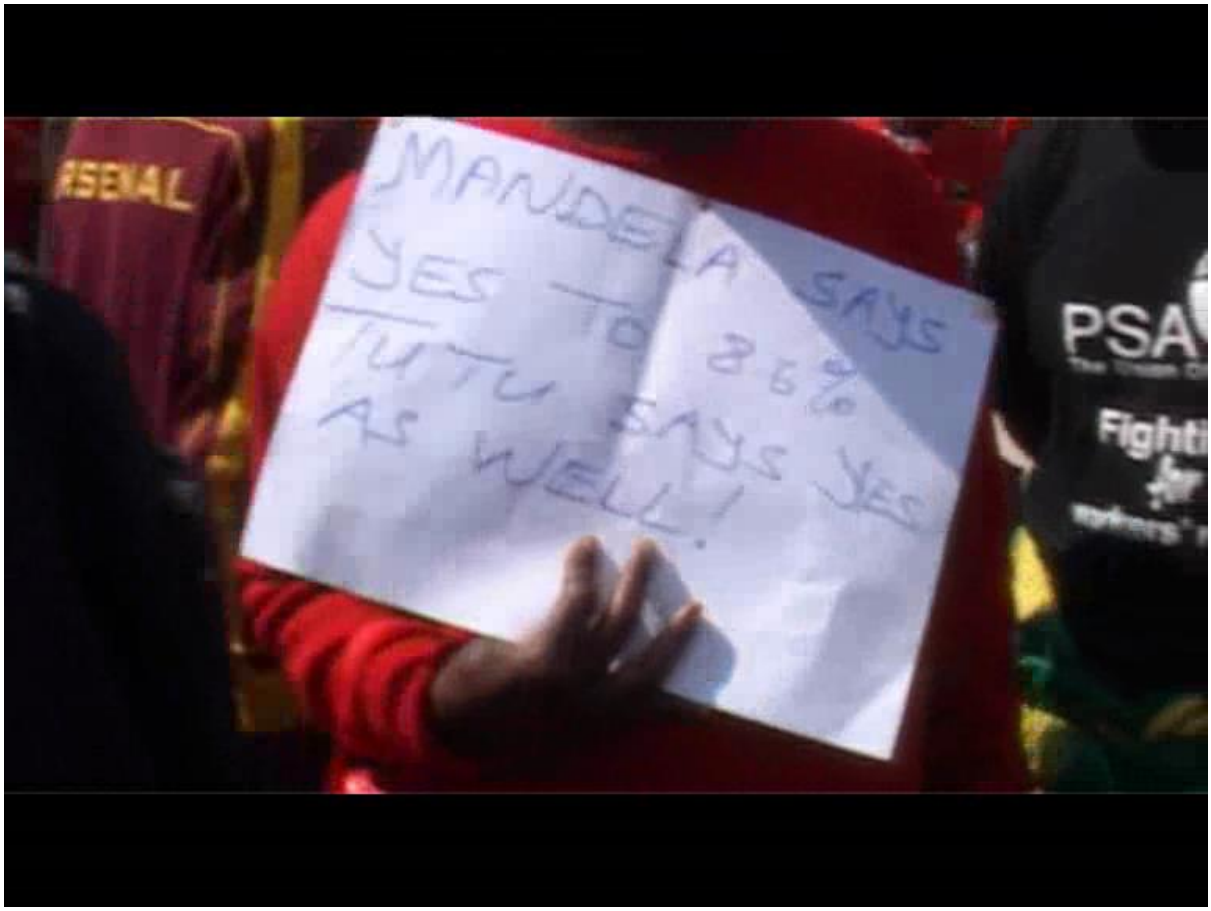


Photo 302: Calling on higher authorities, referencing the anti-apartheid struggle. Screenshot of footage, Johannesburg Source: Claire Ceruti

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1 September, Diepkloof hall, teachers' meeting



Photo 303: A teachers' meeting after the strike was suspended. Although the hall is still full, it is not packed as it was in the early days of the strike. Source: Claire Ceruti

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Photo 304: Ronald Nyathi, Sadtu, makes an impassioned speech obliquely but obviously calling Cosatu to order. Source: Claire Ceruti

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The end of the photos

Appendix C: Turnitin report

Ceruti 85-50828 Strikes and eventful identities 6 October 2022-1.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

5%	5%	2%	1%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.rc44labour.org Internet Source	1%
2	www.marxists.org Internet Source	1%
3	vdoc.pub Internet Source	<1%
4	cosatu.org.za Internet Source	<1%
5	Submitted to University of Cape Town Student Paper	<1%
6	wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
7	lists.fahamu.org Internet Source	<1%
8	journals.lib.unb.ca Internet Source	<1%
9	www.boerevryheid.co.za Internet Source	<1%