Poverty and socio-political transition: Perceptions in four racially demarcated residential sites in Gauteng

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In the period preceding the May 2011 municipal elections there was speculation in the South African media about how widespread dissatisfaction with economic insecurity and poor service delivery would affect voting behaviour. The popular protests that occur intermittently are symptoms of a deep structural malady: the prevalence of chronic poverty in the context of a widening gap between South Africa's rich and poor. State officials keep pointing to the cushioning effects of social grants and poverty alleviation initiatives, but critics argue that poor state performance and failure to include communities in political processes are holding back socioeconomic development. This article discusses recent research on economic hardship and the 'politics of the poor' in four residential sites in the vicinity of Pretoria. The data reveal grassroots perceptions of poverty and vulnerability and the coalescing and contradictory political discourses across racial divides.

1. Background: Poverty in South Africa

In November 2010, the South African Government launched a long-awaited New Growth Plan that aims to address the poverty, inequality and 'extreme joblessness' that constrain sustainable growth and inhibit the post-apartheid project of creating a just and equitable society (Patel, 2010). The way South Africa's development agenda has been held back in the recent past can be inferred from a quick perusal of poverty and inequality data. In 1994, when the new political order came into being, 17 million South Africans could be described as 'poor', with about 70% of them living in the former Bantustans (Van Donk & Pieterse, 2004; Bhorat & Kanbur, 2006).[2] By 2001 that estimate had increased and approximately 26 million were categorised as 'living in poverty' (Schwabe, 2004). Of course, our ability to identify emerging trends is somewhat hampered by the dissimilar ways in which poverty is measured and conceptualised, and by inadequate understanding of who precisely constitute 'the poor'. The estimates above are based on 'absolute' definitions that deemed all those below a minimum living level to be enduring poverty. A more subjective definition of 'being poor' would capture the way people see their quality of life and their rights, and what they aspire to or expect in the way of change and inclusion, compared with the rest of society. Thus, the related notion of 'inequality', which Green suggests has attracted renewed attention over the past decade because it 'affects every aspect of the life chances of the poor' (2010:33), deserves some elucidation.

Between 1995 and 2000 the gap between South Africa's 'wealthy' and 'poor' widened. Statistics South Africa (2002) data reveal that mean household income declined by 19% during this period, with the poorer half of the population earning only 9.7% of the total

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[2] During the apartheid era, 10 Bantustans were established for the occupation and self-governance of black South Africans of various ethnic origins (see Clark & Worger, 2004).

national income. The Gini coefficients per racial group over a 30-year period shown in Table 1 confirm that inequalities have increased within all four racial groups, and in particular that the gap between the incomes of wealthy and poor black people is much wider than the income gaps within the other race groups. Interestingly, the increased inequality rate among whites, coloureds and Indians appears to be moving at a very similar pace.

Table 1: Gini coefficients by population group using per capita income, 1970–2001.

	1970	1975	1991	1996	2001
African	-	0.49	0.62	0.66	0.72
White	0.43	-	0.46	0.50	0.60
Indian	0.42	-	0.49	0.52	0.60
Coloured	0.53	-	0.52	0.56	0.64

Sources: Schwabe (2004); Daniel et al. (2005:495)

Much current writing on poverty and development in southern Africa wrestles with the paradox of change and stasis (see Naidu & Roberts, 2004; SARPN, 2006). While it is common to imagine the possibility of a break from the historical past, there is at the same time an acknowledgement of people's rootedness in unchanging socioeconomic conditions. Clearly, South Africa in 2011 boasts a political landscape greatly altered from that of almost two decades ago. Legal racism no longer exists and democracy has replaced the segregationist doctrines of the apartheid era. There is freedom of movement and expression in place of influx control, pass laws and detention without trial. Notwithstanding this political re-ordering, anecdotal evidence consistently reiterates that for the poor not much has changed (see Schlemmer, 2005; Seekings, 2007). It would be misleading, however, to claim that the post-apartheid state has taken few or no steps to address poverty. Government departments have invested a fair amount of resources in meeting basic needs (such as housing, water and electricity, road works and clinics in townships and rural areas) over the past 17 years. In addition, state departments have established numerous poverty relief projects, including more substantial pensions, social grants and feeding schemes, human resource development and training, and a series of anti-poverty funds for indigent individuals and households (Van Donk & Pieterse, 2004; Simkins, 2007). The question to raise, however, is whether 'poor' communities, particularly those in the better resourced provinces (such as Gauteng), believe that their conditions of life, both material and social, have improved over time – given post-apartheid promises of a better life for all?

In this paper selected data is offered on experiences of poverty and people's perceptions of changing socioeconomic circumstances in four sites in the vicinity of Pretoria: Danville, Eersterust, Laudium and Soshanguve. The four areas have racially specific histories shaped by the Group Areas Act of the past. While it is commonly argued that class (after the demise of apartheid) holds greater significance than race, it is also conceded that South Africans continue to embrace both national and sub-group identities (Klandermans et al., 2001). These identities have been given new life in racial (and, to a lesser extent, gender) quotas affecting employment opportunities and have resurfaced in state discourse on who should be prioritised for benefits and redress. Thus, in the present study, viewing poverty in terms of racial hues was regarded as a useful step towards gaining comparative insights.

2. Profiles of four racially demarcated areas of Pretoria[3]

Pretoria, once the headquarters of a repressive apartheid state, now hosts the administrative machinery of the new democratic order. It is central to the Tshwane 'unicity', a vibrant, densely populated, economic hub which resulted from 13 former local authorities in the greater Pretoria metropolitan area being integrated into one. Gauteng is not a poor province: it has the second lowest proportion of poor persons of all South Africa's provinces (Schwabe, 2004). Pretoria itself has been described as a comparatively affluent city, although 22% of the population are said to be enduring poverty (SAIRR, 2009). This study focused largely on areas where large sectors of Pretoria's poor are concentrated, to gain an understanding of their socioeconomic conditions and their political perceptions and sentiments. The four sites are described below.

Danville, a white working class area about 10 km west of the Pretoria CBD, functioning as a dormitory town, was regarded as an appropriate research choice to capture 'white poverty'. It is close to other white residential areas such as Phillip Nel Park, Elandspoort and North View, and adjacent to the black and Indian townships of Atteridgeville and Laudium. The original suburb dates back to the 1940s when it was created specifically to cater for Afrikaans-speaking blue-collar workers employed on the industrial and steel (ISCOR) plants in Pretoria West. The area remains predominantly white but changes can be seen as black civil servants buy up properties, particularly in the newer extensions, at relatively cheap prices. Danville has held much interest for scholars over the years because of its class character and right-wing politics (Department of Arts & Culture, 2004).

Eersterust, about 20 km east of Pretoria, was chosen because it is the city's only coloured township. It came into being in 1963 to accommodate scattered populations of coloured people forcibly removed from places like Marabastad, Lady Selborne, Eastwood, Claremont and Booysens, which were set aside in 1958, 10 years after apartheid became official policy, for white occupation only. While Eersterust has a middle class sector, most economically active residents hold working class occupations, with nearby Silverton and Watloo being the main places of employment. Levels of unemployment are increasing and a growing number of people (both young and old) are becoming self-employed or seeking salaried work in informal sector enterprises outside the area (Faul, 1989; Department of Arts & Culture, 2004; IUFRO/University of Pretoria, 2011).

Laudium is an Indian suburb, a relatively small area about 15 km west of Pretoria. Most of the Indian South Africans in Pretoria in the 1950s lived in the area known as Marabastad (or the Asiatic Bazaar). By 1962, with the passing of the Group Areas Act, they had been forcibly removed and relocated in Laudium. Since the dismantling of the Group Areas Act in 1991 many wealthier, and younger, Indians have moved out into previously white suburbs in the Pretoria vicinity. Laudium currently has an established middle-class sector, but a sizeable minority live in sub-economic houses and have insecure and ad hoc jobs. The area has a busy retail and small manufacturing sector. Networks of friendship and religious affiliation appear to exist, as does some semblance of kinship and familial bonds. Most of the Indian poor live in a demarcated section (a social ghetto) known as the 'White Blocks' area (Freund, 1995; Department of Arts & Culture, 2004).

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[3] The Group Areas Act of 1950 enforced separate residential areas on the basis of racial classifications (blacks, whites, coloureds and Indians) (see Clark & Worger, 2004).

Soshanguve is a historically black residential area approximately 30 km north of Pretoria. Prior to (the Bantustan) Bophuthatswana's declaration of independence in December 1977, Soshanguve was known as Mabopane East, forming part of the greater Mabopane-Boekenhout-Winterveld complex. Mabopane East was renamed 'Soshanguve' in 1977 when the area was incorporated into the Bophuthatswana Bantustan. Since the late 1970s, Soshanguve has become a vast expanse of semi-developed territory with formal housing flanked by informal settlements, some well-established and some less so. It has a vibrant informal sector and spaza shops alongside of newly established malls (Ligthelm, 2007). As a dynamic and expanding area, it exhibits all the problems of a peri-urban settlement that has become home to migrants from all over Gauteng, the North West Province and Limpopo. Because parts of Soshanguve are quite well developed, with good transport and infrastructure, the area has drawn residents from surrounding black townships such as Mamelodi, Wallmannsthal, Mabopane, Winterveld and Atteridgeville (Huggins, 1989; Anderson, 1992; Gaither, 2000).

None of the four areas is racially exclusive any more, although, as places in which the poor and marginalised are rooted, they retain strong pre-1994 characteristics with predominantly white, coloured, Indian or black populations.

3. Research design and methods

For the quantitative research four separate survey sites were purposively selected. A probability sample of 1567 households was proposed across the four areas, and a dissimilar number of households was allocated to each area in a fairly judgemental fashion, taking account of the relative sizes of the areas, the heterogeneity of each sample area, and the probable presence of individuals from the target population; that is, people enduring poverty and unemployment and who manipulate various survival mechanisms in their day-to-day lives (see Table 2).

Table 2: Allocated sample size

Area	Sample size	Percentage
Danville	354	22.6%
Eersterust	270	17.2%
Soshanguve	676	43.1%
Laudium	267	17.0%
Total	1567	100.0%

Source: Naidoo (2005)

Enumerator areas (EAs) were randomly selected in each area using multistage cluster sampling and the 1996 Census Enumerator Areas. Although preliminary results of the 2001 census had already been released by the time the samples were drawn in June 2003, the full Census 2001 dataset was still being awaited. In the absence of sufficient information to draw the various samples, older data from the 1996 census had to be used. Approximately 30 households were allocated per EA. Fieldworkers systematically selected households across selected EAs using an interval and a random starting point. In the case of multiple households on a stand, a single household was randomly selected. Just over 94% (94.4%) of the anticipated 1567 households were surveyed successfully. The lowest completion rate (82.5%) was observed in Danville and the highest in Laudium, where the full complement of households was sampled. Slightly more than 99% of sampled households were enumerated in

Eersterust and about 97% in Soshanguve. The highest proportion of refusals was noted in Danville (12%), followed by Soshanguve (2.4%). Correspondingly, Danville also led the way with the highest number of inaccessible households where interviews did not take place (4.5%), again followed by Soshanguve with 1%.

After the quantitative survey had been completed, a team of graduate students conducted a total of 90 in-depth qualitative interviews in 2004, 2007 and 2008. The large majority of these interviews were conducted in the same vicinities as the households surveyed earlier, but usually with participants who did not take part in the survey. While the survey offered comprehensive insights, our emphasis veered eventually towards themes emerging out of the longitudinal qualitative research in which people's sentiments and viewpoints on politics and economics were strongly represented.

4. General and particular findings

4.1 Glimpses of hardship and vulnerability

Two broad categories of data are presented here: indications of hardship and vulnerability to poverty, as shown in Table 3, and perceptions of changing politics and socioeconomic circumstances, as shown in Table 4. While objective criteria relating to household income, households dependent on welfare and numbers of people facing food insecurity and unemployment are used, qualitative impressions are also integrated.

In the qualitative work, the respondents across the areas tended to mention R2000 per month as a rough estimate of the absolute minimum required to sustain a household of about four people. This amount covered payment for rent, water, electricity (or other energy resources), food, school fees and other basic necessities. Since South Africa does not have an official or generally accepted poverty line, households whose accumulated income is less than R2000 per month are viewed as being very poor. The All Media Products Surveys conducted a national survey in which 'the poor' in mean national terms were assessed as those earning 'less than R1400' per month (Schlemmer, 2005:6). In the case of Gauteng, however, it is reasonable to propose a slightly higher minimum household subsistence level because poor communities, locked into the urban economies of South Africa's industrial heartland, face higher living costs here than in most other places. This also correlates well with the Bureau for Market Research's minimum living level (MLL) of R1871 per month for a household of 4.7 people in 2003 (cited in Landman, 2003:4). With this figure as the indicator, more than 40% of all households in the four areas surveyed revealed themselves to be enduring economic hardship. Soshanguve and Eersterust have the largest concentration of low-income households as well as the largest numbers of people actively seeking work (see Table 3). It was interesting to note that close to 20% of households in all four areas are dependent on state welfare (state pensions, child and disability grants). Compared to most other African states, South Africa's welfare system is well established. Nevertheless, many respondents (predominantly coloured and black) claimed to be eligible for welfare benefits but could not make their way through the cumbersome bureaucratic welfare system to access these entitlements.

A clear indicator of hardship is, of course, food insecurity. Apart from Laudium, in the other areas sizeable proportions of people stated that they periodically endured hunger because they could not afford to buy food. Both the survey and the qualitative work reveal that most of

Pretoria's poor live socially isolated existences. Few have close friends. The most destitute of people spoke of the absence of friendship networks and of abandonment by close kin. In general, though, if faced with financial crises most people will rely on themselves and household members only, relatives to some extent, and to a lesser extent neighbours. While Soshanguve was the most vulnerable in this regard, very high numbers of respondents in all four areas also made reference to inaccessible or unreliable familial networks of support. Partly in response to this, many people were aligning themselves to organisations and extra-familial groups.

National estimates of poverty per racial group were calculated in 2000 by May et al. to be 61% for blacks, 38% for coloureds, 5% for Indians, and 1% for whites. Although such statistics consistently reinforce the idea that Indians and whites are not severely affected by poverty, targeting the poorer sectors of these communities will reveal more substantial numbers (see Table 3). Here it could also be noted that the difference between Eersterust (51.3%) and Soshanguve (59.7%) in terms of household incomes below R2000 per month was strikingly small. Irrespective of national population estimates, the hard experience of poverty (for households with incomes less than R2000) is most surely very similar. This reality should invite similar policy decisions to address vulnerability among all racial groups.

This background on experiences of economic hardship in the Pretoria region helps, in part, to explain an emerging politics and critique of the state that is beginning to reshape and connect the discourses of the various racial groups.

Table 3: Hardship and vulnerability, by area

	Danville ('white area')	Eersterust ('coloured area')	Laudium ('Indian area')	Soshanguve ('black area')	Totals
Indications of hardship and vulnerability					
Households with income below R2000	23.4%	51.3%	13.1.2%	59.7%	42.4%
Households enduring food insecurity	19.1%	20.5%	7.6%	33.1%	23.4%
Households dependent on welfare	21.6%	21.6%	17.4%	19.1%	19.7%
Individuals unemployed and actively seeking work	10.3%	34.3%	12.9%	42.2%	29.2%
Individuals without any support networks	30.66%	37.83%	35.87%	49.22%	41%

Source: Naidoo (2005)

4.2 Grassroots perceptions of state responses to poverty

Respondents were asked a range of questions in the survey about voting behaviour and whether they were going to vote in the 2004 general elections. The survey showed that while many people voted with much optimism in 1999, the political mood became quite pessimistic after that. Many viewed the state as largely 'ineffective' and as not addressing their needs. In fact, most people of all racial groups in the survey claimed that since 1994 the government had 'not at all' taken their needs into account: Danville (69%), Eersterust (60%), Laudium (73%) and Soshanguve (53%). In Soshanguve more respondents (52%) were aware of the presence of local government representatives than people in the other areas, indicating a stronger link to political processes than is the case with residents in the other sites. Interest in politics was strongest in places where mass based organisations had previously been active – mainly in Soshanguve, to some extent in Eersterust, and less so in Laudium and Danville.

The qualitative work conducted in 2004, 2007 and 2008 resonated strongly with the survey data. Two principal discourses played themselves out. First, there was discussion of *the state's ineffectiveness and non-benevolence*. Within this initial discourse were two sub-discourses: one that explained the state's poor performance as being due to too many demands and too few resources (such voices were not particularly vociferous, though many respondents in Soshanguve articulated such sentiments), and another that saw the state as acting in an un-even-handed fashion, i.e. of discriminating against certain groups of the poor. Examples of the first sub-discourse were the following:

> Our government is trying hard. It is just that there are many people in our country and that is why not everybody will be catered for. The government is doing all it can and unfortunately some of us are not part of the lucky. It is impossible to create employment for everybody. (Soshanguve respondent)
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> Nothing is happening here … but listen, we can't expect overnight changes. (Eersterust respondent)

The second sub-discourse was evident in comments such as the following:

> During the period of the [apartheid] government you would find that the jobs are there, poverty similar to this one was not there. Nowadays we are failing by the ANC that we voted for and the ANC that we used to protect. What can we say if things are like this? … A poverty of a person is a government that is not providing for the people … I have registered already, and yes, we are going to vote for the ANC. But on the other side I am crying. (Soshanguve respondent)
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> These days it's mainly about [reverse] racism. The whites do all the work while the others get bigger salaries for doing nothing. It's happening all over. There are a whole lot of people resigning because the whites are being discriminated against. (Danville respondent)
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> So what happens to the Laudium and Eersterust people if it's only for Atteridgeville people? So even the RDP houses is a one-bedroom house, one bedroom with kitchen and toilet and very small, half the size of this. But even that they don't want to give us. (Laudium respondent)

While there is currently much discontent throughout the country because of the state's perceived failure to deliver basic services to poor communities, in Soshanguve many people acknowledged that the installation of water and electrical services played some part in improving their situation. Thus sentiments suggesting that 'the government is trying its best but the problems it confronts are very big' were heard intermittently. At the same time, there was some cynicism about slow delivery in respect of job creation, infrastructural development and welfare services, which led to a second discourse of *things getting progressively worse*. Although the tendency of poor whites, coloureds and Indians was to argue that their black counterparts were given preference when it came to jobs, housing and welfare, the fieldwork did not reveal any discourses in Soshanguve that showed poor people to believe that they were especially entitled. On the contrary, poor people in Soshanguve suggested that they too were being systematically overlooked by the state's agencies because of the area's historically marginal status.

This discourse had two strands. The first was the expression of concern that future generations would endure similar, if not greater, poverty and deterioration of financial resources. Consequently, the perception was that battling households could look forward to little respite. The second was the intention to withdraw from voting or active participation in political structures. The following extracts exemplify the two strands.

> When Mandela was elected many people had registered. Now people are not worried about elections. They are not interested … it makes no difference. They keep saying that the youth must go … the youth must go and vote … what for? There is no work. I am not working and I can see that there are many young people sitting at home in Eersterust … and it is also worse now in Mamelodi. (Eersterust respondent)

> Their ideas on politics are that nothing has changed since 1994 and they predict that the next five years will be even worse. They say that the new government has just taken off where the white government left off. They still feel as if they (coloureds) are being discriminated against, only now by blacks. They say that in the past they, the coloureds, formed a collective front, but today they are more disintegrated and must form a united front based on their common economic difficulties. The whole family but Robert [an Eersterust respondent] has registered to vote. He says that it won't help to vote. The people must rather take action themselves in improving their lives and not sit around and wait for the government to do it for them. (Fieldworker's notes after a long house visit)

> You see the government, if they can, must just change the situation of the people now. It must not look like the past situation, they must make everything better for us … I think it is getting worse, it is worse … The people of Soshanguve are the poorest of the poorest because of government's neglect. (Soshanguve respondent)

> I am not interested in voting. I don't think the new government will be any different from the old. New is always worse. Everything then will be as is. Everything now is more expensive than in the past. Everything is getting worse. They promised that there will be no more school fees and all the usual things. Look now at our own high school here. You must get everything at your own cost … the school fees are higher, you must buy your own books … yes, everything has become much worse. (Eersterust respondent)

The survey provided some important data on people's sense of 'being enfranchised' and 'having power' to shift poverty and live better lives. People saw themselves as having rights in varying degrees. The clearest indication, however, of how people in the four areas judged their socioeconomic circumstances, and how their lives were transforming, can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Perceptions of changing circumstances, by area

	Danville ('white area')	Eersterust ('coloured area')	Laudium ('Indian area')	Soshanguve ('black area')	Totals
Socioeconomic circumstances improved or not since 1994?					
Improved	16.2%	14.5%	10.2%	37.8%	24.3%
Stayed the same	20.3%	26.0%	39.1%	35.0%	31.2%
Worsened	63.6%	59.5%	50.8%	27.3%	44.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Parents' living conditions better or worse than yours?					
Better	64.7%	50.7%	56.1%	58.7%	57.9%
The same	21.7%	16.8%	23.1%	20.7%	20.6%
Worse	13.6%	32.5%	20.8%	20.7%	21.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Believe that your children will be better or worse off than you are?					
Better	36.3%	48.3%	25.6%	59.8%	47.1%
The same	18.1%	13.8%	29.5%	13%	17.1%
Worse	45.6%	37.9%	45%	27.1%	35.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Naidoo (2005)

Among black respondents, the mixed fortunes of Soshanguve were clearly apparent: some acknowledged better circumstances, some did not see any real change since 1994, and a substantial portion suggested that conditions were getting worse (see Table 4). It was this portion that expressed deep resentment and animosity towards state officials during fieldtrips. A majority of coloureds and Indians saw their positions as getting worse. Their consciousness of being in a minority, which reinforced their feeling that racial identity made some disadvantaged groups less able to access state resources than others, made them ambivalent and insecure about rights and entitlements in the post-apartheid era. Surprisingly high proportions of people in all four areas claimed that their parents had lived better lives in the past than they themselves did at present. This pessimism also extended to people's beliefs about the way their children would live in the years to come.

It was clear in the course of fieldtrips from 2004 to 2008 that interest in voting was not particularly strong among the poorest sector. Many people did not have identity documents and had consequently not registered as voters. However, the 2006 and 2011 municipal results in the wards closest to the four field sites indicate a slightly renewed interest in political participation in the 2011 election. The ANC (African National Congress) won in Soshanguve and Laudium, and the DA (Democratic Alliance) in Danville and Eersterust. Overall, all four areas showed evidence of a decline in support for the ruling ANC and an increase in support for the opposition and other smaller parties (IEC, 2011).

5. Concluding reflections

The empirical work for this study revealed that only small proportions of people in the four selected areas of Pretoria considered their material circumstances to have improved over the recent past, with surprisingly large numbers of people claiming that their lives had become worse. Recent descriptions of South Africa's class dynamics show a weakening of the coincidence of race and class, but also a deepening of poverty for the bottom strata (Seekings & Nattrass, 2004). Although debate persists as to the extent of social and economic benefits the poor have reaped in post-apartheid society, there is little argument about the widening gap between the rich and the poor of all racial groups (see Liebbrandt et al., 2010). People's perceptions that conditions are deteriorating are reinforced by the starkly visible contrast between those deemed to be benefiting, and living extravagantly, and those effectively excluded from a growing economy. It is the *sense of inequality* and not just large-scale absolute poverty that is most threatening to the survival of democracy and social solidarity in South Africa (Sen, 2000:93; Everatt, 2003).

Even among the very poor, poverty is not simply about the physiological struggle to survive but about not being able to live a meaningful social life. To improve their lot, people will need, simultaneously, political enfranchisement, socioeconomic rights and the power to intervene actively in shaping their future (Chambers, 1988). As Harrison says,

> one cannot separate political and economic rights, therefore it makes no sense to celebrate a process of political opening which makes no difference to the material well-being of the masses … This is not just a question of understanding democratisation as 'bread and butter' issues; it is also a question of keeping an eye focused on the *scope* of democratisation, that is the boundaries of state action and popular influence over the latter. (2002:83)

Against the background of the highly acclaimed South African Constitution, it was startling to note the very small proportions of all racial groups who believed they had 'rights' and the many conversations in the field in which people argued that they felt generally excluded and disempowered.

The strong criticism of the state's disregard for the poor can be interpreted as being particularly heightened because of the fervour of election time. As political rituals, elections attempt to reinforce or engage national traditions and bonds but can also facilitate rituals of protest as people secure opportunities to raise complaints, make claims, express dissent and change allegiances (Baringhorst, 2001:300). In January 2006, on the eve of the previous national municipal elections, violent demonstrations erupted in Soshanguve. The anger was not simply about a lack of service delivery but because active attempts over a 10-year period

to negotiate with the state for delivery had produced few positive results. Thus, the popular claim that democratic transition and the acquisition of political rights is a necessary condition for the promotion of socioeconomic rights does not resonate in the poor enclaves of Pretoria. For the poor, dichotomised understandings of rights (e.g. 'political rights' first and 'socioeconomic rights' second) do not really exist. Their acknowledgement that poverty is not shifting and that attempts to influence state structures through democratic processes have not been entirely fruitful have led to claims that 'rights' in general have not yet been fully attained. Such feelings were expressed strongly in Soshanguve, and also in the other so-called 'minority' areas where rights and the power to shape personal destinies were regarded as both ambiguous and fluid.

Poor people's statements that 'nobody is fighting for us' and 'the people must take action themselves' highlight what Friedman describes as one of the characteristics of the current political scenario: pro-poor groups' lack of presence among the poor. He says that

> the fact that the poor remain without effective political representation ensures that political support for fighting poverty is weakened. The lack of a voice for the poor also means that even where political support is available for fighting poverty, the policies misread the needs of the poor and are therefore ineffective. (2002:4)

The survey revealed that a large majority of people in all four areas align themselves to a wide range of organisations. A list of the most important of these organisations shows 310 different groups that people were affiliated to. Few of these groups are political in nature. Most ensure that individuals are not completely isolated but linked (to some extent) to social structures and networks. Despite the limited incorporation of the very poor into market and mainstream activities, much agency is reflected in the way people seek inspiration from and connectedness to these various local groups.

A recent Afro-barometer report (Bratton, 2010) once again reveals popular assessment of South African state performance as being poor – much poorer than popular assessments of the state in Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique. A central point of Bratton's analysis (2010:13) is to highlight people's 'subjective sense of political efficacy' or what has been drawn upon in this article as perceptions of political transition. Thus critical elements in addressing poverty and inequality would be to create institutional space for serious dialogue between local state structures and poor communities and to set up mechanisms for the poor to be drawn into initiatives to assess development progress and problems with regard to state performance and delivery (see Naidoo, 2011). In addition, new thinking and impetus at national state levels with regard to employment creation for the poor (irrespective of race) should become a more urgent priority (see Turok, 2009). Above all, as Green (2009) suggests, we will need to encourage an active and organised citizenry, one that is not merely heard at election time, but that recognises and exercises its rights consistently, and that can engage effectively with the state and hold it accountable for delivery and economic justice.

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