

Conclusion

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We opened by asking about the possible class basis of divisions between trade unions and social movements. Since starting the project, my own concerns have broadened into issues associated with the contrasting mobilisations of workers' strikes and the rebellion of the poor. In the first part of this conclusion I summarise key findings from preceding chapters and then, in the second part, link this with analysis emerging from the newer research, thus adding another dimension to the argument. At the outset, our leading question was framed by a hope that we might contribute to wider, international discussion of class, and in the third part of this conclusion we offer some pointers in that direction.

Soweto: A differentiated proletarian unity

Our exploration was based on quantitative and qualitative research undertaken in Soweto, South Africa's largest black township. This included a large representative survey conducted in 2006. It transpired that, compared to black South Africans as a whole, Sowetans were mildly better off in terms of possessions, but experienced higher unemployment. However, the average Sowetan was not even close to being as well off as the average white person. Widespread poverty was highlighted in the percentage of the township's population associated with each of our employment categories (ECs). Less than 0.1 per cent of the population could be regarded as capitalists, only 1 per cent as managers and supervisors, and 6 per cent as petty bourgeois (included self-employed workers). Twenty-four per cent were regularly employed workers, 12 per cent were students and 12 per cent were pensioners (and others not in the labour force); 24 per cent were unemployed and a further 21 per cent were underemployed (engaged in survivalist self-employment or partial work).

Since the end of apartheid, income and class differences among black South Africans have expanded rapidly. In geographical terms this is associated with better-

off people leaving townships and moving to formerly white suburbs, something that has happened with Soweto, although the scale of the process, and its implication for 'class' are still unclear. With regard to Soweto, I follow Claire Ceruti in characterising the township as a 'differentiated proletarian unity'.¹ By 'proletarian' we wish to convey important social ties linking employed workers with the unemployed, underemployed, pensioners and most students. 'Differentiation' occurs along various axes. These include variation in employment status; the households of workers, for instance, being better off materially than those of partial workers and the unemployed; quality of housing, education and lifestyle; class identity; and capacity to mobilise for change. Gender and age are also important – in relation to family conflicts, as well as to popular culture and political activity. However, there are also important commonalities. Critically, a person's EC did not impact greatly on the kind of house in which they lived. Thus, many workers who received a regular income were living in shacks, while many unemployed people lived in better quality, brick-built housing. Moreover, a large majority of Sowetans, 67 per cent, lived in a household in which at least one adult aged eighteen or over was employed; a further 29 per cent were in households with somebody who was not unemployed (for example, pensioners, underemployed and students); and only 5 per cent lived in households in which all adults were fully unemployed. Most people in the last grouping were dependent on child support grants and/or the salary of somebody outside the household. Further, although there was some cultural separation between those with a salary and those without, church attendance, funerals and family rituals contributed to social cohesion. As Keke Motseke and Sibongile Mazibuko showed, there is some association between church denominations and Living Standards Measure (LSM) scores, but no sharp divisions.

We also investigated class identity. Ninety-three per cent of Sowetans recognised the existence of two or more classes. The dominant model consisted of some kind of lower, middle and upper class, so it was similar to the pattern found in most of the South African ethnographic literature. But a separate working class also exists in the minds of many Sowetans. We provided a choice of more than one identity, and 66 per cent of Sowetans claimed to be middle class, 43 per cent working class, 38 per cent lower class and 13 per cent upper (or top) class. Factor analysis showed that lower class was almost synonymous with 'poor', a class identity offered in the survey. There was a close association between the 'working class' label and working (in the sense of having a job); and most regularly employed workers considered themselves to be working class. People who claimed to be lower class and/or poor, tended to be more deprived than other Sowetans (in terms of EC, household possessions, education and recreational activity). The 'upper class' was understood

to be 'those who have everything', although people who claimed this identity were not significantly better off than other Sowetans.

As self-identity, 'middle class' was ubiquitous, with two-thirds of Sowetans describing themselves as such. This was higher than we had anticipated, and reveals a very different notion of middle class to those available in academic literature (Ceruti 2011: 97). Having asked our question about class self-identity in English, we were able to discover that one reason for the high figure was 'mistranslation' from respondents' mother tongue. As Mosa Phadi and Owen Manda show, specific class concepts used in English do not exist in indigenous South African languages, and people were translating words that mean something approximating 'in the middle' into the English 'middle class'. That is, when people described themselves as 'middle class' they were conceiving themselves as living somewhere between those who were 'suffering' and those who had 'everything', so it is hardly surprising that so many people described themselves as 'middle class'. There were also other reasons for accepting a 'middle-class' label. It was defined in relation to peers, so even well-off people could consider themselves middle class; it was linked to self-respect, to upward mobility and aspirations (especially among young respondents); and it was regarded as normal, thus neither 'above' nor 'below' other people.

It was also revealed that the ways people practise class and talk about it in cultural terms is linked to economic well-being through 'affordability'. Kim Wale showed that when Sowetans look 'upwards' they tend to emphasise cultural and individual characteristics, and when they look 'down' they tend to stress economic considerations, such as unemployment. Linked with this, 'class' can be seen as something positive, because unlike 'race' it permits upward mobility. On the other hand, when poverty stunts mobility, class is connected with injustice, providing a basis for protest action.

However, our account is limited in place and time, so some caution is necessary. Moreover, our research has revealed three areas that would benefit from further empirical research. Firstly, the implication of the exodus to the suburbs is unclear. It is certainly possible that this leads to family and social separation that marks a new form of class division, but it might also be associated with new work-based solidarities. Secondly, if, as claimed, house prices and rentals are rising rapidly in Soweto, this could have a significant impact on social dynamics. Thirdly, households redistribute resources, but they are also a site of struggle over that redistribution, and it would be helpful to know how this works out in more detail.²

So, Soweto is a largely proletarian township, albeit one that is cut through by much variation. People with jobs are better off than those without, but there is a spectrum, and what one can afford is affected by a number of factors, including the

ratio of income earners to non-income earners. Our research highlighted widespread awareness of class, and it is possible to make a distinction between the working class and lower class based on EC and deprivation. Yet, at the same time, most people regard themselves as middle class, and there is minimal stigmatisation of people regarded as poor.

Relationships to the means and ends of protest

But how does our account of a 'differentiated proletarian unity' square up with the realities of struggle in South Africa today? This is an especially important question given that our opening problem was about the class basis of divisions between unions and social movements/urban revolt. From the outset we should note that there is a clear divide between strikes and what has been termed the 'rebellion of the poor'.³ Rather obviously, strikes involve regularly employed workers, and other township residents are excluded. By contrast, workers are marginal to the 'community protests' that are at the heart of the rebellion. Available evidence shows that people whom we would have categorised as unemployed, underemployed or pensioners undertake most of the organisation, but one also comes across teachers, pastors, the petty bourgeois and students. The fighting involves mostly young people, particularly unemployed youth, although school students often participate as well. As the historian and Western Cape activist, Martin Legassick, observed: 'There is a disjuncture between protests by employed workers and protests in the townships (by mainly casually employed workers and unemployed).' 'All are part of the working class', he says, adding that 'those in the township protests however tend to identify themselves as "the poorest of the poor"'. Elsewhere, people just talk about 'the poor'. This rift does not run along a fault line marked by the existence of a labour aristocracy or a minority underclass, but can be understood in terms of the kind of distinctions we have made in this book.

The contrast between workers and the poor is particularly significant because the level of strike action and community unrest is extremely high. Since 2005, South Africa may have lost more workdays through strike action per capita than any other country; certainly it is close to the top of that league. The South African economist, Mike Schussler (quoted in Vollgraaff 2011) put South Africa in first place for the years 2005–09, but he did not include Argentina, which the International Labour Organisation (2012a) positioned higher for 2006–08. In 2007, South Africa experienced its greatest number of strike days ever, and this figure was surpassed in 2010; with the fourth most in 2011 (Kelly 2012). Meanwhile, it is possible that South Africa has the highest level of ongoing urban revolt in the world.⁴ The country's police recorded an average of two 'unrest-related gatherings' per day in

the five years from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2009, and 2.9 per day for the period from then until 5 March 2012 (Alexander 2012). In the six months to the end of June 2012, there were more protests than in any previous year.⁵ Protests have occurred all over the country (including many in Soweto and neighbouring areas), with informal settlements particularly prominent. Using the erection and defence of barricades as an indicator, many of these protests amount to local insurrections, but action ranges from peaceful marches through to blockades of major highways and the torching of municipal buildings.

The distinction between workers and the poor can be amplified. When workers protest they strike against a boss (usually a capitalist) and demand something that she/he can deliver, often a pay increase, but when the poor protest it is usually against local municipalities, and they make different kinds of demands, mainly about the delivery of basic services (such as housing, water, electricity, toilets and roads).⁶ Workers have built national unions. These have numerous organisers paid from subscriptions, they participate in time-consuming negotiations and legally protected strikes, and they often have substantial investments. Mass mobilisations of the poor have been uncoordinated and local, mostly ad hoc, and sometimes spontaneous. Organisers are few, and are either unpaid or funded by foreign donors; action is determined with little or no formality, enacted without delay and frequently illegal. The power of workers derives from their capacity to disrupt productive work. Extremely poor youth, in particular, have other sources of strength, including time to organise, the legitimacy to mobilise in the name of a community, the capacity to win backing from workers, the ability to destabilise local party politics and to mount dramatic protests that threaten the rule of the state. Further, immediate interests, narrowly conceived, may be different, so workers may resent expectations that they join a community protest by observing a stayaway strike that leads to loss of pay, or unemployed youth may demand that they, as locals, should be given jobs in preference to workers from another area.

This fissure has its own South African character, but it is not exceptional. For instance, Ira Katznelson (1982: 19), commenting on US history, distinguished between 'work and community based conflicts', concluding that 'the links between [them] . . . have been unusually tenuous'. He continued: 'Each kind of conflict has had its own separate vocabulary and set of institutions . . . Class, in short, has been lived and fought as a series of partial relationships.' In similar vein, Manuel Castells (1983: 268), writing about the massive urban movement that rocked Spain in the 1970s, distinguished between the labour movement and neighbourhood associations, demonstrating that the two 'fought separate battles, even if they often clashed with the same police and exchanged messages of solidarity'. Katznelson and Castells

both highlight the different dynamics that separate work/labour from community/neighbourhood movements, and their model can be applied to South Africa. The social composition of community/neighbourhood/township movements is particularly varied, and what divides them from workers' movements is less the specificities of class and more the domain of contestation. This is not to say that class characteristics are inconsequential. Thus, the Madrid citizen movement, described by Castells (1983: 266), stretched across the city, incorporating people from different backgrounds, yet the 'working-class neighbourhoods' were the best organised and most-militant.

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1979) were alive to the significance of domain *and* 'class' in their study of poor people's movements in the United States of America, providing an account that is particularly germane to our own analysis. They argue that 'it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points to the targets of their anger'. In contrast to workers, the unemployed, they say, 'do not and cannot strike, even when they perceive that those who own the factories and businesses are to blame for their troubles. Instead, they riot in the streets where they are forced to linger . . . and it is difficult to imagine them doing otherwise' (Piven and Cloward 1979: 23). Elsewhere, I have attempted to generalise this sentiment in a way that is pertinent to contemporary South Africa, proposing that what separates workers and the poor is *different relationships to the means and ends of protest* (Alexander and Pfaffe 2012). The implication is that the division is not about 'class' in any fundamental or antagonistic sense, but about capacities for action and achievement.

How well does the worker/poor dichotomy described above map onto the divisions of employment and identity we found in Soweto? It appears to be more like the representations of politics and relief found in Abraham Ortelius's maps from the sixteenth century than the latest Google satellite images. There is a lack of detail, proportions are wrong and the names are sometimes different, but the continents are recognisable and approximately in the correct relationship to one another. *The workers* are our 'regularly employed workers' and, from the perspective of people in Soweto, the regularly employed workers are the major component of the 'working class'. *The poor* are more of a mixed bag, and there can be a mismatch between ECs and the community domain (a problem that does not exist with worker and workplace).⁷ 'The poor' includes the unemployed, the underemployed (although some may obtain an income outside the township, complicating their relationship with the community as a realm of struggle), students attending township schools, nearly all those defined as pensioners and others not in the labour force.

There is a considerable overlap between 'workers' and 'working class', but the fit is looser between 'the poor' and people whom Sowetans regard as 'lower class'. In part this contrast arises from 'working class' being widely defined by 'employment', which has fairly sharp edges, whereas 'lower class' is associated with concepts such as 'suffering', which are imprecise and subjective. In addition, workers are far more likely to have been involved in collective action as 'workers' than the poor are as 'the poor', which is rarely the banner under which protests are mobilised.⁸ Further, in contrast to 'working class', which has more claimants than those we included as regularly employed workers, the 'lower class' is smaller than those we are calling 'the poor'. At a basic level, we can assume that some people are describing themselves as working class on the grounds that they 'work', rather than because they are regularly employed as workers, while some of 'the poor' regard themselves as 'middle class', for reasons suggested earlier. More significantly, the worker/poor distinction is doing a different job to 'working class'/'lower class'. The first is an attempt to depict particular struggles in a way that creates possibilities for comparative analysis. The second is derived directly from popular distinctions. We can aim to achieve more than Ortelius, but we neither hope for nor desire a satellite image.

While one side of our Soweto analysis is about discrete ECs and distinct identities, the other emphasises commonalities (the 'proletarian unity'). To what extent is this second dimension present at the level of struggle? The occurrence of work 'stayaways' linked to protests is largely unreported, but probably common.⁹ However, in the cases we know about, the communities initiated the action, rather than workers. When we investigated a 2009 insurrection in detail, we interviewed workers who were highly critical of the youths (referred to as 'comrades') who attempted to stop them from going to work (Alexander and Pfaffe 2012). Workers complained that if they were absent they would lose pay, and possibly their job. We also came across another response. As a municipal worker put it: 'We are members of the community, so of course we support the demands.' The overall effect was one of half-hearted solidarity. However, in a nearby town we came across a community march to a workers' picket line, and workers' solidarity with a community protest (Alexander 2010b: 36). Moreover, in a recent 'workers' household survey' it was found that nearly 25 per cent of the members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) had participated in a service delivery protest in the four years prior to the survey (COSATU 2012: 55). While the picture is somewhat mixed, one should add that, in terms of collective mobilisation, open conflict between workers and the poor is exceptional.

Flipping back to the months after the Soweto uprising in 1976, and to the 1980s, we see similar processes, with workers sometimes reluctant to back community protests, though oftentimes joining huge stayaways (Hirson 1979; Seekings 2000). From 1984 worker militants began taking the lead in initiating solidarity action, sometimes organising strikes with the support of ‘comrades’. There were also examples of community boycotts in support of workers’ strikes. Eventually, in 1988, COSATU joined with the township-based United Democratic Front in establishing the Mass Democratic Movement, which forced the regime to engage in negotiations for a new South Africa. An important dynamic in 1976 and the 1980s, as today, is that workers were often a generation removed from the unemployed youth activists who spearheaded township resistance. They were separate from, yet sympathised, with their ‘children’.

The example of the 1980s remains relevant today, not only because it is sometimes evoked by militants, but also because of what it represents theoretically and politically. We wrote earlier about domains of struggle, and of differences in relationships to the means and ends of protest. The 1980s highlight ways in which the domains begin to overlap and even, momentarily, coincide; a situation in which the ‘ends’ coalesce and the ‘means’ turn from being divided action into a division of labour in a common struggle. Glimpses of this phenomenon exist in the present, not only in the examples given, but also in the reality that when protests succeed in improving services or removing corrupt officials, the whole community benefits, and when strikes lead to higher pay for workers, it is to the advantage of their families and to others around them (through small purchases, partial employment, donations, and so forth). To borrow Wright’s (1978: 88) distinction, workers and the poor are separated by immediate not fundamental ‘class interests’.

Some theoretical pointers

Any researcher interested in class as a socio-economic phenomenon has to grapple with the problem of categorisation. Their choice will be determined by the purpose of their enquiry (that is, theoretical predisposition) and the time and place they want to understand (in other words, context). Our major concern was with ending poverty, inequality and oppression through the creation of a new society based on democratic control over the economy, in short socialism, and we have tried to make sense of a context, South Africa in the early twenty-first century, that is characterised by historically high levels of socio-economic inequality, very high unemployment and considerable labour and urban unrest.

The two scholars whose concerns come closest to our own are Erik Olin Wright (especially in his 1978 book), on grounds of predisposition, and Jeremy Seekings

(especially in his 2005 book with Nicoli Nattrass), because of context. Attuned to the problems of class in late capitalism, Wright's addition of 'control' to the matrix of class analysis was important. He was making sense of the United States, where the middle class was very substantial and posed theoretical problems, and not unreasonably he retained a focus on direct relations of production. But how should one deal with people whose relationship to production is indirect? Concerned with fundamental class interests, he adopted various strategies (Wright 1978; see also Wright 2000): linking dependents to the main breadwinner in a household (that is, 'mediation'); classifying the temporarily unemployed, pensioners and students according to 'trajectory'; and including the long-term unemployed as a separate 'underclass'. But this approach was not designed to cope with a context such as the one considered in this book, where unemployment and poverty, rather than the middle class, pose the major theoretical challenge. Concerned mainly with labour market disadvantage, and influenced by John Goldthorpe as well as Wright, Seekings and Nattrass extended the principle of mediation to include all members of a household, doing this on the basis of 'dominance'. They, too, were left with an underclass – this time defined as people living in households in which nobody was employed and where income from other sources was negligible.¹⁰

Our own approach was different to both of these. Our emphasis on socialism as self-emancipation meant that we required categories that allowed us to investigate relationships between an objective marker rooted in production and aspects of both reproduction and subjectivity. We did this using a marker, our ECs, that included categories with indirect as well as direct relationships to production. Given that only about 27 per cent of South Africa's working-age population has a formal job, and workers engage in struggles separately from 'the poor', this was important. Individuals could be used as a unit of analysis, and everybody could be treated equally, rather than including some as an appendage (integrated through 'mediation' or 'trajectory'). This suited our orientation. The categories grew out of the data but they also had a theoretical basis, with this derived mainly from Wright (hence Marx). The distinction between the two groupings outside the labour force (students and pensioners, etc.) was partly about 'trajectory' (preparing for exploitation versus no longer available for exploitation), although also about income and capacity to mobilise. The partial workers and subsistence self-employed were our own invention. A significant implication of our approach is that there was no theoretical imperative to have an 'underclass', so we could investigate whether, empirically, such a category was meaningful. From our own research, Wright's distinction between long-term and temporary unemployment held little relevance, and, significantly, it was not utilised by Seekings and Nattrass. Equally, though, we found Seekings and Nattrass' argument about social capital unconvincing. In practice,

the distinction that mattered to people – particularly in terms of identity and mobilisation – was one between ‘the working class’ and ‘the poor’. This approach to class categorisation is our first contribution.

Our second innovation was to assume that individuals’ might have more than one class identity, and in practice this proved correct. In part, this situation arises from the reality that ‘class’ names two distinct experiences: hierarchies around income and neighbourhood (commonly three classes) and work relationships (mostly dichotomous). The hierarchical model is more widely held in Soweto, and while ‘working class’ was the second most popular identity, it was a single identity for only 3 per cent of Sowetans. More broadly, about 38 per cent of the population claimed one class label, 36 per cent went for two, and 19 per cent selected three or more. The existence of dual, indeed multiple, class identities, may go some way to explaining the kind of ‘class ambivalence’ that, reportedly, exists in the United Kingdom and the United States. Moreover, the meanings attached to class identity varies according to setting, with, as we have seen, a shift from cultural to economic dimensions as one moves from ‘looking up’ to ‘looking down’. This finding adds weight to the possibility – discerned in some British literature – that the way class is defined and practised is determined, in part, by class location, with the higher middle class becoming cultural omnivores and the lower working class emphasising economic disadvantage.

A further advance was to theorise the popular term ‘afford’, probably the most important concept that people deployed in distinguishing between the lower, middle and upper classes. It is not, though, a crude materialist term, and equivalent indigenous words also refer to being able to look after oneself, thus independent, and with this comes self-respect and pride. However, the significance of affordability is that it provides a bridge between important cultural aspects of class – including food, clothes, education and recreational activity – and the capacity to pay for such things. ‘Capacity to pay’ is, in turn, affected by a number of factors, including the ratio of income earners to non-income earners in a household and the cost of housing. But it is determined, in particular, by the kinds of jobs people do, and thus, ultimately, by relationships to production. Differences in class identity, income and employment category – all associated with ‘affordability’ – underline the significance of ‘differentiation’ in Soweto. However, there is still fluidity among what we have termed the proletariat, and, as with Bennett et al.’s study of Britain, it would be a mistake to talk of homologies in the strong way in which Bourdieu uses the term.

A parallel distinction exists at the level of action, where there is separation between workers’ strikes and the rebellions of the poor. There are similar divisions between labour and community struggles in other countries, and one can explain

the phenomenon in terms of 'different relationships to the means and ends of protest'. These differences reflect the fact that workers and the poor can have different short-term goals. However, the evidence presented throughout this book shows that there are also many commonalities, and the longer-term interests of workers and the poor are the same. This unity of interests is sometimes manifested in united action, although at present this is the exception rather than the rule.

This study was framed by questions that were cast within a Marxist paradigm, and our conclusions connect with two elements of Marxism. The first of these concerns the importance of 'reproduction', by which I mean consumption, and the dynamics of family life, and interventions of the state in the realm of welfare payments, basic services, schools, health care and so forth. For people without regular work – that is, the majority of adults in South Africa – the household plays a major role in survival (accompanied sometimes by contestation over who gets the spoils). Reproduction also entered our account through the significance of education, housing and consumer durables as markers of class; migration in and out of Soweto; lack of segregation of housing by employment category; and networks of support associated with extended families, neighbours and churches. Further, community protests are mostly about 'reproduction' issues: shelter; water that is free and clean; provision of sewage, drainage and refuse removal so that people do not fall needlessly ill; and about electricity that keeps people warm, prevents their food from rotting in hot weather, allows children to study at night, and reduces boredom by providing power for television sets. In general, our argument that both workers and the poor are part of the proletariat would be very much weaker if reproduction had not been firmly located within our terms of reference.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels recognised the importance of reproduction for a materialist understanding of history (although it received limited attention, understandably given their political and intellectual priorities). However, Engels, in one particularly important intervention in *The Housing Question*, reached the conclusion that housing problems were a product of the capitalist mode of production and that they could be resolved only through its abolition.¹¹ David Harvey (2012: 18) points to the contemporary relevance of this pamphlet, using it to emphasise the importance of urban resistance in class struggles against capitalism. Our book highlights the way in which 'affordability' provides a link between class identity, reproduction and class structure, and community protests draw attention to growing inequality matched by pro-capitalist economic policy. My assessment, then, is that if one's analysis of class is anchored in emancipation it is necessary to grapple with reproduction as well as relationships to production.

The second element of Marxism on which I wish to comment is Marx's (1867) description of the 'surplus population' in *Capital, Volume 1*. This has a remarkably strong resonance in contemporary South Africa. Firstly, when there is some expansion in the formal capitalist economy, workers are recruited from the surplus population (from the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed). We found this occurring in highly localised upturns, when a business requires a workforce at short-notice (for example, for construction or a catering contract). Secondly, impoverished people from the rural areas (sometimes outside South Africa's border) migrate into the cities where, initially, they swell the ranks of the reserve army (those without any work). Thirdly, when an employer no longer requires workers, their survival becomes the responsibility of family members – they are thrown onto the shoulders 'of the working-class and lower middle class' (Marx 1954: 603). Fourthly, for Marx (1954: 602–3), there was the 'lowest sediment' – which included old people, the disabled, orphans, etc. – which 'dwells in the sphere of pauperism', and thus had the potential to access 'poor relief'. While, the vocabulary, intentions and details are different, the old-age pension, disability allowance and child benefit play a similar role in today's South Africa. Fifthly, it is clear that South Africa's huge surplus population places pressures on employed workers who are poorly skilled and/or unorganised, pushing them to toe the line and accept lower wages. Yet there are differences. I have not been able to track down figures for late nineteenth-century Britain, but it is unlikely that the surplus population reached the proportion that now exists in South Africa, where, in Soweto, 56 per cent of the adult population consisted of people who were unemployed, underemployed or pensioners.

Marx's (1954: 592–3) description was bedded into a theory that concluded:

... [T]he surplus population becomes ... a lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production ... it creates a mass of human material always ready for exploitation ... The whole form of movement of modern industry depends ... upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands.

These formulations could be read as evidence that the surplus population was functional for capitalism, and, indeed this was true to a degree. But Marx's account was rooted in the contradiction that, alongside the development of capitalism, the number of people unemployed would increase relative to the number of those who were employed.¹² Dead labour (in the form of machines) replaces living labour! Workers lives became more 'precarious' (Marx's 1954: 599), increasing the

importance of organising against the capitalists. There is a useful parallel here. As we have seen, a generation of Marxists regarded 'race' as functional to the needs of capitalism. But there was always a contradiction, and apartheid became increasingly dysfunctional. The ability of rural production to sustain the capitalist workforce declined; workers came under pressure to improve wages to support their families (many unemployed); black people began to unite against a system that oppressed them all (on the basis of race); and, eventually, apartheid was dismantled.

The present moment not only bares similarities to this history, it is also, in some respects, its extension. If there is a limitation in Marx's account it is that he did not anticipate that the poor might develop their own collective agency. But this does not challenge the fundamentals of Marx's diagnosis or his prescription. He argued that workers and the surplus population were part of the same class and advocated united organisation. Thus, as he put it, 'overwork of the employed *part of the working-class* swells the ranks of the reserve'. Then, a few pages later, he advocates 'regular co-operation between employed and unemployed', through '[t]rades Unions, etc. . . . in order to destroy or to weaken the ruinous effects of [capitalist production] on *their class*' (Marx 1954: 599; my emphasis).

So, then, capitalism involves the development of different relationships to production and a tendency for the surplus population to grow. This produces a differentiated proletarian unity, that is, a set of different experiences combined with common interests that have the potential to unite workers and the poor. There is ample evidence for this in our Soweto findings. The way these differences and commonalities come together in households and communities assists us to comprehend actual class identities. On the one hand, class identifications involve a mingling of practices rooted in production and reproduction, with multiple class identities common and working-class identity existing alongside the dominant three-class model. Notions of affordability tie identity to disposable income and relationships to production. On the other hand, the size of the unemployed population (and of the surplus population more broadly) and the wretchedness of its existence and low expectations of obtaining a job, contribute to the mobilisation of the poor, independently of the working class. That is, the growth of the surplus population has been a major factor leading to massive urban unrest. Despite this expansion and the emergence of the rebellion, the unemployed and the employed are no less part of the same class. The former are still largely dependent on the latter, although now the actions of the former may bring benefits to the latter (improved services in particular). Similarly, successful mobilisation by workers can bring advantages to the poor.

Implications

But how does this relate to our opening concern with inequality in the global arena? The possibility that the reserve army could expand more rapidly than the active army of labour would have seemed remote until recently. The ability to plunder colonies, the expansion of overseas markets, the emigration of part of the surplus population, the importation of cheap labour from rural areas (often across borders), the physical destruction of competitors' means of production and massive state intervention have all, in their different ways, transferred the problem. Development has been uneven, but it has allowed the more dynamic sectors of the world economy to expand the system as a whole. However, as 2012 draws to an end, it is far from certain that this process will continue. A crisis has engulfed the Eurozone, the world's largest economy, and for the moment political leaders seem to have no way out. With rates of unemployment topping 20 per cent in some European countries, South Africa's experience becomes commensurately more important.

In South Africa there are now clear signs of popular disillusionment with and within the ruling bloc. This is reflected in protests and strikes, in discontent with corruption, and in splits within the ANC. In other countries, too, one discerns a rising level of anger about austerity measures, which impoverish the proletariat while retaining capitalism intact. However, there is nothing pre-ordained about the employed and unemployed engaging in common struggle. This is dependent on a range of subjective factors, not least the emergence of alternative politics. Nevertheless, Marx's conclusion remains valid. Workers and the poor would benefit from 'regular co-operation in order to destroy or to weaken the ruinous effects of [capitalist production]'.

Notes

1. Our use of the term 'proletarian' rather than 'working class' is tactical and semantic. As we have seen, in popular South African usage, the term 'working class' is associated with doing paid work, and we wanted a word that conveyed something broader; that is, to use the old Marxist formulation, those 'who have nothing to sell but their labour power'. An alternative approach would be to contest the meaning of the concept 'working class'. See Chapter 4.
2. In a recent study of family life in two KwaZulu-Natal townships, Sarah Mosoetsa (2011: 59) argued that 'there is more conflict than co-operation in poor households', and she showed that households can expand or decline in relation to available resources, with, for instance, destitute members of an extended family attaching themselves to a

household with a stable income (Mosoetsa 2011: 26). Similarly, Jeremy Seekings (2008b) showed that many South African households are 'fluid' (in that individuals move between households), and also that some are 'porous' (in that individuals may be members of more than one 'household' at the same time).

3. Unless stated otherwise, this section draws on material available in Alexander (2010); Alexander and Pfaffe (2012); Runciman, Ngwane and Alexander (2012); and Alexander (forthcoming). There is a growing body of literature on the rebellion. Important contributions include Booysen (2011); Ngwane (2011); Pfaffe (2011); Von Holdt et al. (2011); Booysen (2012); Dawson (2012); and Langa and Von Holdt (forthcoming).
4. China has also experienced a high level of localised protest in recent years, but my reading of literature available in English showed that, on a per capita basis, there were more protests in South Africa (Alexander 2012). The size and intensity of mobilisation in the Middle East has been greater, but the spread and number of insurrectionary protests in South Africa is almost certainly higher.
5. This statement is based on data from the South African Local Government Research Centre, South African Broadcasting Corporation's News Research, Municipal IQ and SA Media. I am grateful to researchers from the first two organisations for making their detailed data available. Information from Municipal IQ is available on that organisation's website.
6. There have also been demands for jobs to be provided by mines (and additionally by municipalities). However, it is difficult to mount a fight over employment at a local level, and the importance of unemployment as a factor propelling the movement is inadequately reflected in the issues being raised.
7. We are not defining 'the poor' in relation to a particular income (that is, poverty per se).
8. See Hirschsohn (2011: 17). The level of participation in strikes will have increased since our survey and since the one analysed by Hirschsohn (conducted in 2008/9). Community protests vary in size from under 100 to more than 10 000 people (Alexander forthcoming), but most are at the lower end of the range. When organisations of the poor give themselves a name, it normally includes a geographical referent (for example, Soweto) and identities such as 'residents', 'crisis [committee]', 'civic', 'youth', 'unemployed people' and 'landless people', rather than 'poor'.
9. In a survey of protest leaders conducted at the 'Academics and activists workshop on the rebellion of the poor' held at the University of Johannesburg on 18 June 2011, out of 22 protests 10 included a stayaway and 12 did not.
10. See Chapters 1 and 3 for less simplified renditions of the approaches offered by Wright, and Seekings and Natrass.
11. The substance of the pamphlet is a series of articles published in 1872 and 1873, but the preface to the second edition, published in 1887, is particularly interesting.
12. Ceruti (2011) examines the dialectical nature of Marx's theory, placing it in the context of our Soweto research.