

**"We oppose the authorities because we never gave them the authority ...":
Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Political Resonance of Western Cape
Anti-Eviction Campaign**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how the images and ideas of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC) circulated around the world during the first decade of the 21st century. More specifically, this essay seeks to examine the peculiar manner by which land and housing struggles in Cape Town's sprawling informal settlements and sand-swept townships came to resonate with similar struggles a world away. Central to this project was the WCAEC's commitment to what Neville Alexander refers to as non-collaboration. I argue that this principle shaped the WCAEC's image and ideas for over a decade, leaving its mark not only on the margins of Cape Town's hotly contested electoral landscape, but also framing the movement's reception at key sites of social struggle in Africa and Latin America as well as Europe and North America. In 2009, for instance, public housing activists launched the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign with a spontaneous eviction blockade by the residents of the Cabrini-Green public housing development that occurred days after a visit by WCAEC Chairman Ashraf Cassiem. In Cabrini-Green, the WCAEC's principle of non-collaboration easily mapped onto a decades-long tradition of militancy, Pan-African sensibilities, and Black Nationalist politics. Yet, this political resonance has had, I argue, as much to do with the convergence between the ways in which regimes of neoliberal governance have been mapped onto the urban landscape of American and South African apartheid as it does the transnational thinking of local activists. Indeed, for their Chicago counterparts, the WCAEC's attempts to place non-collaboration at the center of its struggles against these regimes and the crises they engendered marked it as an example worth imitating.

Keywords: non-collaboration; militancy; Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign; Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign; Public Housing

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We take action to get land and houses and also to prevent banks from stealing our land and houses. When a family gets evicted and has nowhere else to go, we put them back inside. ... When government cuts off our electricity, we put it back on ... We break the government's law in order not to break our own (moral) laws. We oppose the authorities because we never gave the authority to steal, buy and sell our land in the first place.

- Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (2009)

This is the new movement we have been waiting for, a post-apartheid movement for social revolution. We need a post civil rights movement in the US to rebuild our fight for real democracy and social transformation. We can learn from them.

- Abdul Alkalimat (2009)

Introduction

In August, 2002, Max Ntanyana, a prominent Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC) activist, attended a meeting of the *Asamblea Popular Cid Campeador* in Buenos Aires, Argentina, held in the downtown headquarters of Argentina's failed *Banco Mayo*. Amidst the turmoil of the country's financial crisis, assembly members had boldly occupied the three-story building, repurposing it as a social center and renaming it the *Cid Campeador* House. Yet, just weeks before Ntanyana's visit, local police had raided the center, charging three assembly members with trespassing, and threatening to arrest all those found remaining when they returned to execute an eviction (Adamovsky, 2003).

Ntanyana's visit to Argentina, a product of a chance opportunity to speak at a special thematic session of the World Social Forum, occurred at a pivotal moment not just for the building occupation, but also in the development of the WCAEC itself (Adamovsky, 2002; Pointer 2004). Following the 2000 local government elections, some of South Africa's largest banks had moved even more aggressively in evicting pensioners, single-parent households, and other

vulnerable families – upwards of thirty per day – for the arrears on their apartheid era low-income bonded housing scheme in the Mandela Park section of Cape Town’s sprawling township of Khayletshia. In response, residents established the Mandela Park branch of the WCAEC as a vehicle to fight back. Over the next several months, they blocked evictions and returned evicted families to their homes as well as taken their protests to downtown bank offices, occupying them to force a renegotiation of members’ arrears. Within a year and half, these efforts had halted most evictions in Mandela Park, winning the WCAEC largely favorable local media coverage and attracting international attention (Legassick, 2003; Pointer, 2004).

Within months of Ntanyana’s return from Argentina, however, he and several other WCAEC members who also worked as shop stewards in the South Africa Municipal Workers Union would be jailed following a strike at a waste treatment center. Their release on bail came with strict conditions not as a result of the work stoppage, but associated with an interdict sought by the country’s five biggest banks. In one of the first cases of targeted political repression in the post-apartheid era, the Mandela Park AEC would soon be vilified in the press, face more than 400 arrests linked to evictions, and find Ntanyana facing repeated arrest, abduction, and even imprisonment for his refusal to have his political activities restricted by ever more stringent bail conditions (Legassick, 2003; Gibson, 2004b; Desai and Pithouse, 2004b; Desai and Pithouse, 2004c; McDonald, 2008).

While the WCAEC’s militancy would be countered by severe state repression, this militancy would also shape its engagement with other radical movements at key sites of social struggle around the world. In Argentina, the WCAEC’s presentation to the *Asamblea Popular Cid Campeador* would help its members to maintain their building occupation. One assembly members would later recall that Ntanyana “gave us strength and in hearing him we discovered that one can actually come back to the place from which you are evicted ... we had never

thought of that possibility” (Adamovsky, 2014). Emboldened by the example of how the AEC mobilized neighbors to block evictions and sought out previously evicted families to return them to their Mandela Park homes, assembly members resolved to maintain their occupation. Despite continued threats of eviction, assembly members decided to maintain their occupation and resist any future police raids, ultimately transforming the former bank building into a hub of political and cultural organizing (Mauro and Rossi, 2010).

To better understand how one of South Africa’s “new social movements” (Marais, 2011, p. 450) could have such a unique impact abroad, this chapter will examine a more recent example of the WCAEC’s international resonance. Similarly, WCAEC Chairman Ashraf Cassiem would begin a U.S. speaking tour in November 2009 by visiting Chicago’s notorious Cabrini-Green public housing developments at a moment in which local leaders had exhausted efforts to hold off the demolition and mass displacement of its residents. Much like *Cid Campeador* popular assembly members, Cabrini residents drew inspiration from accounts of the WCAEC’s militancy (Tolsi, 2010a). Just days after his visit, they would not only launch an eviction blockade, but also a Chicago branch of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, adopting the tactics and militant ethos of their South African counterparts (Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, 2009).

For urban planner Ananya Roy (2013, p. 3), the fact that Cape Town’s most prominent poor peoples movement provided the motivation for the creation of a U.S. counterpart is emblematic of a “dramatically rearranged world” that has been profoundly reshaped by the “shifting territorialization of power and poverty.” For Roy, this ‘rearranged world’ is characterized by the imposition in the global South of profoundly new relations of labor and capital that anticipate the arrival of similar developments in the West. Just as these regimes of accumulation had migrated north, the Western Cape AEC had now done the same in Chicago, a global city that for Roy (2013, p. 21) “must be understood not simply as the industrial North but instead as an instantiation of the dispossessions and

activisms which are prefigured in the global South.” After nearly a decade of experience actively resisting the imposition of neoliberal policies in Cape Town, the WCAEC offered those in Chicago a window onto the future, a demonstration of how these regimes might be resisted.

While drawing on Roy’s insights, this chapter goes further in suggesting that in addition to marking the convergence of regimes of accumulation, the WCAEC’s militant activism has also been central to its international resonance. This will not be the first time that the militancy of its politics has attracted scholarly attention (Desai and Pithouse, 2004a; Desai and Pithouse, 2004b; Desai and Pithouse, 2004c). But in contrast to previous studies of the WCAEC (Miraftab and Wills, 2005; Oldfield and Stokke, 2006; van Heusden and Pointer, 2006), this chapter will argue that this militancy is rooted in a commitment to what the late South African linguist and political revolutionary Neville Alexander describes as the principle of non-collaboration. In contrast to strategic negotiation and tactical participation in state institutions (Gibson, 1990), non-collaboration calls for a rejection of ruling class institutions not simply as a tactic, but instead as “the path by which the workers and the peasants would be taught the politics of class independence”(Alexander, 1986, p. 2). In doing so, this principle posits that the oppressed masses must recognize a fundamental conflict of interests between themselves and their oppressors, and, in doing so rejects any opportunities to participate in the institutions that legitimated their own oppression.

Running from the Non-European Unity Movement of the 1940s through factions of the United Democratic Front of the 1980s, non-collaboration would shape the contours of South Africa’s national liberation struggle and, subsequently, post-apartheid grassroots politics. Just as earlier liberation organisations rejected apartheid era mechanisms of political participation, the WCAEC consistently called upon other social movements to reject the post-1994 electoral process. In putting into practice this ‘politics of class independence’, the WCAEC forged a militancy that, even when untethered from the question of electoral participation,

has had a distinct influence on the landscape of social movement strategy at home and abroad. This militancy would resonate amongst housing activist in Chicago more strongly than any other place visited by the WCAEC. From its founding, the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign would repeatedly draw on the example of the WCAEC, an organization intensely local, yet linked to global struggles.

On the Politics of Class Independence

On June 7, 2006, members of the Tafelsig AEC demonstrated their commitment to non-collaboration amidst South Africa's latest political controversy. Across the country, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) had made strong gains in that spring's Municipal elections, except in Cape Town. Here the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) narrowly held off the ruling party in the votes for the city's Metro Council – only to have those gain undermined by a surprise coalition between the ANC and the Independent Democrats (ID) that gave them a slim majority (Ngclul, 2006).¹

In response to this political shift, Sheval Arendse, Tafelsig's ward councilor, defected from the ID to the DA, prompting a municipal by-election in the ward. With their vote, residents of one of Cape Town's most far-flung Coloured townships would determine which party would take control of South Africa's third largest city. On Election Day, Tafelsig voters roundly rejected the ANC-ID coalition by re-electing the iconoclastic Arendse with a landslide 68% of the vote.

Though the mainstream press accounts praised a record-high 40% turn out of registered voters for a by-election, few reports mentioned that this percentage was slightly lower than the election turnout four months earlier - already among the lowest in the country. As analysts assessed the prospects of DA-controlled

¹ Increasing the party's vote total by 1.3 million and winning control of an additional 17 local councils.

Cape Town, they failed to mention that only one in five of Tafelsig's likely voters had even bothered to cast a ballot (Pressly, 2006).² Even fewer noted that this low turnout reflected a further decline in electoral participation, particularly among the country's most marginalized populations (Butler, 2012).

Indeed, that morning, a crowd of over 300 local residents marched from a local polling station under the banner of the WCAEC, calling for a complete boycott of the day's by-elections. Led by a lively brass band, neighbors carried placards proclaiming "No poverty" and "Don't vote on the 7th of June – No parties, Leave them at home!" Another sign listed demands as varied as the scrapping of rental housing arrears, full employment, and comprehensive health care to land redistribution, adequate housing, and the implementation of a basic income grant. In closing out the demonstration, the poem reiterated the day's theme: all politicians had failed to deliver on these basic needs, thus, no one, regardless of party, deserved support (Cassiem, 2006).

In organizing themselves in opposition to voting, the Tafelsig AEC highlights what recent scholarship on South African social movement has overlooked, namely the contemporary salience of a political line running from the mid-1930s through the late 1980s "connecting all black organisations completely opposed to [political] participation" (Gibson, 1990, p. 24). Over the past decade, scholarship on South Africa's social movement has followed the emergence of groups like the WCAEC, but only recently have these studies been concerned with explaining how the historical legacies of past struggles have influenced present-day movements (Mbali, 2013; Benson, 2015; Naicker, 2015). Yet, even these more recent studies have primarily been concerned with drawing out the

² Without reliable data on the number voting age population in Tafelsig Ward 82, voting age population was estimated to be half of total population (26,147). Voter participation was calculated as total votes over voting age population (21%).

organisational continuities between late apartheid era activism and present-day resistance to neoliberal capitalism.³

In his influential *We are the Poors*, for instance, Ashwin Desai argues, these movements are “a form of collectivity...free from the ideological inhibitions of organized labor or the tired dogmas of the Left” (2002, p. 139). Not only has the organisational structure of these movements provided an opportunity to move beyond union and party politics, but also “their protests [are] not driven by ideology but by the need to survive and the desire to live decently” (Desai, 2002, 9). Following Desai, scholars have tended to ignore the influence of past ideas on new community movements. Whether it is historicizing the contemporary Treatment Action Campaign through the 1980s Gay Association of South Africa or Gauteng’s Anti-Privatization Forum through the Civic Association of Southern Transvaal, the emphasis on organizational form has often overshadowed the question of ideational content.⁴

Yet, more rigorous analysis of movement thinking is useful, offering an opening onto the legacies on which the social movements have consciously and unconsciously drawn. The WCAEC’s efforts to adhere to non-collaboration through its vote boycotts offer one such example. To the degree that these efforts reflect the influence of non-collaboration, itself a dissident tradition of working class struggle, there remains an opportunity to deeply historicize the ways in which the WCAEC has extended an “austere policy,” a generally non-Charterist line running through the political thought of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), Black Consciousness

³ For examples of this trend, see studies of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the National Land Committee (NLC), and the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF) in *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, edited by Nigel Gibson as well as “Subjectivity, Politics, and Neoliberalism in Post-Apartheid Cape Town” by Peter van Heusden and Rebecca Pointer.

⁴ For a recent exception to this trend, see Gibson, N. (2011) *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY.

Movement (BCM), and elements of the United Democratic Front (UDF) into the post-apartheid era (Hirson).

Although various organisations have taken up non-collaboration, the core presumptions – and even rhetoric – have remained relatively consistent over the course of the twentieth century. Beneath the rhetoric, however, there does exist a tension between those who have advanced non-collaboration primarily for the purposes of overcoming ruling class domination and those who have approached it as a mechanism for liberating the minds of those who were racially subjugated. This tension has been reflected in the debates between Marxists and Africanists, BCM-partisans and proponents of the Freedom Charter. In the final analysis, this tension has left the WCAEC with multiple interpretations of non-collaboration, an imprecision that has shaped both its practice at home and its resonance abroad.

A Brief History of Non-Collaboration

The emergence of non-collaboration in the early 1900s is tightly linked to the failure of what Alexander refers to as the "petitionist politics" of the middle class African leadership (Alexander, 1986). During the first four decades of the century, numerous deputation by the missionary school educated teachers, merchants, and professionals of the African People's Organisation, the African National Congress, and the Natal Indian Congress were unable to persuade, first, the British colonial, then Union governments to concede equal rights. These efforts paralleled the rising tide of white supremacy in South Africa and, in particular the further curtailment of the voting rights of Coloureds and Africans in the Cape Province (Karis and Carter, 1973).⁵

⁵ Looking back on this sort of politics, NEUM leader I.B. Tabata would later write: "They were lead to believe that some day they would become full citizens...They did not realise that the Government, the administration, and the Parliament, all belong to the white man who has no intention of ever giving the Africans even the least small avenue for advancement, for voicing his grievances and aspirations, and for acquiring his full and rightful place in citizenship...It came as a terrific shock to the Black man. The African people suddenly found that from now on they had no one to rely on, except themselves." (Alexander, 1986, 4)

In response, Cape Town's Marxist intellectuals, specifically Trotskyist groupings like the Spartacist faction of the Lenin Club, launched the earliest organisational expression of non-collaboration. They did this through the Anti-CAD, a representative coalition of various groups and formed in response to the proposed creation of a Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) in 1943. Seen as a herald of greater segregation, akin to the Native Affairs Department, the CAD galvanized radicals opposed the more 'collaborationist' politics of more established leadership. Drawing on the language of anti-fascist partisans, they made calls for a political boycott of all Union government ("herrenvolk") institutions and a personal boycott of all those ("quislings") who participated in them. Initially, this widespread opposition was successful in forcing the Union government to scrap the CAD, though the proposed disenfranchisement would soon be carried out through 'collaborationist' Coloured Advisory Council (CAC).⁶

Though addressing principally Coloured concerns, those in the Anti-CAD also sought common ground with Africans and Indians in united, non-European front against racial segregation. Together with representatives of the All-African Convention (AAC) and several other organisations, Anti-CAD radicals established the NEUM in 1943 and made non-collaboration part of its 10-point programme. Over the next fourteen years, the NEUM would consistently argue for non-collaboration as a central aspect of national liberation, often criticizing other organisations that employed civil disobedience tactics, but still participated in the CAC and other 'dummy' bodies. In comparison to other forms of civil disobedience, election boycotts were the quintessence of this principle (Alexander, 1986).⁷

⁶ From a world away, these Coloured intellectuals grasped the advantage of resistance, the role of collaborators, and the need for the oppressed distinguish their own interests. Future radicals would continue to use Nazi Germany as a metaphor for the application of white supremacy in South Africa, deriding white supremacy as a 'herrenvolk' ideology and collaborators as 'quislings'.

⁷ A decade after the birth of the Unity Movement, Hosea Jaffe concluded that: The policy of non-collaboration springs from the...basic fact...(of) the absolute irreconcilability between the Herrenvolk and the exploited and oppressed Non-Europeans. Non-Collaboration expresses and formulates and gives guidance (sic) to this reality, to the fact that exploitation and oppression

The early adoption of NEUM's ideas would be reflected in the election boycott called by the All-African Convention and supported by the ANCYL in 1947 (Gibson, 1990). Although largely limited to the Cape Province, this campaign made the elections for the NRC, an advisory body created following the purging of Africans from the country's general voting rolls, not just a political target, but also a foil against which a "new African political self-consciousness" could be cultivated (Gibson, 1990, p. 30).

While the principle of non-collaboration largely remained contested during the 1950s and 60s, its proponents did exert some influence on the thinking of those outside of the NEUM's orbit. The ANC, for instance, moved away from civil disobedience at the outset of the mid-1950s because of organisational limitations and police harassment, only to turn to aspects of non-collaboration with the 1956 Bantu Education campaign. Grassroots organisations also employed aspects of non-collaboration during the Evanton bus boycott of 1955-56 and the 1957 Alexandria bus boycott, as well as local economic boycotts and stay-aways carried out during the late 1950s (Karis and Gerhart, 1977).⁸ Additionally, there is some indication of NEUM and AAC's involvement in the rural revolts in northern Transvaal and eastern Pondoland between 1957 and 1960, particularly through an organisation calling itself the Pondoland Anti-Bantustan Movement (Karis and Gerhart, 1977).

A somewhat different conceptions of non-collaboration, emphasizing its utility as a means of mental liberation, would later be advanced through the political

make collaboration between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed always detrimental to the oppressed and beneficial to the oppressor, and which preserves the misery of the people, while non-collaboration expresses and helps the daily, almost invisible struggle between the masters and slaves in South Africa as everywhere else in the imperialist dominated world" (Alexander, 1986, p. 4).

⁸ While NEUM was officially uninvolved, a sectarian leaflet distributed at the Johannesburg bus boycott called on riders to remain suspicious of the "White government who are the source of our ruin," as well as attempts by ANC "quislings" to "sell-out" the struggle. (Karis and Gerhart, 1977, p. 395).

thought of the Pan-Africanist Congress and later the Black Consciousness Movement. Following its split with the ANC, the PAC's leadership quickly advocated the use of consumer boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience. In his December 1959 "State of the Nation" address, PAC President Robert Sobukwe explained, "it is our task to exorcise this slave mentality, and to impart to the African masses that sense of self-reliance which will make them prefer self-government to the good government preferred by the A.N.C.'s leaders." The coming Anti-Pass Campaign, he continued, "will free the mind of the African and once the mind is free, the body will soon be free. Once white supremacy has become mentally untenable to our people, it will become physically untenable too, and will go" (Karis and Carter, 1977, p. 546). Although earlier proponents of non-collaboration had given a nod to the ideological impact of non-collaboration, the PAC extended and emphasized this point.

State security authorities met the successful launch of the PAC's Anti-Pass Campaign on March 21, 1960 with severe repression. Following a growing stay-at-home in Cape Town that ground many of the city's industries to a halt, ANC and PAC leaders quickly called for similar actions across the country. The government's declaration of a State of Emergency and the banning of the ANC and PAC left leading activists either in police custody, underground, or out of the country. By the mid-1960s, widespread arrests and state repression had nearly eliminated above ground organizing and virtually silenced African resistance during the 1960s.

The recovery of non-collaboration was largely due to the renewal of aboveground opposition to apartheid through the numerous student groups, community programmes, workers' organisations, and popular assemblies that would make up the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s and 80s. From the movement's earliest inception with the 1969 launch of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), its guiding principles included key aspects of non-collaboration. Following its split with the national, and largely white, student

organisation, a caucus of black university students formed SASO as a means through which they "could speak for themselves instead of relying on liberal whites to articulate their goals and prescribe their modus operandi" (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 95). Frustrated with the condescension and paternalism of their white peers, SASO's early leaders sought to craft a vehicle to take the initiative in their struggle. Analogous to NEUM's efforts to construct a united front of the oppressed, SASO redefined 'black' as a positive identity, inclusive of Africans, Indians, and Coloureds. The term Non-European was not used as "they viewed as a negation of their being" (Gibson, 2004a, p. 7). In its place, 'black' was infused with positive value as an assertion of humanity. While creating an alternative identity, 'black' also reinforced the long ignored fact that liberation of all those oppressed remained intimately interlinked.⁹

In crafting an inclusive racial identity, African students were also wholly rejecting the apartheid government's efforts to promote a tribal identity that dovetailed with its plan to strip Africans of citizenship and repatriate them to eight independent bantustans. Steve Biko, the leading theoretician of black consciousness and inaugural SASO President, observed that this policy sought to assuage the demands for equal rights while dividing the black population along ethnic lines. Echoing an earlier description of the NRC as 'playing with toy telephones', Biko described bantustan leader as posturing from "these dummy platforms, these phoney telephones," but with little tangible power. For Biko, "bantustan leaders are subconsciously siding and abetting in the total subjugation of the Black people in this country...they have managed to confuse the blacks sufficiently to believe that something great is about to happen" (Biko, 1978, p. 84-85). Rather than leading the oppressed to freedom, Bantustans left a false sense of hope that someone else would do the work of liberating them. Similar to NEUM's philosophy of non-collaboration, black consciousness found that "even if the

⁹ Among Coloured people, the "Anti-CAD movement" had already begun to create a change in racial identity, gradually getting "the so-called Coloured people to cease being a mere 'appendix to the White Man', a surgical operation that was finally completed by the [Black Consciousness Movement] in our own day" (Alexander, 1986, p. 9).

government could not be brought down immediately, what could be changed was the mind of the people. They could learn self-worth, self-awareness, self-determination, if not in reality then at least in ideas" (Gibson, 1990, p. 41). Biko and others sought to use black consciousness as a means through which to prepare the oppressed for freedom. In contrast, Bantustan leaders, by appearing to provide a challenge to the state, were contributing not only to the physical, but also the psychological subjugation of the black majority.

Much like the PAC's approach to non-collaboration, SASO's 1971 Policy Manifesto described this organisation as "working for the liberation of the Black man first from psychological oppression by themselves through inferiority complex and secondly from physical oppression accruing out of living in a White racist society" (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 481). For SASO President Steve Biko, this society dehumanized blacks, seeing them only "as additional levers to some complicated industrial machines" (Biko, 1978, p. 91) while black consciousness offered "true humanity" (Biko 1978, p. 98) not only for blacks but also for the entire society. Just as NEUM's I. B. Tabata recalled early African leaders finding that they had 'no one to rely on, except themselves', the Black Consciousness slogan - "Black man, you are on your own!" - similarly embraced the autonomy and assertiveness of non-collaboration (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 108).

While those in the BCM were critical of the bantustan leaders and white liberal for aiding this process of psychological subjugation, it would be the township Urban Bantu Councils that would become a key target of violent protest during the 1970s (Biko, 1978). Tasked with financing their activities through township taxes, service payments, and alcohol sale receipts, the UBCs were staffed with unelected officials imposed by the regional government authorities. Throughout

the country, militants made the abolition of UBCs a central demand and their offices were targeted for petrol bomb attacks (Karis and Gerhart, 1997).¹⁰

In spite of the October 1977 banning of all BCM organisations and detainment of movement leaders, non-collaboration remained central to this sector of the liberation struggle (Karis and Gerhart, 1997). In the wake of a 1977 state crackdown, the remaining BC activists, many of who were seeking to incorporate a more robust class analysis into their political ideology, launched the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) in April 1978. Though the government had banned the chairman and secretary and numerous branch leaders faced police detention within subsequent weeks, AZAPO proposed continued opposition to collaborationist politics and support for community service projects, as well as “joint strategy talks” with trade union leaders to take up labor issues (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 762).

In late 1982, resistance to the Koornhof Bills brought Cape Town area BC and NEUM activists into a loose coalition with local trade unions, student groups, and civic organisations through the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (Seekings, 2000; Gibson, 2004a). The proposal of a new Constitution for the Republic of South Africa offering only limited parliamentary representation for Coloured and Indians, but none for Africans would mark an even more significant rallying point. In June 1983, over 800 delegates from 164 organisations launched the National Forum, agreeing to four basic principles of anti-racism, anti-imperialism, non-

¹⁰ In Soweto, for instance, the Soweto Students' Representative Council called for the UBC's replacement with an elected representative body only to find in April 1977 that the regional governmental board would be raising rents to pay for repairs to government buildings. The UBC had known of the impending increase, but had failed to inform residents or organise a community response. Soon after the increase announcement, Student protests forced a halt on rent increases and by June 1977, the resignation of all UBC members. Meeting soon after, a coalition of 61 representatives of local organisations elected a "Soweto Local Authority Interim Committee," which put quickly put forward a sweeping plan proposing full municipal status for the sprawling township. Though the entire "Committee of Ten" was detained in October 1977, its members would launch the Soweto Civic Association upon their release two years later, "converting itself into a mass-based body pledged to oppose any compromise or collaboration with apartheid," emblematic of the turn to grassroots politics throughout the late 1970 (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 236-7).

collaboration with the ruling class, and independent working class organisations (Gibson, 2004a).

Two months later, hundreds of civics, churches, unions, and women's organisations came together to launch the UDF, an ANC-aligned coalition that lacked an explicit commitment to non-collaboration (Seekings, 2000).¹¹ Following the example set by local affiliates, the UDF did call for a boycott of upcoming Black Local Authority elections. As a result, these local elections drew only 5 to 10 percent of eligible African voters. Building on these results, the UDF then pushed for a nation-wide Don't Vote Campaign in preparation for the parliamentary elections (Seekings, 2000). Though it did not prevent the seating of the new Parliament, this campaign did contribute to the broader project of undermining the Botha government's legitimacy. While two thirds of white voters supported a 1983 referendum on constitutional reforms, only one in five eligible Coloureds voters, and fewer Indians, even cast a ballot (Seekings, 2000). Within a year, uprisings had taken place in the Vaal Triangle, South Africa's industrial heartland, eventually spreading throughout the country. During this period, it was township and shop floor militancy that pushed forward these vote boycotts. Across the country, non-collaboration at the polls was linked to a range of actions including strikes, consumer boycotts, stay-aways, necklacing of collaborators, and armed self-defense that added to the growing ungovernability that would usher in the key political prisoners and the unbanning of the ANC in 1991.

Though contested and fraught with tensions and contradiction, the growing acceptance of non-collaboration paralleled a shift from elite negotiations to mass insurgency. Initially linked to the Anti-CAD and NEUM, non-collaboration would later be accepted by the ANCYL and PAC. But it was not until BC adopted central aspects non-collaboration as parts of its political thought that it would gain

¹¹The Unity Movement, AZAPO, and other groups unaffiliated with the ANC made calls for a 'united front' in 1981 and 1982. In response, ANC exiles sent a message urging underground units to form some kind of coordinating structure to rival AZAPO's National Forum (Seekings, 2000)

widespread acceptance. By the 1980s, “the political ethos of non-collaboration” had become “so integral to our struggle for national liberation and emancipation that any hint even of talks with the present government raises the political temperature particularly of the black youth and or [sic] organised black workers” (Alexander, 1986, p. 13). Although the subject of vigorous political debates, especially within the UDF, participation in state-sponsored institutions had largely been delegitimized in favor of building dual power through community structures (Gibson, 1990).

The release of key political prisoners and the negotiated transition from racial apartheid to multiracial democracy would usher in an abrupt decline in adherence to non-collaboration, with AZAPO one of just a few political parties boycotting the historic 1994 elections. Yet, this decline would only be brief, as a resurgence of protests against evictions, water cutoffs, and electricity disconnections after the 1999 national elections provided an opportunity for the rearticulation of aspects of non-collaboration. With apartheid era political organizations now campaigning for elected office, it would now be the WCAEC and other grassroots movement that would take up earlier themes of local autonomy, mental liberation, and working class independence.

From *Don't Vote!* to *No Land! No House! No Vote!*

From the launch of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign on February 18, 2001, the WCAEC has drawn on this ideological legacy. One of its first pamphlets described it as “a volunteering organisation comprising of unemployed members of different communities...fighting a war with the neo-liberal government of South African and the whole world’s multinational companies insisting on implementing their policies and programmes aimed to keep the poor subservient and penniless” (WCAEC). Over the next ten years, the campaign would spread to nearly thirty different neighborhoods, establishing chapters in areas with public, private, and informal housing, and organizing across the

barriers of language and geography. In addition to keeping individual families in their homes and reconnecting disconnected services (McDonald, 2008), the campaign has forced municipal housing officials to ignore the housing, electricity and water arrears accumulated under apartheid. On two occasions, the Cape Town City Council passed a temporary moratorium on evictions. Additionally, low-income homeowners had forced Khayletu Home Loans, a private lender, to forgive those who had defaulted on their mortgages.

One of the WCAEC's core organizing principles has been that of non-collaboration, particularly sustained opposition to political participation. Written before its first election boycott, WCAEC's 2003 Strategic Plan, reiterated, "Political parties proceed from their own agenda with no regard for the impact they have on poor communities. The campaign abstains from party politics and electoralism and believes that communities must develop their own independent politics." Moreover, "the campaign is not an extension or front of any political party and does not align itself to any political party" (WCAEC, 2003, p. 2). Rather than simply a refusal to vote, the WCAEC called upon poor communities organise themselves and formulate their own "local plan of action" and direct its implementation (WCAEC, 2003, p. 2).

In part, this focus on local politics and community mobilization is a reflection of practicality and principle. With only limited resources, local organizing could drive the mass mobilizations that gained the attention of key authorities. As the 2003 Strat Plan explains, "the strength of the campaign lies in its ability to engage in mass mobilization, public meetings, marches, demonstrations and petitions." Campaign members have found this politics to be the most effective in halting evictions, stopping service cut offs and forcing concessions from officials. This politics maximises local power, but also places "leadership of the struggle in the hands of the community as active participants," and in doing so "builds confidence and restores self worth, dignity and humanity" (WCAEC, 2003, p. 2). According to the WCAEC's organisational guidelines, local residents should lead

local struggles, not only because this sort of mass politics has been practically effective, but also because it challenged the psychological subjugation of oppressed communities.

This line also extends to the WCAEC's engagement with NGOs and government advice offices. Rather than serving poor communities, these organisations must work with communities so that residents can ultimately serve their own communities: "Any relationship with these formations must be based on the transfer of skills and resources that build independence and develop capacity. Anything else would lead to disempowerment of communities and the campaign becoming an appendage of these formulations." Where Steve Biko, for instance, worried that white society dehumanised blacks, seeing them as "additional levers to some complicated industrial machine", the WCAEC argues that outside non-governmental organisations do much the same to poor communities (WCAEC, 2003, p. 8). Ultimately, these communities, and by extension, the campaign, must be protagonistic and self-determining - able to rely on their own resources, skills, and initiative to solve their own problems.

Much like the non-European fronts fashioned by prior proponents of non-collaboration, WCAEC members draw pride in theirs being a movement of 'the poors,' an oppressed multitude further dispossessed of housing, water, electricity, and other basic services. "The anti-eviction is standing up for the poorest of the poor" (Grootboom, 2003). In part, this identity simply speaks to the material conditions of these communities, where families often rely on disability grants, the informal economy, or a sole wage earner for their survival. "The people on the ground is poor, old people, disabled people, not working class people," explained a Tafelsig AEC member. "Working class people is people that work" (Cassiem, S., 2005). This conceptualization of 'the poors' as distinct from those that work marks a class consciousness that spans racial boundaries, linked not only to social relations of productions, but also the spatial isolation of Caepit Town's townships and shack settlements. Just as BC revalorised 'black' as a

multiracial identity with a positive valence through resistance to oppression, the AEC has done much of the same with 'poor'. As one Tafelsig AEC member stated, "we are proud to be poor" (Losier, 2013, p. 29). Wrestling with negative presumptions linked to poverty, the AEC has sought to fashion a class consciousness attuned to neoliberal moment.

In drawing on these prior approaches to non-collaboration, the WCAEC also took up electoral boycotts as a means of achieving both consciousness raising and local autonomy. Though this principle takes into account the importance of how the WCAEC should operate in local communities, it is primarily expressed in regards to participating in elections, which the campaign members not only abstain from, but also seek to delegitimize in the eyes community residents. As a pamphlet produced prior to the 2006 Municipal elections suggested:

No Land, No House, No Vote: In the local government elections we are going to vote for all or for no one. For 11 years no party could stop privatization economic policies and until that can happen, we cannot vote for anyone (TAEC).

Indeed, this was not first time that the WCAEC had actively challenged the logic of participating in government institutions. As early as November 2003, the WCAEC joined with the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and the National Land Committee (NLC) in calling for a No Land! No Vote! Campaign. Arguing that South Africa had achieved only a 'ballot box' democracy in the decade since the transition from apartheid, the campaign demanded a moratorium on all evictions and immediate land redistribution, or, in lieu of voting, activists would carry out a series of land occupations (Alexander, 2006). These demands were met with strident criticism by the media, ANC officials and land rights NGOs allied with the LPM (Mngxitama, 2006). In spite of this opposition, LPM activists in townships and rural settlements demonstrated against voter registration, marched on government offices, and carried out actions across the country.

On Election Day 2004, the Tafelsig AEC organised a family day rally attended by over four hundred residents. Rather than voting, "People from different streets, different parts of this Tafelsig came together and met each other for the first time. We just got to know each other, what it is that we want, and why we are not voting" (Cassiem, A., 2005). While the national ANC campaign rhetoric promised to deliver a predetermined "a better life for all," residents discussed what they would like their future to look like, including more schools, hospitals, and playgrounds for neighborhood children (Lopez, 2005). Most ominously, the government cracked down on the LPM's threatened land occupations, arresting 57 members in the Johannesburg settlement of Thembelihle and disrupting other LPM protests (Alexander, 2006).

During the months prior to the 2006 municipal elections, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), the Durban-based Shackdwellers movement, joined the WCAEC in an election boycott. Together, they expanded the call to "No Land! No House! No Vote!" in recognition of the pressing need amongst those in shack settlements for decent and affordable housing. As AbM President S'bu Zikode argued, "the community has realised that voting for parties has not brought any change to us - especially at the level of local government elections. We can see some important changes at national level but at local level who ever wins the elections will be challenged by us. We have been betrayed by our own elected councilor. We have decided not to vote" (Zikode, 2005).

Once again, the boycott call provoked a sharp reaction. Within the WCAEC, there were sharp disagreements over non-collaboration with former organizers in Mitchell's Plan and Khayletshia attempting to run for city council seats on the Universal Party and Socialist Alternative Party tickets (Losier, 2013). Outside of the movement, ANC partisans bitterly complained that this "No Vote!" campaign was draining support from already atrophied ward committees and cast movement activists as anti-ANC. Progressive politicians, primarily white and middle class, questioned the strategic benefit of a no vote campaign, arguing that

social movements should instead support independent candidates. In response, members of the AbM explained that while they respected the past achievements of the ruling party, they could not excuse the corruption and betrayal of the incumbent candidates.¹² In Durban, these refusals to support any political party culminated in an "unFreedom Day" event. Held two days prior to the 2006 municipal election, this event brought together AbM members and activists from across the city in declaring that 'there is no freedom for the poor' through theater, dance, song, and poetry. Yet on Election Day, South African Police Services (SAPS) unlawfully banned a scheduled AbM march and brutally repressed those who took to the streets (Gibson, 2011).

In spite of these and other challenges, WCAEC and AbM used their joint election boycotts as the foundation for an Action Alliance. Beginning in 2006, these two organisations sought to put into practice a deeper sense of unity by convening solidarity marches. Coordinated largely through mobile phones and uniting under the slogan, "the poor protecting the poor – together fighting for basic needs," the Action Alliance sought to carry forward aspects of non-collaboration in spite of their limited capacities. In July 2008, these two movements joined together to help launch an AbM Western Cape movement, to directly address the concerns of residents of Cape Town's numerous informal settlements (Losier, 2013).

Later that year, WCAEC and AbM would partner with the Rural Network and LPM's Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal branches to establish the Poor People's Alliance. "We are calling it the Poor People's Alliance so our people can identify with it," explained WCAEC Chairman Ashraf Cassiem. "It is a solidarity alliance. If there is an action in one place, [we] will carry it forward in another area. It must be people-orientated. It must be action-based, as opposed to an NGO that sits in

¹² For example, at a meeting on January 15, 2006 between abhlali members and other local leaders from a settlement in Lamontville, ANC partisans argued that "you are fighting against the ANC," "killing the ANC in this ward," and "it's killing our party. We can see that there are still some of you are ANC members." One ANC activists suggested that "if this movement is not against the ANC than why are you not coming to meetings, not joining ward committees?" Author's field notes, 15 January 2006.

the office” (Losier, 2009, p. 60-61). Launched at the close of a City Wide Shack Fire Summit convened by AbM in September of 2008, the Poor People’s Alliance came in response to these organisations’ shared concerns over the dominance of left academics and NGOs in social movement politics.

Prior to the 2009 National Elections, those in the Poor People’s Alliance would face severe police repression as they sought to carry out their vote boycott. On February 8, 2009, South African police broke up a WCAEC mass meeting held at Cape Town’s Gugulethu Sports Complex. Without warning, police tear-gassed the more than 1,000 people in attendance, beating those who tried to flee and arresting local leaders Mncedisi Twalo and Mbulelo Zuba. According to the WCAEC, a local councilor and other ANC officials directed the police to attack their meeting and arrest key activists on charges of obstructing voter registration (Pithouse, 2009).

Three weeks later, police in the Protea South section of Soweto arrested and held eight LPM members in jail for two days on the charge of public violence after delivering a petition to their ward councilor demanding a public report-back on various community issues. “Elections are always dangerous time for poor people’s movements in South Africa,” decried an LPM press release. “Our marches are banned, we are beaten, arrested, sometimes tortured and sometimes even murdered” (LPM, 2009). As in previous elections, state repression exposed the authoritarian character of party politics in some of South Africa’s marginalised communities. Faced with both limited capacities and outside opposition, the WCAEC, and, to varying degree, other movements within the Poor People’s Alliance, struggled with not only rejecting electoral politics, but also maintaining the sort of robust, grassroots democracy essential to organizing premised on local autonomy, consciousness raising, and working class independence. In spite of this grassroots movement’s weaknesses, aspects of non-collaborations would directly would inform the WCAEC’s international resonance, first in South America and Europe, and then in the United States.

From Cape Town to Cabrini-Green

On November 11, 2009, WCAEC Chairman Ashraf Cassiem rounded out his first full day in the United States by speaking at the University of Chicago, the first stop on a three-week tour organized by this author and other activists. Noting the irony of being invited to give a presentation at the intellectual home of neoclassical economics, Cassiem used the balance of his talk to describe the destruction wrought by the ANC's particular version of neoliberal economics policies. He detailed the brutal beating of he and his mother by SAPS at an eviction blockade in 2001; the criminalization of eviction protests in Mandela Park; the 2003 "Water War" sparked by the city's attempt to shut off the water of hundreds of families in Mitchells Plain. These were the harsh realities of life in the "Rainbow Nation" that would be hidden from the world during the upcoming FIFA 2010 World Cup.

From the audience, public housing organiser Willie "J.R." Fleming found Cassiem's account of the WCAEC's grassroots militancy particularly compelling. Based in Cabrini-Green, a notorious 3,600-unit public housing development, Fleming had spent the last several months coordinating a human rights investigation of the U.S. by Raquel Rolnik, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing. Just days prior to Cassiem's talk, Rolnik had concluded her investigation only to acknowledge that there was little that her office could do to stop the planned demolition of Cabrini-Green and the mass displacement of its residents, despite terming it a gross human violation. With the U.N. unable to forestall a mass eviction, the WCAEC offered an example of how the poor could successfully mobilise to secure their own interests.

After that evening's talk, Fleming invited Cassiem to spend the day in Cabrini-Green. There, the WCAEC leader learned how the overwhelmingly poor, black

residents of this 70-acre development were now facing the prospects of being pushed to the outskirts of the city. Several high-rise public housing buildings had already been demolished. City officials were encouraging long-time residents to take rental voucher to relocate to heavily segregated neighborhoods, to the city's inner-ring suburbs or out-of-state. While a class action lawsuit prevented the wholesale demolition of the complex, CHA officials were increasingly turning from the carrot of vouchers and gift cards to the stick of eviction threats to bleed Cabrini-Green of its last remaining residents.

For decades, Cabrini-Green significance lay in its close proximity to some of Chicago's richest and most influential neighborhoods. Since the early 1970s, resident activism had successfully beaten back efforts by downtown corporations and city officials to remove the roughly 14,000, overwhelmingly black, increasingly poor residents and secure the area for upscale development. Instead of demolition, the development would first suffer from official neglect. As a result, Cabrini-Green's population declined by the thousands as officials routinely failed to maintain building and provide adequate security, choosing instead to take hundreds of units out of service, particularly the top floors of buildings. While the development deteriorated, the abandonment provided opportunities for homeless families to "live off the lease" by occupying vacant units and the high-rise buildings essentially serving as a "de facto shelter system," (Kalven, 2001) particularly during Chicago's bitterly cold winter months.

In 1996, a key shift in federal policy eliminating a rule mandating that each public housing apartment unit demolished had to be replaced by another provided officials with an opportunity to make good on these earlier efforts. Written into federal law two years later, this rule change made it far easier for local officials to destroy public housing without adhering to the prior one-to-one replacement rule. With the worst public housing stock in the country, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) officials quickly signaled that this policy shift would be used to eliminate Cabrini-Green and other development while shifting as many residents as

possible onto the private rental market with rental vouchers. In response, some resident leaders and their allied organisations formed the Coalition to Protect Public Housing (CPPH), a citywide partnership between those in public housing and some seventy supporting community, civic, and religious organisations. Over the next eight years, this broad coalition would employ rigorous research, popular education, public demonstrations, and even civil disobedience to inform residents about the city's plans and push the city to improve and preserve, rather than demolish, its large stock of public housing (Wright, 2006).

Over the next few years, the CPPH faced various obstacles in pursuing its mission of protecting public housing. Chicago officials not only formulated plans to demolish more than a third of its public housing, but they also outmaneuvered CPPH in securing support for its "Plan for Transformation" from the elected resident leadership. Under this plan, key sites would be targeted for demolitions, with both replacement public housing and new, upscale condominium apartments to be built through the public-private partnership of mixed-income development. Once outmaneuvered by CHA officials, the public housing leaders in CPPH found themselves increasingly isolated, unable to mobilise a mass base of residents, bring new supporters into their coalition, or even secure grants from the same non-profit foundations that had previously helped to fund it. Stymied by the turn away from public housing at the local and national levels, CPPH had by 2009 turned to a human rights framework, international law, and human rights mechanisms like the UN Special Rapporteur.

Walking through Cabrini-Green just days after Rolnik's investigation, Cassiem "did the worst thing he could have done – he spoke to our people" (Tolsi, 2010a). On front porches and inside living rooms, Cassiem talked with residents about their struggles to keep their community intact and their fears of being scattered to more dangerous neighborhoods across Chicago. Dismissing their reliance on human rights, Cassiem pointed out how the WCAEC used a variety of lawful and unlawful tactics to fight similar anti-poor policies: throwing rocks, blockading front

doors, burning tires, reconnecting services, occupying downtown offices, returning families to their homes, seizing vacant land and so. Refusing to tow the line of polite, legal protest, he emphasized, had served the WCAEC well.

Cassiem left Chicago the next day, but it would only be a week before those in Cabrini-Green would have an opportunity to put the WCAEC's example into practice. The day prior to his visit, the Cook County sheriff's eviction squad had given Lenise Forrest, a 19-year resident of Cabrini's rowhouse apartment units, a one-week eviction notice. When she explained her situation to other residents, they made plans to do a South Africa-style eviction blockade on the morning of her eviction. Bearing signs that read, "The Rich got bailed out we won't get put out" and "Housing is a Human Right," local activists mobilised several dozen residents, housing rights activists, and outside supporters for a rally and press conference for the morning of the eviction.

"As we all know, these are trying times in America, said Fleming to the morning's crowd, "Unemployment is almost at an all time high. People are finding it hard to find work in this country. If you cannot find work you cannot maintain an income. If you cannot maintain an income, you cannot pay rent. Should the punishment be homelessness? We don't think so. So we as residents of the city of Chicago and Cabrini-Green have come together to say this will be the last eviction, there will be no more evictions. We're against any eviction of poor people in our city and our country" (Peery, 2010a). With no police and county sheriffs in sight, Fleming and other activists with CPPH called the eviction blockade a success and the beginning of a Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign (Peery, 2010a).

Yet, residents struggled to organise themselves as city officials once again outmaneuvered them. On January 4, 2010, the day after the end of the annual holiday eviction moratorium, a full complement of the sheriff's eviction unit put Ms. Forrest out on the street, and boarded up her apartment unit, with a Chicago police detail stationed outside of her front door. Over the next week, rumor

spread that at least fourteen other families had been evicted (Peery, 2010b). A packed mass meeting called to address these developments turned up more than fifty eviction cases, all with upcoming court dates. Yet, a follow up meeting was delayed for weeks as local churches and community organisations repeatedly denied Cabrini-Green activists requests for a meeting space and officials barred them from going door-to-door to pass out flyers in CHA buildings. Even the elected leadership of Cabrini's Local Advisory Committee was slow to offer its assistance, despite the fact that the CAEC had been conceived of as an LAC organizing project (Peery, 2010b).

In spite of these obstacles, those in CAEC continued to press forward with regular outreach to Cabrini-Green residents and coordinating tenants rights workshops for those facing eviction. Time and again, they found residents who were facing eviction because housing officials had misplaced their paperwork or found a pretext to invoke the federal "one strike" rule that made any arrest associated with their public housing unit, even those that did not result in a criminal conviction, as grounds for an eviction. As CHA continued to push out more Cabrini-Green residents to various parts of the city and suburbs, the CAEC increasingly found itself pulled away from the development. Activists not only followed former public housing residents now scattered throughout the city, but also increasingly sought to contend with an expanding mortgage foreclosure crisis that was leaving unemployed tenants and homeowners facing eviction.

In May 2010, thirty-one families in 1230 N. Larrabee, one of Cabrini-Green's last high-rise apartment building, received 30-day eviction notices from the CHA. Rather than improving conditions in the building and moving in families on the city's long waiting list for affordable housing, CHA officials had determined that with only a quarter of the apartments occupied, an emergency building closure was the safest option for those remaining families. Following the CAEC's mobilization of building residents and a legal motion by lawyers for the Cabrini-Green LAC, the CHA rescinded its eviction complaint. Yet, it continued to

pressure the last remaining tenants to move out, emptying the building in just two months and clearing the way for demolition (Cottrell, 2010).

Six months later, the CAEC once again failed to block the CHA's efforts to displace the last remaining families at 1230 N. Burling, the development's last high-rise. By this date, much of the CAEC's organizing had shifted away from Cabrini-Green, with its outside supporters pulling it away from Cabrini-Green and towards the spiraling mortgage foreclosure crisis entangling more than 3,000 Chicago area families a month. In October 2010, CAEC had helped to win a month-long moratorium on evictions from foreclosed homes and offered its support to tenants and former homeowners facing eviction on the city's North Side. These actions reflected a shift in the organisation's vision from simply preserving public housing to enforcing the human right to housing more generally. Amidst its failure in Cabrini-Green, the CAEC hosted a visit by activists with Take Back the Land (TBtL), a Miami-based group attracting public attention for placing homeless families in vacant, foreclosed homes and building a national network modeled of the WCAEC (Rameau, 2010). While most within the CAEC remained adamant that the ongoing mortgage foreclosure crisis was premised on the privation of public housing begun under the "Plan for Transformation" and similar policies, dialogue with TBtL and other groups prompted local activists to shift their frame of analysis and field of action to foreclosed and vacant properties.

Amidst this protracted strategic reorientation, the CAEC's heterodox mix of public housing residents, student activists, Trotskyist cadres, and anarchist militants repeatedly turned to "Fighting Foreclosure in South Africa," a 2009 open letter written by the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign to U.S. activists. Published in the U.S. months prior to Cassiem's visit, this two and a half page document briefly summarised the emergence of and resistance to the ANC's neoliberal order. Here, the CAEC framed its actions within two principles: first, poor people should not cede control of their communities to NGOs, politicians, and

development bureaucrats, and, second, fundamental resources like land and housing had to be decommodified.

“We break the government’s laws in order not to break our own (moral) laws,” it read. “We oppose the authorities because we never gave them the authority to steal, buy and sell our land. Combined these are battles for a new emancipatory structure where we are not stakeholders but people; where land is for everyone and where resources are shared rather than fought over” (WCAEC, 2009)

In addition to these principles, this letter offered four brief points gleaned from the WCAEC’s past nine years of struggle. Throughout 2010, this document would serve as an essential reference point for the organisation’s development. In strategy sessions and general meetings, participants returned to it as a reflection of the sort of principled activism they should emulate. Rather than prescribing the actions that should be carried out, the WCAEC’s open letter offered an analytical framework through which to assess the ongoing crisis and particular mistakes to avoid that drew on the lessons of the South African example:

- Beware of all those in power – even those who seem like they are on your side.
- Beware of money, especially NGO money, which seeks to pacify and prevent direct action.
- Beware of media, even alternative media written by the middle class on behalf of the poor. Create your own media.
- Beware of leaders, even your own. No one can lead without you.
Leaders are like forks and knives. They are the tools of the community and exist to be led by the communities

When you build your “Take Back Our Land! Take Back Our Houses!” movement, build from below. Build democratically. Build alternative and autonomous ways of living within your community while fighting for what is yours. Build your own school of thought (WCAEC, 2009).

It is worth noting that this document makes only a brief mention of the 2004 and

2009 “No Land! No House! No Vote!” campaigns, but instead reiterated key aspects of non-collaboration, particularly local autonomy, direct decision making, and independent, working class politics. Rather than taking an election boycott as a litmus test for militancy, the WCAEC’s open letter directly attended to the goals of independent thought and working class self-determination.

In early 2011, key leaders from AbM and WCAEC visited in Chicago, engaging many of those in what was becoming a multiracial and multiclass coalition. Ultimately, however, the open letter’s guidelines on how to avoid the problems that might befall a militant, bottom-up organisation that would serve as the most profound influence as the CAEC sought to ground its organizing in poor neighborhoods across the city. Being able to draw on these sort of guidelines would be crucial as the CAEC was in the midst of its own transition from operating as an upstart organizing project of the Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council to an independent organization broadly concerned the human right to housing. In February 2011, lawyers active with the CAEC successfully defended Roberta Rendle, a Cabrini-Green tenant, against an attempted an eviction by the CHA following the arrest of two suspects in her apartment as a “one-strike” violation of its good-conduct lease provisions (CBS Chicago, 2011). In some sense, this legal victory was the culmination of nearly a year and a half of open opposition to evictions in Cabrini Green. Yet, rather than serving as the foundation for broader challenge to CHA policy, particularly around the destruction of public housing, this focus on public housing, with only a few exceptions (CAEC, 2011c), moved off of the CAEC’s radar as its focus continued to shift to the ongoing foreclosure crisis.

After months of preparation, the CAEC captured local and national media attention when it announced its first takeover of an empty foreclosed home on June 17, 2011. Standing outside of a two-story, single family home on Chicago’s South Side, those in the CAEC pointed out that not only had this house been left vacant by Deutsche Bank for more than two years to be vandalised by local

scavengers. In addition, the family that would be moving into this vacant home had been pushed out of Cabrini-Green and then evicted from a foreclosed apartment building (Gottesdeiner, 2013). While the bank and city officials might oppose their action, CAEC activists pointed out that a county judge had recently restarted foreclosure process on this home after Deutsche Bank's lawyers admitted to fraudulently filing some 1,700 Chicago area legal cases (Terry, 2011). Flanked by housing activists and human rights advocates from across the U.S., CAEC activists called upon other organisations to reclaim vacant housing in their own communities (CAEC, 2011a).

In the days that followed this home occupation, the CAEC found itself contending not with state repression, but rather roiling internal divisions. Sparked by a bitter personal dispute between Fleming, now a former public housing resident, and Holly Krig, a North Side tenant organizer, this conflict touched on unresolved disagreements about decision-making and the role of outside supporters within the CAEC's broad framework and fluid structure, breaking out sharply along the fault lines of race and class, gender and geography. As these divisions deepened, CAEC members from Cabrini-Green and the city's South Side caucused at a South Side café and community center to determine how they would ensure that the organisation would remain true to the founding of both the WCAEC and CAEC by poor and working class activists. Casting their push for leadership in a bid to return to the WCAEC's example, this wing of the CAEC held an election to establish their own Executive Committee and called for a "re-adoption" of the "Cape Town AEC's principles and umbrella structure" (CAEC, 2011b). Without the participation of those who did not come from public housing or were not based in Chicago's historically black South Side, the CAEC now had a clearly defined and elected leadership structure, with Fleming as the Chairman, in the mold of its South African counterpart. Rather than resolving earlier disagreements over internal democracy, this move accelerated the split into two different organisations, the CAEC and the Communities United Against Foreclosure and Eviction (CUAFE). Although both groups were committed to

same goal, enforcing the human right to housing, each group initially operated in competition with the other, though in different Chicago neighborhoods.

The manner in which those from the Cabrini-Green wing of the CAEC explicitly drew organisational structure and political principles of the WCAEC can be interpreted a variety of ways: as a contest for power within an ostensibly “structureless’ space” (Pointer, 2004, p. 282), as a justification for maintaining black working class control over a multiracial and multiclass coalition, as well as as a window onto deeper anxieties about the CAEC’s strategic shift away from public housing. Without clarifying issues of internal decision making or its class character, the WCAEC offered a militant example, a means by which this faction could establish its organizational authenticity. Esteemed for its commitment to local self-determination and political independence, the WCAEC provided a framework of principles crafted from aspects of apartheid era non-collaboration. Nearly two years after Cassiem’s brief visit to Chicago, local activists continued to look to their South African counterparts even while forging their own militant politics.

Over the next several years, the CAEC’s militancy would resonate with other groups seeking to navigate the housing crisis. In late 2012, activists linked to the Los Angeles chapter of Occupy Wall Street launched the Los Angeles Anti-Eviction Campaign amidst a four-months long occupation and eviction defense of a foreclosed Van Nuys home (Radford, 2012). A year later, a group of housing activists attempted to organize a NY Anti-Eviction Network (Rob Robinson, 2013). Much like the WCAEC’s resonance in Chicago and Buenos Aires, these organizers found themselves attracted to the CAEC’s militancy as well as its broader commitment to developing an assertive and independent working class politics. While these efforts have floundered over the degree to which they have been able to ground themselves in poor communities to develop a viable partnership between local residents and outside activists, they have each reflected the broader political resonance of aspects of non-collaboration.

Towards a Conclusion

In the summer of 2013, the *New York Times Magazine* published a cover story on the Chicago AEC's efforts to turn vacant, foreclosed homes into shelter for poor, homeless families. Since the start of the Great Recession of 2007-8, waves of home mortgage foreclosures have swept through the city, hitting its poor and working class neighborhoods with an "unevenness that can seem fiendishly unjust" (Austen, 2013, p. 24). Far from the city's iconic skyline, more than 62,000 properties sit abandoned, more than two-thirds of them concentrated in the largely black neighborhoods on Chicago's South and West side.

Against this backdrop, the CAEC was "a radical urban homesteader movement," works amidst this blight and devastation. Some families they help to keep them in their homes, reviewing their legal papers, accompanying them to court, and physically blocking evictions when necessary. What's more, the organization was also 'taking over' dozens of empty homes, making repairs to them and then moving in homeless families, an action justified by loophole in the state's trespassing laws. "The beautiful thing about the home takeovers is that they capitalise on the isolation and abandonment of these neighborhoods" (Austen, 2013, p. 28) Here, at the city's margins, these actions served as a fulfillment of the basic human right to shelter and a 'do it yourself' process of neighborhood revitalization, a reliance on the law's grey areas and a militant form of civil disobedience.

Buried halfway through this cover story, the group's international origins received brief mention. "The idea for the Anti-Eviction Campaign actually came from South Africa," Austen noted, referring to the eviction blockades and land occupations of the WCAEC. Those in Chicago "realized they didn't need to build lean-tos ...they had all the empty homes they required" (Austen, 2013, p. 28). Instead of constructing shacks to occupy vacant land, local activists took

advantage of the glut of foreclosed and abandoned homes now left to blight already marginalised neighborhoods, and instead, reclaimed them for basic shelter. While there was no longer regular communication between the two organizations, the CAEC continued to invoke its South African inspiration, listing Cape Town along with Chicago and Los Angeles on its logo and to its outreach materials, and echoing the WCAEC in calling for the decommodification of land and housing (CAEC, 2014).

This account of the CAEC's origins reflects much of what has been unique about the WCAEC's global resonance. For over a decade, this movement did not simply draw on the example of social struggles from around the world, but it also influenced the grassroots politics of activists in Argentina, Germany, and the United States. In each instance, it has primarily been the WCAEC's militancy that has attracted the attention of their counterparts abroad, offering an example of vigorous mass mobilization, social movement autonomy, and aggressively confrontational forms of direct action protest.

This militancy has been grounded in principle of non-collaboration, a crucial, though often ignored, component of 20th century South African politics. Reflected in the variety of ways in which organisations and movements have refused to participate in ruling class institutions, this principle was epitomised in election boycotts that both undercut the legitimacy of state institutions and framed this denial of legitimacy as part of a broader process of mental liberation. During more than a decade of activity, the WCAEC drew on the history of this principle to frame itself a movement independent of party politics and accountable to poor communities. It also helping to anchor repeated nationwide *No Land! No House! No Vote!* campaigns. Indeed, it is worth nothing that since the decline of the WCAEC, the Poor People's Alliance has fallen apart and AbM has moved from non-collaboration to strategic party endorsement in the 2014 national election (Tshabalala, 2014).

This militancy also shaped the launch of a Chicago chapter in 2009, and, by extension, similar efforts in Los Angeles in New York over the next several years. Yet, this political resonance fits within a unique historical context. The inspiration drawn from a Cape Town-based social movement, reflects both the global sophistication of the WCAEC as well as the “two-way road of ideas and freedom struggles between the U.S. and Africa” (Alan, 2003). Along this ‘two-way road’, the particular experience of racial apartheid has added particular emphasis to the long standing conversations between political projects in both the U.S. and South Africa (Fredrickson, 1995).

Although the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign quickly developed its own set of organizing practices and direct action tactics, it also built upon a deeper history of struggle linking movements between the two countries. As such, it is far from a coincidence that the WCAEC inspired an organizational counterpart in Chicago, a city with a rich history of black working class organization as well as deeply entrenched patterns of racial exclusion that have typified “American Apartheid” (Masey and Denton, 1993). Here, the political resonance of the WCAEC points not only to a dramatically rearranged world, with instantiations of dispossession and activism migrating north from the Global South, layered upon a world marked by distinct points of convergence linking movements on both sides of the Atlantic along a broader terrain of struggle.

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