

N U M B E R 24

**Yet Another Transition?
Urbanization,
Class Formation, and
the End of National
Liberation Struggle in
South Africa**

David Everatt



Project on Urbanization, Population,
Environment, and Security.
Supported by the U.S. Agency for
International Development through a
cooperative agreement with the
University of Michigan's Population
Fellows Program.

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WASHINGTON, D.C., 1999



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Everatt, David. *Yet Another Transition? Urbanization, Class Formation, and the End of the National Liberation Struggle in South Africa.* Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Comparative Urban Studies Occasional Papers Series, 24), 1999.

Written for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars' Comparative Urban Studies Project on Urbanization, Population, Environment, and Security. The project brings together a diverse group of urban scholars and practitioners to examine issues of population, environment, and urbanization. Our goal is to consider urban problems within an international security framework. This initiative will examine specifically what elements of urbanization contribute to social conflict or political instability and how that conflict or instability might affect the international community. Critical issues for examination include: urban violence and crime, migration to and from urban centers, population growth, public health, housing provision, and conflict over urban space, cultural symbols, and environmental resources.

The project is supported by a grant from the **U.S. Agency for International Development** through a cooperative agreement with **the University of Michigan's Population Fellows Program**. For more information about the project, please contact (202) 691-4235 or rosanchr@wwic.si.edu. Papers are available on the Woodrow Wilson website at <http://wwics.si.edu>.

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Everatt specializes in applied social research, focusing on areas including development, politics, polling and voting, urbanization, media, youth, and violence. He has edited and published numerous books, articles, and reports, many of which examine youth and education in South Africa. One such book, *Creating a Future: Youth Policy for South Africa*, discusses youth development and its underlining principles. Everatt outlined his strategic planning recommendations for youth development at the second National Conference on Marginalized Youth and the National Youth Development Forum.

Everatt has also served on government task teams and commissions in the areas of poverty and targeting, monitoring and evaluation, and youth policy. He was the official evaluator of the Constitutional Assembly, which produced the new South African Constitution, and served on the ANC election polling team in 1994 and again in 1999.

Everatt received his B.A. at the University of East Anglia and his D.Phil at Lincoln College, Oxford University. He has been awarded the British Academy Scholarship for his work in post-graduate studies. When he is not busy fathering his two children, Josie and Jonathon, Everatt serves as an external examiner and guest lecturer for the School of Public and Development Management and the Business School at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Executive Summary:

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth. While all South Africans now share equal political rights, they have very different social, economic, and other needs. This is true among and between black South Africans. The black middle class and new ruling class elements have left the townships to live in formerly white-only suburbs, leaving townships more evenly poor. Resentment among squatters, backyard dwellers, and formal homeowners result from high levels of exploitation of these informal settlement residents by their (black) landlords. ANC appeals for township residents to pay their rent and service charges have been ignored. This divide between the black South Africans in turn impacts politics at the local level. Those living in backyard or informal dwellings lack an organizational home. Fear of reprisal from landlord-cum-political leaders prevents many poorer township residents from attending ANC meetings. At the bottom, below even the squatters, lie the migrants from outside South Africa, blamed for crime, dirt, disease and for taking away the few social and economic opportunities that exist. The ANC cannot promise a radical transformation of South African society or economy, bringing poorer citizens back into the fold with talk of dramatic redistribution.

David Everatt, director of Strategy and Tactics, a research consultancy in Johannesburg, explores the class differentiations and hostilities that arise between formal and informal dwellers in townships and the impact this has on local politics and overall socio-economic transformation in South Africa. He presents case studies of two townships Tladi-Moletsane (Soweto) and Alexandra, that suggest that the basis of hostility—to keep outsiders away from what few existing opportunities exist—also threatens to turn against South Africans living in informal settlements.

YET ANOTHER TRANSITION?

URBANIZATION, CLASS FORMATION, AND THE END OF NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

David Everatt, Director,
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June, 1999

Introduction

In September 1998, three people were thrown (or leapt, depending on the source) to their deaths from a train in Johannesburg. Two were Senegalese, the third a Mozambican. By sad happenstance the three were on a train that was boarded by supporters of the Mapumalela Unemployed Mass Movement of South Africa, which had organized a march to protest the lack of jobs. Newspapers reported that the train carriage was littered with posters used in the protest, and a photograph showed a home-made cardboard placard with the following message: “We want jobs not foreigners or else we will take law [sic] into our own hands and do something negative” (*The Star*, 4 September 1998).

A resident of Alexandra township, a ‘blackspot’ left tucked away in the wealthy northern suburbs of (predominantly white) Johannesburg, participated in a focus group. Alexandra has a population of some 150,000 people, crammed into four square kilometers of mainly single-story houses and shacks. It was one of the few townships left close to areas zoned for whites under apartheid, and in the 1990s is a sought-after place to live because of its proximity to the city, shops, and other facilities. Less than a decade into “the new South Africa,” this young Alexandra resident hankered after some of the most-hated aspects of the old South Africa, particularly its influx control or “pass law” measures. He told the focus group, “I wish there should be a control system of people coming from rural areas like Pietersburg. For instance, there should be a register so that we can be able to know whether you have come to seek work or to visit” (Isserow and Everatt 1998).

A few miles to the south of Johannesburg, an interviewer spoke to a young woman who lived in the Tladi-Moletsane “squatter camp” inside old Soweto. The settlement comprises a motley collection of shacks made of plastic, cardboard, and tin sheeting, across a road from the formal houses of this old Soweto suburb. Asked about political participation among residents of the informal settlement, she told the interviewer: “We are only squatters. Even if we wanted to participate [in local affairs] how do we get involved when everybody undermines us? Even if we wished to attend meetings, who will look at us? We are not recognized as people” (Everatt, Rapholo, Marais, and Davies 1998b).

The three stories, and the issues they raise, are central to the concerns of this paper, which attempts to analyze the sociopolitical situation in South Africa on the eve of the second democratic general election. The transition from apartheid to democracy was widely hailed as a negotiated “miracle,” as well as testimony to the goodwill of black South Africans, symbolized by President Nelson Mandela. But what is the state of the miracle five years later? What pressures are being exerted on government as it tries to serve an impoverished population with insufficient resources and in the midst of an economic downturn? How is the ANC responding to criticism that it has “sold out” the poor in favor of capitalist advancement for a small number of well-placed individuals?

The fact that the end of apartheid arrived through negotiations rather than a mass uprising or military victory is South Africa’s blessing and curse. No radical program of wealth redistribution has been possible, because national unity is a priority of the ANC. Many beneficiaries of the former regime have retained their wealth and privilege as well as their jobs in government and business. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth. It will remain so for a long time, as the ANC has to rely on the inevitability of gradualism, with gently guiding nudges, to alter the status quo.

The ANC cannot maintain its near-universal black appeal as a national liberation movement in the long term, and its support, though substantial, is beginning to erode. When will a more sectional politics emerge? What kind of organization will try to speak for the marginalised groups in South African society, who are increasingly vociferous in their hostility toward “foreigners”? What will happen to notions of nonracialism and nation building?

These are questions that are beginning to be asked in South Africa. We cannot answer them here, but we can try to provide part of the context in which they are emerging, and illustrate some of the trends that will have an impact on future developments.

Overview

This paper provides two brief case studies that illustrate the widespread poverty, limited services, and struggle to find decent shelter that is the lot of many residents of Gauteng (formerly the Transvaal) Province, the economic motor force of South Africa. It goes on to discuss class formation, occurring for the first time since the 1960s in the context of legal political activity and coinciding with the global retreat of radical ideology. This is creating powerful tensions within and around the ANC as it tries to remain a national liberation movement able to appeal to the vast majority of black South Africans.

As we shall see, many residents of informal settlements or backyard dwellings suffer high levels of exploitation from their (black) landlords. Those same landlords, together with shop owners, teachers, and others from the petty bourgeoisie, commonly comprise the local leadership of the ANC, the local civic association, church elders, and so on.

Although ANC policy-makers design and ministers implement poverty alleviation strategies that seek to target the poorest of the poor, the ANC at local level speaks a different language. Fear of reprisal from landlord-cum-political leaders stops many poorer township residents from attending ANC meetings. As the quotation cited above suggests, others do not attend because their lower social status means they are disregarded. Since the 1994 elections, there is a dramatically lower level of political mobilization. Although the ANC retains the support of the majority of black South Africans, levels are considerably lower than five years ago. The ANC will win the 1999 general election with a large majority. But this should not disguise the lines of stress and change among voters, and within the ANC.

Gauteng's fast-moving urban population, often living in poor conditions, suffering high levels of crime and violence, with limited services, exploited by land-owners and landlords, are looking for ways to understand why "the new South Africa" is so harsh and has delivered so few tangible benefits to them. To do so they have constructed discourses of blame, which filter down the new social pecking order, gaining in intensity and aggression as they descend. At the bottom, below even the squatters, lie the migrants from outside South Africa, blamed for crime, dirt, and disease.

It would be wrong to talk of a "crisis" in South African cities. Nonetheless, that point is not far hence. The ongoing boycott of service and rent payments has left the greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council R6 billion in arrears. Violent crime is endemic in Gauteng. One in four South Africans has been a victim of crime in the last five years, which rises to one in two whites.¹ Whites tend to blame blacks for crime. Blacks in turn blame "illegal immigrants," and, as we saw at the outset, this can become violent and fatal. There is a danger of growing vigilante action against squatters and illegals, the two groups most frequently blamed for crime. However, this will almost certainly become a regional concern, as citizens of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries are increasingly harassed and attacked inside South Africa. South Africa is already regarded with considerable dislike within SADC because it so dwarfs its neighbours.

Methodology

This paper mixes qualitative and quantitative data, and draws on several recent key studies. The Soweto case study is from a study commissioned by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), which used an action research approach, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and workshops with local organizations (Everatt et al. 1998b). The Alexandra case study is taken from the first baseline study of Alexandra township, commissioned by the Beyers Naude Development Foundation, which comprised a series of focus groups, in-depth interviews with local leaders, and a sample survey of one thousand respondents (Isserow and Everatt 1998).

Both of these studies were in response to the lack of reliable data on Gauteng's townships, let alone informal areas. The 1991 census relied heavily on aerial photographs for urban black areas, and produced widely discredited statistics. Census '96 only released data in late 1998, and no local-level analysis has taken place (Statistics SA 1998). As such, the data used here remain the most accurate available.

Gauteng: Province of Gold and Poverty

Background

Johannesburg is not an official capital of South Africa, and only became the capital of Gauteng province after the 1994 general election. It is however the unofficial economic and political capital of the country. Johannesburg comprises a Central Business District (CBD) with wealthy, formerly white, suburbs stretching far to the north, east, and west; to the south, lies a large formerly white working class area providing a buffer before one reaches the South Western Townships, commonly known by its acronym, Soweto. Greater Johannesburg is currently divided into four metropolitan Sub-Structures, each with its own administrative autonomy.

The ANC inherited the results of apartheid urban design, which aimed physically to separate white suburbs from black (African or colored or Indian) townships. White areas included a tax base derived from nearby industry and services; black areas did not, and prohibitions existed regarding the types of businesses allowed in townships. White local authorities administered African townships, but residents had to finance their own development. It was a system designed to underprovide for blacks, legitimated by the “grand apartheid” notion that all blacks were “foreigners” in white areas and “citizens” only of their tribal homelands. Compounding the deliberate underdevelopment of Soweto is a current boycott of service payments. The boycott emerged as a tactic of the Mass Democratic Movement opposing apartheid, but has remained in force in many areas, ostensibly protesting limited or absent delivery by the new government. In late 1998, the provincial government of Gauteng admitted that some R6 billion is owed in arrears.

Social stratification

In many sociological texts of the 1970s and 1980s, black South Africans appear as an undifferentiated, oppressed but struggling mass. Distinctions based on rural/urban location, gender, or political affiliation were common, but few studies delved into the contradictions and exploitative relations among those struggling to end apartheid. This was understandable to the extent that the apartheid government was a ruthless opponent, exploiting existing social tensions to its own advantage through a low-intensity war. In the 1990s, such considerations no longer apply.

Racial zoning under the Group Areas Act forced all black South Africans to live in the same geographic spaces, regardless of class position or income. Since 1990, however, the emerging black middle and new ruling classes have largely moved out of townships into formerly white suburbs. As a result, townships, and informal settlements in particular, are more uniformly poor. Lacking any significant industrial or business tax base in or near townships, new local authorities have been formed to merge townships and white suburbs to try to spread wealth beyond established middle-class areas. Townships remain black working-class ghettos.



People living in matchbox township houses, squeezed into the attached outbuildings, or in more or less permanent squatter camps, come from many parts of South Africa and beyond. The majority comprise a spillover from Gauteng's townships (Everatt et al 1998a.). Areas zoned for blacks were deliberately insufficient to contain the numbers needing shelter, designed as they were to house "temporary sojourners" from rural areas plying their trade in urban areas before being forced to return to mythical "homelands." House building since 1990 has fallen well short of the massive backlog, which amounted to some five million units in 1994. The result is intense competition for shelter, or for urban land where settlements mushroom overnight. The competition for jobs is even more intense. People move swiftly on hearing of new opportunities.

Gauteng is South Africa's most urbanized province, with 97 percent of residents living in urban areas. The population of Gauteng lives mainly in formal metropolitan dwellings (62 percent), formal backyard structures such as garages (12 percent), and informal areas (24 percent). Another 4 percent live in formal dwellings in small towns on the provincial borders, with a tiny 1 percent in informal settlements near these towns (Statistics SA 1998; see also Statistics SA 1997).²

In townships such as Soweto and Alexandra, the differences between those living in formal dwellings and those who live on their property in shacks, or formal structures such as outbuildings or garages, are significant. The distance between the main house and outbuilding is a journey across deep social and class differences. Africans in formal metropolitan dwellings tend to be better educated and are more likely to be employed and higher paid. Unemployment, at 28 percent, is 11 percent lower than among backyard shack dwellers and informal dwellers. Formal dwellings are at a premium. In a small township like Alexandra, formal dwellings are more overcrowded than other dwelling types, at an average of four people per room (Isserow and Everatt 1998); this halves to two per room in Soweto (University of Witwatersrand 1997:38).

Tenant households, living in backyard shacks or formal backyard structures, form a fragile social group bound together by their common understanding of the value of being better off than those in informal settlements. They enjoy the service benefits of a formal township, such as electricity and sewerage, although these are controlled by landlords, who extract rent and labor in return.

Beyond the formal dwellings and their outbuildings, often within or on the borders of formal townships, are the informal settlements. These, in turn, can be divided into site-and-service areas, formally marked out, with rudimentary sewerage and/or electricity; and the "illegal" areas, not zoned for residential land, and without any services (excluding illegal connections). There are some two hundred illegal settlements in Gauteng, home to an estimated 1.2 million people (Everatt et al 1998a. :2-3). At least one comprises scores of old car bodies, left scattered across a field; each wreck now contains a family.

Both serviced and illegal areas are commonly known as squatter camps. The illegal areas range from ten or twenty shacks to hundreds of self-built structures on land not zoned for the purpose and lacking amenities. This land may be in the middle of townships or on the fringes of greater Johannesburg. Settlements may emerge as a spillover from a nearby crowded area or result from land invasions.

*Demographics*³

Formal structures house more people per dwelling than others, but also have more rooms, contain more income earners, and are populated by older people. The differences, however, are not absolute. People living in formal dwellings are more likely to be in professional, skilled or semiskilled, or sales and clerical employment, but a significant number are also involved in domestic or unskilled work. Unemployment is widespread but differentiated: although 28 percent of formal dwellers are unemployed, this is true of 37 percent of people in informal areas and 40 percent of those in backyard dwellings. Unemployment is also gendered: 36 percent of African women in Gauteng are unemployed, compared with 30 percent of African men.

Fifty-one percent of formal dwellings contain five or more inhabitants; this is true of only 30 percent of informal and 12 percent of backyard dwellings. Households tend to be smaller in informal and backyard areas. Space is at less of a premium in informal areas; 22 percent of inhabitants live by themselves (half that number do so in formal areas); the same number (22 percent) live with one other person.

The educational profile of informal settlement residents is an interesting mix, showing that these areas are collection points for both uneducated and educated migrants, immigrants, and locals: 39 percent of informal dwellers have not gone beyond primary school level, true of 24 percent of backyard dwellers, and 17 percent of formal dwellers. Looked at from the other end of the educational spectrum, 51 percent of formal dwellers have senior secondary or higher education; this declines to 35 percent of backyard dwellers and further still to 22 percent of people living in informal areas.

Poverty is widespread but unevenly shared by Gauteng residents. Backyard dwellers are barely differentiated from informal dwellers, while formal dwellers are often quite distinct, albeit only by degree. For example, 27 percent of formal dwellers and 30 percent of both backyard and informal dwellers have no regular income.

The minimum household monthly income is contested but generally accepted to be about R900 per month (US\$155/month; World Bank/SALDRU 1995:7-9). Figures for individual income show that 74 percent of those in informal settlements earn R899 per month or below; this is true of 67 percent of backyard shack dwellers, and 62 percent of formal dwellers. Although earning less than formal dwellers, the incomes of backyard and informal dwellers are more likely to support people living outside the dwelling. Fully 73 percent of formal dwellers spend their entire income on their own household, which drops to 68 percent of informal and 62 percent of backyard shack dwellers.

Politics

In a recent national survey, respondents were asked to what organizations they belonged.⁴ Women were most likely not to belong to any organization or club. If they did, it was likely to be one with a social and (immediate) economic function such as a *stokvel* (savings club), rather than a political or civic body. Differences also exist among women: the poorer the area, the sharper this trend became. In Gauteng, 64 percent of African women from informal settlements did not belong to any organization at all, compared with 51 percent of women in formal areas. “Politics” is no longer about delivering liberation to all black South Africans; it is increasingly seen to be serving those already relatively well off. As a result, the poor are less involved in political or civic structures.

However, a host of social structures exist at the local level, forming an intricate web of social connection points. These include *stokvels*, small saving circles in which members deposit a weekly or monthly fixed amount and, in rotation, receive the kitty; burial societies; sports, cultural, and other societies; churches, which 85 percent of the entire population visit monthly or more; hobby groups; and so on.

It is possible that the main sounding board for political issues nationally and locally will be the Sunday religious gathering, or the meeting of the *stokvel*, rather than a civic or political meeting. This is particularly true for women, for “squatters,” and for others with a low socioeconomic profile. In a country where between 40 and 50 percent of the adult population is functionally illiterate, word of mouth remains an important source of information and opinion formation, and the social gathering is critical for transmission of messages. These more-or-less organized social groups play a vital informational role for many citizens.

Recent studies also suggest that structures such as block and street committees, initially formed by political movements as part of the antiapartheid struggle, continue to exist but are far less political in nature (see Everatt et al 1998b). Their main focus is safety and security. Three-quarters of residents in unserved informal areas in Gauteng had street committees in their area, and just over a third had block committees; in contrast, only about one-third knew of a civic association operating in their area.

Politics

Looking at South Africa on the eve of the second general election raises important questions about the trajectory from authoritarianism to democracy, especially for national liberation movements such as the ANC. At a national level, tensions over economic policy bedevil the ANC-led alliance that includes the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The ANC has spent the decade jettisoning its revolutionary apparel, in both form and content, from the point in 1987 when it decided to pursue a negotiated settlement rather than mass uprising or military victory (see Ginwala 1991). In the 1994 election, it emerged as a social-democratic party, with an election manifesto that focused on meeting basic needs, under a blurry economic policy.

Two years later, it adopted a macroeconomic framework (the Growth, Employment and Redistribution framework, commonly known as GEAR) that reflected current conventional economic wisdom—reducing the budget deficit, privatization, lowering interest rates, lifting exchange controls, export-led growth, labor market reforms, and so on. GEAR, heavily influenced by World Bank thinking, forms a sort of internal structural adjustment program (see Marais 1997, 1998). Implementation of GEAR has coincided with a weaker Rand, high interest rates, low growth, and a looming recession.

Prior to GEAR, but a lot louder after its adoption, came criticism from the left—which includes powerful groups inside as well as beyond the tripartite alliance—that the ANC had “sold out” the working class in favor of black participation in capitalism. As one commentator noted,

the South African ruling class . . . are for the first time in two decades able to breathe a sigh of relief and sleep a bit more easily. They have achieved, for the moment, the seemingly impossible. The mass movement has been brought under control and its struggles have been damped down. And the white ruling elite has lost little of its power, privilege and wealth. (Myers 1997:2)

If that were not bad enough, capitalist entrapment has only made space for a small number of now extremely wealthy black entrepreneurs, who have adopted the conspicuous consumption patterns that previously marked white South Africans.

The left criticism reflects the bitter debates that racked the antiapartheid movement for decades. Majority opinion (including the Communist Party from the time of Stalin onwards) supported the national liberation struggle as the first phase in a longer-term socialist revolution (Everatt 1992). Others, commonly found in the trade union movement, warned that the national liberation struggle would benefit the emergent black bourgeoisie, who would turn on the working class once they gained political power. The national liberation struggle, if successful, would merely replace white with black capitalists: the lot of the poor would be unchanged.

Current polling data,⁵ in the run-up to the second democratic elections, suggest that voters share some of these sentiments, if not the accompanying political analysis. The ANC will win the 1999 election, and handsomely. But there are important trends below the surface. The ANC stranglehold on African voters (barring Inkatha supporters in KwaZulu-Natal) is showing signs of coming to an end. Voters—including black voters—are looking for black-led political homes other than the ANC. Although polls predict an ANC vote in the region of 54 to 59 percent, this is down from the 63 percent for 1994. Unlike the situation five years ago, every province now has a group of undecided African voters. They comprise a mixture of better educated city dwellers, who feel that liberation has delivered fewer direct benefits than they expected and has been too soft on whites, and poorer citizens, who share the feeling, though from a perspective of limited delivery since 1994. And they are looking for new parties, not those which formed part of the resistance movement. The Pan Africanist Congress, Azapo, and other stalwarts of the liberation struggle will be almost wiped out in the 1999 election, if polls accurately reflect voter sentiment.

Many whites are also looking for a conservative but black-led political party, and are leaving the Inkatha Freedom Party—now too close to the ANC in the Government of National Unity—to look elsewhere. The United Democratic Movement (UDM), led by a former ANC deputy minister Bantu Holomisa and former National Party minister Roelf Meyer, is the electoral dark horse. It is benefiting from internal ANC squabbles and provincial mismanagement in some important provinces, and threatens to mount a challenge for the position of official opposition party. Both black and white voters are looking closely at the UDM. This means that the ANC faces some election contenders that have no “struggle credentials” (at an organizational level) but are entirely modern in their message and appeal.

This fracturing of ANC support is an inevitable consequence of a more settled society. More sectional parties should emerge. There is widespread support among voters of all races for multiparty democracy, and a belief that strong opposition is important for democracy.⁶ However, we shall argue below that the fracturing of ANC support is not simply an historical inevitability. It is (in part at least) caused and reinforced at the local level. Case studies show how local ANC leaders, alongside their partners in civic associations, are drawn from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie. Civic associations were ostensibly community-wide bodies, which in the 1980s were above party politics but allied to the antiapartheid struggle. By organizing around local concerns they were able to mobilize more people than more overtly political structures. However, in early 1990, the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO) formed an election alliance with the ANC, becoming the junior partner, with a foot in and out of protest politics. The pact led to considerable internal strife.

ANC and civic leaders comprise the township elite, who own land and houses which they rent out to others. They enjoy often highly exploitative relations with their tenants, and evince growing hostility to “uncontrolled squatting,” which they see as bringing crime and dirt to “their” townships. They expect payments for water, electricity, and other services from tenants, but then boycott service payments owed to the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council.

As the case studies show, although the ANC remains the party Africans instinctively identify with liberation, it is not a party in which active involvement is evenly maintained across class barriers. In the case study sites, poorer township or informal settlement residents are closed out of meetings by the local (petty bourgeois) leadership. As a result, a space is opening at the grassroots level for less reasoned messages than those of the ANC. People in backyard shacks and informal settlements are increasingly hostile to non-South African migrants. While this paper was being prepared, a number of Mozambican migrants suspected of theft were killed by residents of a site-and-service informal settlement. Symbolism is important even here: they were killed by “necklacing,” placing a burning rubber tire around their waists, the preferred method of removing informers in the 1980s. This is the danger of a situation in which the ANC is no longer creating a home or articulating a message for poor city-dwellers. This provides the political context in which the case studies are situated.

Case study 1: Tladi-Moletsane (Soweto)

It's a filthy township. Water is flowing from the pipes, sewers are blocked. We stay in the area because we have no option . . . it is not a healthy area. In summer the place is smelly and there are a lot of flies. When it's hot we sit outside only because we can't stand the heat in our room (Focus group, females aged 50+, backyard tenants).

Tladi forms a single ward within the Southern Metropolitan Sub-Structure, one of four making up Greater Johannesburg. It has formal houses, a proliferation of backyard dwellings (in garages, backyard outbuildings, and so on), an illegal informal settlement, and a nearby hostel. As such it is a microcosm of townships in South African cities.

People in council houses in Soweto tend to be older, while those in private-sector housing are younger, “testimony to the rapid mobility of the younger generation” (University of Witwatersrand 1997:17). Four in ten Soweto households are traditional “nuclear” families; the remainder show a wide variety of adult/adult, and adult/child relations. Unemployment in Soweto is very high. In the University of the Witwatersrand study, 32 percent of respondents aged over 16 were unemployed and looking for work, and 5 percent unemployed but not actively looking for work. Recalculated as a rate of unemployment, this rises to 48 percent (ibid.:23; the rate of unemployment is calculated as the unemployed, whether looking for work or not, as a proportion of the total available labor force).

The class differences within Tladi are partly formed by and reflected in the places its inhabitants live. Formal dwellers are at the top of the heap economically and socially, and also dominate political structures. Those in backyard structures, with a toehold in the formal sector, anxiously try to keep their landlords happy so that they are not thrown back into the mass of squatters. The squatters are near the bottom; below them all are the “foreigners,” blacks from other African countries, who are accused of stealing South African jobs, women, and houses, drug-dealing, crime, spreading HIV/AIDS, and other social ills.

The informal settlement

The Tladi informal settlement has no electricity, and sanitation is attained either by trying to find someone in the formal township who will allow use of their facilities (for a fee), or queuing outside public toilets in the formal township, which are frequently out of order. A nearby rubbish dump brings with it rats, disease, and a foul smell, and provides a hazardous playing area for children. It also offers a physical reminder of the social position of the squatters, as township residents dump their refuse virtually on the doorsteps of the shacks. The nearby hostel brought violence and fear to the area during the political violence of the 1990-94 period.

On the more positive side, residents of the informal settlement feel reasonably well positioned within the township itself. Schools and clinics, both recently made economically more accessible by the ANC government, are nearby in the formal township (mothers with children up to the age of 6 now receive free health care; schooling has been made free and compulsory for nine years); the local schools are being renovated, and some roads improved. The train station is close to the settlement, helping keep transport costs down. Finally, Tladi is a known factor: “Maybe if we move to another place we will suffer more,” observed one resident.⁷

The overwhelming feeling among Tladi squatters is one of alienation from mainstream township life, including the political and development processes. This reflects the way they are seen by township residents, as one young woman noted: “Some of the girls [from the formal township] are our friends but some isolate themselves as their mothers don’t want them to communicate with us. They say we are a bad influence on their children, that we will make their children also stay with men.”

Tladi informal dwellers live in a poverty-ridden environment, characterized by dirt, social stigmatization, and violence. Most are young and left their parents' homes because of overcrowding, family violence or disputes, or becoming pregnant and being thrown out. Movement into and out of informal settlements is considerable, as people search for better conditions. This has serious implications for trying to create a sense of neighborhood or community, a precondition for joint action around shared interests. It contrasts with those living in formal dwellings, who form "a more stable population . . . with a lower rate of unemployment" (University of Witwatersrand 1997:17). Life in Tladi informal settlements is precarious, particularly for women: "We are near shops and at night we hear screams of girls and you are afraid to go out and help. These thugs are from the township—they stand near the shops to harass girls and mug people."

Pointless participation?

Informal dwellers are quite clear that the interests of those living in formal areas—including backyard dwellers—are almost universally regarded as more important than their own. This is how they explain nondelivery of services to informal areas, as well as the way local organizations operate. Many participants voted in the local government elections of 1995. They can point to improvements within the formal townships, such as tarred roads, school playing fields, and so on—but nothing has changed in their informal settlement. As a result, many feel like voting fodder: "We voted for them but we do not know them."

Residents were probed as to whether local government, elected by Tladi residents of all backgrounds, would take up the concerns of informal dwellers as well as others. The notion was met with deep scepticism, and the researchers regarded as sadly naive. They are aware of being "only squatters" to whom no one wants—or needs—to listen. This indicates less a low self-image and than a bitterly accurate summing up of the situation. The physical separation of informal from formal adds to the unequal power relation: squatters are cut off from information and power by their geographic as well as social and economic situations.

This sociopolitical separation has generated anger and hostility among informal dwellers, with worrying organizational implications for local civic bodies as well as national political parties. Tladi squatters do not feel that participation in organizations operating in the formal township is a worthwhile option. They feel township residents "don't understand our problems of why we stay in the shacks." Their participation is not welcomed: apart from the fact that "in Tladi they hold their meetings late at night so it is risky for us to attend," when they get there, if they start to complain, "they promise to beat you." Although the ANC nationally talks of delivering benefits to these people, its face at the local level is different—and hostile.

In part, this situation is not new. In the 1980s, although civic associations claimed to represent whole communities regardless of political affiliation, they mainly organized among those living in formal dwellings (see Seekings and Shubane 1993; Mayekiso 1996). The favoring of formal dwellers has had its effect on the psyche of those living in the Tladi informal settlement. Powerlessness and passivity marked many responses to questions about government and provision. "The government, "we were told, must provide. Demands are not unreasonable: "Even if they can give us work of cleaning it will be job creation for us." Expectations of delivery, however, are close to zero.

As a result of what shack-dwellers see as nondelivery combined with township hostility, they seem indifferent: “We have lost courage to attend meetings,” said one; another explained: “There is no difference whether you attend the meetings or not.”

Organization

Tladi squatters are only a community because of where they live and the services they do not receive. There is little internal cohesion, and almost no collective action. Residents tried to explain the effect that poverty has on participation, talking of how “relaxed” the shack-dwellers were, a poor translation for the lassitude they were witnessing. Very short-term projects could succeed, but nothing in the longer term. The Tladi squatters told us they knew they should form street and block committees and institute regular night-time patrols, like their neighbors in the formal township, but they do not. As one said: “If you are too poor it’s difficult to have a functioning mind.”

For them, organized party politics—which currently means ANC politics—is not an available option, for reasons already discussed. Setting up their own structures also seems not to work. The result of their alienation from mainstream township civil life, combined with a belief that they will not be serviced by local government, leads directly to a mindset of boycotting service payments: “I think they [local government] only concentrate on caring for people who stay in the townships. Like now we are boycotting paying for services as they don’t care for us.” “We cannot pay rent because they are not helping us with anything. If they don’t satisfy us in return we cannot satisfy them too.”

Local authorities across South Africa have been near crippled by a widely supported boycott of service and rent charges. Figures for the Greater Johannesburg area cannot be given, since government made the data a secret known only to itself, although as we saw earlier, arrears have reached R6 billion. Although people in unserviced informal settlements, by definition, do not pay for municipally supplied services, a mindset of resentment and withholding payment is being engendered. This is potentially disastrous for urban development and governance.

The situation is compounded by a lack of coherent organization or leadership. Tladi’s informal residents have dropped into a form of clientelism. A local leader, Mr K., receives their complaints and is their voice at local meetings. Although Mr K. lives in the informal settlement, he is better off than most of those living there: “He is a well-to-do man, he is not starving like us,”—which presumably initially marked him out as a “leader.” He was described as having many of the cultural attributes of traditional leaders—elderly, some financial resources, Zulu-speaking, and so on. He has won some minor gains, such as the distribution of refuse bags by the local council. His leadership style is patriarchal. He was described as “too cheeky and strict but he is the only one who can help us.” His leadership style reinforces the image of squatters: they are seen to be not as clever, sophisticated, or successful as township residents; as dirty, untrustworthy, and ultimately less deserving. These psychosocial issues are powerful barriers to community-wide organization.

The Tladi case is illustrative of many other situations where informal dwellers are regarded and treated as lower-class residents by their township neighbors, feel ignored by local and national government, and see no reason to contribute financially for rates and services, or to participate in community activities or structures. To the extent that the ANC at the local level is identified with, led by, and seen to be serving the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, people from informal settlements will increasingly be available to other organizations. They in turn can be expected to enunciate a more radical interpretation of transformation and redistribution, and a program of direct action rather than the incremental transformative approach of the ANC.

The backyard dwellers

According to Census '96, 200,000 Gauteng households live in formal rooms in the backyards of houses; another 153,000 households live in informal dwellings erected in backyards. (Average household size in South Africa is four people.) In all, some 1.5 million people live in the backyards of formal dwellings in Gauteng, and comprise 18 percent of residents; in Soweto, the figure rises to 30 percent of residents (University of Witwatersrand 1997:16).

The Tladi backyard dwellers who participated in focus groups had spent many years (an average of about five) trying to find their backyard rooms, and made it clear they would cling to them as long as possible, at considerable personal cost, until something better became available. Their tenuous position—half in and half out of the formal areas, fearing eviction—opens them to considerable exploitation by their landlords. One woman talked of her fear of squatter camps: “I once visited such an area. These places are horrible. Some are playing here while others are fighting there. There is no order.”

If the gulf between squatters and backyard dwellers is symbolized by geographical separation and urban form, that between landlords and their backyard tenants is as wide but less visible. Tenants pay high rents and also work for their landlords, as one woman pensioner described:

When you get your pension money you must immediately pay for your rent. Your movement is not free—you have to wake up early in the mornings, as old as you are, you have to sweep the yard, clean the toilet. You must wait for the house-owners to first use the washing machine before you can do your washing.

Poor residents in Tladi's informal settlement feel government ignores them while formal township dwellers are the beneficiaries of government delivery. Backyard shack residents feel differently again: “When watching the news, you find that government is only concerned with shack dwellers. What about us? We are sitting with big expectations that they will build us houses. We have grown so old, sitting in the same backyards.”

Seekings (1992) has argued that backyard dwellers “tended to support conservative township organizations rather than radical civics,” but offered no evidence to support the claim. Our case study reinforces the view that backyard dwellers do not involve themselves in “political” activities, not because of an inherent conservatism but because they fear possible reprisals from their landlords, who commonly form the leadership cadre of both ANC and the civic associations in their areas.

Another reason backyard tenants may appear conservative lies in their firm opposition to service boycotts. This also does not derive from an innate conservatism flowing from their social position. It is the result of a factor not mentioned in histories of the boycotts of the 1980s (Seekings; see also Mayekiso 1996): backyard tenants had to keep paying their rent or service payments to their landlords, who took the money but then boycotted their own rent and service payments. Backyard dwellers in our case study were fully aware of this anomalous situation: “We never stopped paying our rent. Our money does not go to the office. It goes into the hands of the house owner. But they were not paying their rent.”

Because of their tenuous social position, backyard tenants often talk of duty, order, and responsibility, language that can easily be seen as conservative. They see squatters as almost childlike in their carefree (and “irresponsible”) position: “Shack dwellers are happy as they don’t pay rent, they have no home addresses, and they have no permit. I can also buy corrugated iron, find an empty space and build a shack. That is why they say they are informal dwellers.”

While being expected to perform the duties of a domestic worker without pay, tenants are also strongly reminded of (and are in turn very clear about) their place in the social hierarchy: “If you buy your fridge, then you are in trouble. You are now independent. You are no longer going to ask the landlady to store food in her refrigerator, begging her to help you. They become jealous if you buy yourself anything.”

Participation

Some backyard residents accused their landlords of deliberately withholding information about local civic meetings, for fear that the tenants might expose their poor living conditions. Others said they do not dare attend civic meetings for fear of their landlord seeing them and forcing them out of their rooms. If this happened, they would lose their toehold and slip back into the mass of informal dwellers.

Backyard dwellers avoid activities that can be seen as political, preferring the safer avenues of *stokvels* or church groups. Neither civic nor political meetings are attended: “civic meetings are attended by home-owners. They only inform us if we have to contribute some money.” Unlike the informal residents, backyard dwellers in Tladi wanted to attend meetings, but could not do so without the support of their landlords. The backyard dwellers were better informed about their local councillors than were informal dwellers, although they did not know how to contact them. They spoke of “the chosen leaders” of the area: “I do not know the names but I

was informed that they are people who help us solve our problems.” Even if the Tladi backyard dwellers had known how to find their local councillor, they would not go to see him because “once they [landlords] are aware, they will evict us and tell us to go and stay at the councillor’s home.”

Where informal dwellers talked generally about “the government,” backyard dwellers differentiated between municipal and national government. For both groups, however, power was something located beyond them. It was the preserve of the already more powerful, the employed homeowners. Despite the massive political changes brought about in South Africa by community action, neither backyard tenants nor informal dwellers seemed to be concerned with local mobilization to secure their needs. Where the informal dwellers had Mr. K to help voice their demands, the backyard residents exhibited no form of organization, leaving their fate inextricably tied to their landlords. People in informal or backyard areas in the case study sites, and nationally, still instinctively regard the ANC as their party of choice. The ANC will still attract the vast preponderance of their votes in the 1999 general election, although interest is low; after two rounds of voter registration, just half of all eligible voters have bothered to place their names on the rolls.

In our case study sites, it seems clear that the mixed signals coming from the ANC are at least contributory factors. The ANC talks of redistribution and eradicating poverty, which resonates loudest among the poorest. But at the grass-roots level, the ANC is controlled by the local elite, and by omission or commission excludes the most impoverished. Who will win control of the ANC? Will it continue to champion the rights and needs of the poorest or become a mouthpiece for a nonracial middle class? Answers to these questions are unknown, but what we can see are the class forces currently fighting for the ANC.

The formal dwellers

The majority of Gauteng residents live in formal dwellings. Like most things in South Africa, this is racially skewed. Informal and backyard dwellers are almost exclusively African. According to Census '96, over a million of Gauteng's 1.9 million households live in formal dwellings. In Soweto, half of residents live in council houses, and another one in ten live in private sector-built formal dwellings (University of Witwatersrand 1997:16). Those living in formal dwellings are the only residents of Tladi to speak of the area with any affection. Only they seemed to be living in a suburban community. Backyard and informal dwellers give the impression of being in transit to anywhere better; formal dwellers were the only respondents who had a positive perspective on their area, noting that “things are shaping up.”

The homeowners had one main complaint, their tenants; and a second less stridently voiced one, the dangers of unregulated squatting. Where backyard dwellers complained of paying rent during boycotts, their landlords complained (in voices that could easily belong to white South Africans) that “when [tenants] are supposed to pay their rents [sic] they start telling me stories . . . they tell me of their problems, of school children, of problems with their wives.”

Participation

The clearest difference between formal dwellers and others in Tladi is in their attitude toward, knowledge of, and participation in local organizations. For formal dwellers, the civic association is “our civic,” and government is an ally: “We are nearer the local government [than national government]. Some of them are people we know. They don’t stay far from us.”

Formal dwellers participate in street committees that report to the civic association, and regard it as a channel for their voices to government. “Civic” and ANC were interchangeable for this group, who participate actively in both. Civic associations are seen to be more powerful than government, which is seen as cumbersome. The civic association is close by, populated by neighbors, and favors immediate—and direct—action. As we shall see in our second case study, the current crime wave is leading growing numbers of township residents—particularly formal dwellers—to talk of taking direct action to protect their property and families. What is most worrying is their near-ubiquitous identification of squatters and illegals with the perpetrators of crime.

Direct action is favored for protecting the property of formal homeowners, but not when it threatens their interests. This is particularly true of land invasions. Formal and backyard dwellers share one clear prejudice, against what they see as “uncontrolled squatting,” symbolized by land invasions. These are people who have a stake in the system and fear that they may lose out: “In future it can happen that someone can come and squat in your yard and say: ‘I don’t have a house. Where do you expect me to stay?’ So in future I think squatting must be done orderly [sic].”

The social stratification in Tladi is replicated in our second case study in Alexandra, and will not be analyzed in any detail. Rather, we use it to illustrate the way in which the combination of poverty and exclusion leads to growing hostility between different groups. Squatters are seen to be invading townships that do not belong to them, and are blamed for stealing opportunities as well as goods. They move from enemy to ally only when foreign-born migrants are considered, who then emerge as the focal point of hostility and blame.

Case study 2: Alexandra township

If you can realize Soweto, Tembisa and other townships were born out of Alexandra. What is strange is they are much more improved than Alex. Alex has many stars and celebrities. I want shacks removed. There should be plants and there must be “MOTHER OF ALL TOWNSHIPS” written when you enter Alexandra.⁸

Alexandra township is small, heavily populated, and hemmed in by white suburbs, main roads, and a belt of light industry designed to act as a buffer zone. Old Alexandra is bordered by the Jukskei river to the west, by recent middle-class housing developments on the East and Far East Bank, and a highway (see Isserow and Everatt 1998). North and south borders are busy main roads. Across the highway lie leafy, predominantly white, suburbs that share a spiraling crime wave with Alexandra.

Overcrowding is the dominant development issue facing Alexandra—hemmed in as it is on all sides—but estimates of the population vary from 131,000 in the 1991 census, to half or three-quarters of a million in media reports. A baseline survey conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (C A S E) found a population of 157,000 people. Until Census '96 issues appropriate figures, the population will remain contested (not least because a smaller Alexandra population will result in a smaller budget for the local council). The CASE figure, albeit the lowest suggested, gives a population density of some 35,000 people per square kilometer, in a township overwhelmingly comprising single story buildings.

Alexandra is a long-established township; 54 percent of its residents have lived there for longer than ten years. Although residents (as we show below) share hostility to what they regard as a “flood” of “foreigners” and others entering Alexandra, only 16 percent of the population moved in during the last three years. Only 1.5 percent of survey respondents said they were born outside South Africa.

History and community

Alexandra has a well-known history, and has been heavily if not over researched. The politics of Alexandra also has a distinct history. Some of the key moments in the antiapartheid struggle occurred in Alexandra, from the bus boycotts of the 1950s to the six-day war of the 1980s. But Alexandra also has a history of division: in the 1980s and early 1990s, some small unions were accused of “ultra-left” tendencies, and there were two and sometimes three civic organizations. In the late 1990s, many of the problems that affected the civic movement emanated from the Alexandra civic associations. More positively, the hostel was treated more as part of the community than elsewhere in Gauteng, and although violence did affect Alexandra between 1991 and 1994, it started many months later than other townships because the hostel was not an isolated and alienated base for vigilantes (see Everatt, Dugard, and Greenstein forthcoming).

Alexandra is a vibrant, bustling township. It is also deeply ridden by crime, a fact not often mentioned in histories that are in danger of romanticizing the place. People do not live in Alexandra because of its history or culture, but because it is nearer the Johannesburg Central Business District, suburbs, and shops than any other township in Gauteng. Proximity to Johannesburg also gives rise to greater economic opportunities than other townships: the unemployment rate is high at 30 percent, but is 18 percent lower than in Soweto. There were some people who spoke of a community in Alexandra—as we found in Tladi; however, they were likely to come from formal areas. A young male focus group participant from a formal dwelling told us: “Life is very cheap . . . it’s cheap in the sense that if you have R10 in your pocket we can all share.” Much writing about Alexandra assumes that because of the small physical space and high levels of mobilization in the 1980s, there is a close-knit community. Residents were more likely to mention the practical advantages of Alexandra than a tightly knit community. When they did praise Alexandra, it was with a concern attached, as one man from a formal dwelling noted:

Alex is a quite beautiful small township with friendly people who are easy to communicate with. However the question of immigration is messing up our township. There are so many people from outside we no longer have freedom of movement.

Like Tladi, it is more accurate to talk of a range of different, often antagonistic, communities within Alexandra.

Housing patterns and social relations

Housing patterns in Alexandra differ significantly from Tladi. In all, 43 percent of Alexandra residents live in informal dwellings, and 39 percent in formal dwellings. The remainder live in hostels (18 percent), flats (4 percent), the East Bank houses (3 percent) and the relatively recent Shtwetla informal settlement outside Old Alexandra (3 percent).

Although more people in Alexandra live in informal dwellings and fewer in formal dwellings, the social relations and the power relations between formal, backyard, and informal dwellers are the same as in Tladi (see Isserow and Everatt 1998, ch. 6); other studies have also shown the commonalities of these relations in different Gauteng communities (Community Agency for Social Enquiry 1998). Tensions exist within Old Alexandra, between formal dwellers on the one hand, and backyard dwellers and squatters on the other. Divisions in Alexandra, however, also occur on a second axis: all those in Old Alexandra—formal, backyard, and informal—share a deep hostility toward those in the recently established Shtwetla shack area. Most of those who complain about the current situation in Alexandra come from formal areas or informal dwellings within Old Alexandra. They look at the Shtwetla shacks and see the cause of the problem.

This marks a significant attitudinal shift. In July 1990, violence swept across the Vaal, the East and West Rand, and Soweto. Hostels, originally designed to house male migrant laborers, became armed fortresses at the center of a whirlwind of violence that saw thousands of people taking part in pitched battles between township dwellers and squatters on one side, and Inkatha-supporting hostel residents on the other. Violence began in Alexandra in 1991, after the hostels were taken over by Inkatha supporters, and continued through to 1994. Thousands of Alexandra residents were left homeless as the suburb, renamed Beirut for obvious reasons, became an urban battleground to be won street by street.

Squatters were the allies of formal dwellers, hostel residents the “enemy.” Hostel dwellers are now allies, and there is a new enemy. One hostel dweller said that nowadays “if there are functions at the hostel, we see local people coming to attend the meeting and walk together, unlike before.” Others told us they “find the environment very conducive,” but complained of crime, police corruption—and “foreigners.”

Present and past

In focus groups, many Alexandra residents claimed that things were better in the past. When this was posed as a survey question, 33 percent agreed or strongly agreed that South Africa was better in the past. In other words, barely four years into the democratic South Africa, a significant portion of people from one of the country’s more famous townships thought the old South Africa preferable to the new.

The sentiment was not equally shared by all Alexandra residents: 43 percent of those in flats and 37 percent of those in formal dwellings agreed with the notion, joined—significantly—by 31 percent of those living in informal dwellings within Old Alexandra. However, only 11 percent of those in the Shtwetla shacks agreed with the statement. These people are the poorest in Alexandra, but are also recent arrivals who have managed to find

space in the township. They were least likely among Alexandra residents to say that nothing has improved since 1994 (15 percent of those in the Shtwetla shacks thought this, compared with 28 percent of those in informal dwellings within Old Alexandra).

Shtwetla shack dwellers are positive about Alexandra and its attributes: “We like Alexandra because we see things are happening,” as one put it. The advantages of proximity and inexpensiveness are available to them as well. However, as we shall see, even the shack dwellers look at the “foreigners” to find a group to blame for Alexandra’s problems.

Post-1994 South Africa has opened opportunities for all (albeit in a context of low economic growth). This may amount to a shack on the fringes of a formal township and a small informal sector income, but is more than was available under apartheid. Those very benefits, however, because they are available to shack dwellers and “foreigners,” are the cause of unhappiness for residents of Old Alexandra. As far as they are concerned, the poor have flooded their township, bringing in crime and dirt, and taking away opportunities from those who lived in Alexandra during the dark years of apartheid.

The situation leads to an odd class alliance of formal dwellers, their tenants, and squatters inside Old Alexandra, who join together in disliking the newcomers. The same class alliance was evident in Tladi, where backyard dwellers, despite the exploitation they suffered at the hands of landlords, aligned themselves with landlords and against the local poor—the squatters.

(Loss of) community

People are positive about Alexandra’s proximity to work opportunities and transport and about its relative inexpensiveness. Most residents would rather live in Alexandra than any other township (see Isserow and Everatt 1998). When discussing the problems in Alexandra, residents look for someone to blame. In this they are no different from any other group—except that they also take responsibility for the current situation. Alexandra residents sense that the unity of the past, forged out of common suffering and the struggle against apartheid, has been lost, and replaced with a materialism and selfishness they dislike. As one male focus group participant from a formal dwelling put it,

Before elections, development in Alexandra was flourishing. But after the elections, everyone is doing his own thing. We don’t think for the future in Alex. You’ll hear a person saying, “I remember Alexandra fifteen years back, but its no longer beautiful like before.”

To some extent this can be characterized as a normalization of sociopolitical life, as South Africa recedes from struggle to become a settled society. Many Alexandra residents feel that the pendulum has swung too far the other, individualist, way. Focus group participants frequently noted the extent to which they were part of the problem. The following discussion among young women living in formal dwellings in Alexandra, highlights the issue.

R: The problem is us people.

R: People here in Alexandra are reluctant. For instance when you say there will be a meeting, for example about streets and houses, they will tell you that they won't attend because they have left houses in rural areas.

R: Or maybe they are cooking.

R: The community should meet together if they want their things to be right. Because there is nothing that beats communication, because I can never do things on my own without the community.

Alexandra residents have experienced a time when meetings were well attended, thousands volunteered for community action, and where their community was an important and well-known part of the resistance movement that celebrated victory in 1994. We do not understand sufficiently how this loss of community affects people in the post-apartheid and post-struggle era, but the communal past does stand at odds with what they see as the materialistic present, which both seduces and repulses.

In a focus group, a woman took the notion of responsibility from the collective to the personal level:

It's because we do not want to understand. Like these people who are from the RDP . . . they came with their own bricks, and we stole them. So where do we expect them to take tiles from? We stole these bricks and then next thing we are busy saying it is them who stole these tiles, and yet it is us who are causing the whole mess.

Xenophobia and social control

People are being confronted with enormous socioeconomic problems, for which they know they are partly responsible, and for which there are insufficient resources to resolve. Competition for scarce resources in an impoverished community is intense, and identifiable outsiders are easy targets of blame. No moral leadership is being offered regarding migrants, particularly at the local level—the hard edge of relations, where squatters and illegals live within meters of each other, hostile and competitive. Xenophobia is on the increase in South Africa, as growing numbers of immigrants enter the country, and are seen to accept lower wages for work than many South Africans. They bring with them their own family networks and are found on the street corners of most inner-city blocks, selling everything from watches to curios to fake “luxury” goods. South African traders complain of losing prime sites to “foreigners,” and of disliking the tradition of hard sell and hard bargaining that many have brought to the country.

In focus groups at both case-study sites, a similar sequence occurred. Participants would be asked to discuss what was wrong with their township. They would list a range of issues—usually crime, jobs, and housing—then blame the problem on another group. Formal dwellers would blame their backyard tenants; both in turn would blame squatters. At some point all ended up by blaming “foreigners.” One male, from a formal area, went through the sequence alone:

I want to count a number of issues. Firstly it's untidiness, whereby we look clean and at the same time we are untidy. We throw rubbish into the streets and the reason is that we are many and nobody, even your neighbour, can tell you not to litter around. Secondly it's crime, which is very high. Suppose you have a little brother and he decides when he grows up he wants to see himself driving a stolen car or having a gun. The reason is that we have role models who are thugs. On the same issue of crime we have many foreigners who hide themselves very well at Alexandra. We have more shacks and these people make Alexandra more dirty. And these people are cheap labourers, and with us we want affirmative action. With them they take anything which is a job and makes them hard workers.

Each concern flowed into another, and by the end blame for the situation was being attributed to “foreigners.” When black South Africans in focus groups discussed “foreigners,” they sounded uncannily like white South Africans. A male from a formal dwelling in Alexandra said:

Another thing that government is not handling well is this issue of influx control. You will find that the first immigrant that comes to South Africa is a legal one, with a passport and everything. He then puts a shack inside the yard and in turn twenty more immigrants come and live with him. These twenty people don't have passports because they are illegal immigrants. So if the government can stop the inflow of illegal immigrants, crime can be combated because criminals will be easily spotted.

Repatriation of non-South Africans is a very popular response when asked about solutions to the housing crisis and overcrowding. Unemployment is also frequently blamed on migrants:

R: The government should first send back these illegal immigrants to their countries. I understand that they came here because they were running away from poverty, but now they are even taking away our businesses. They put the stuff they sell right in the streets while my business is not going because they have taken my sales. We are no longer working as maids because they have stolen our jobs for cheap labour.

R: These illegal immigrants should go because we are losing our jobs as a result of cheap labour.

R: I like these people but I don't like their deeds. They poison whites against us and vice versa. Always they are taking goods from South Africa to their countries and most of them are crooks.

Two-thirds (66 percent) of survey respondents believed Alexandra should be for South Africans only, and that “foreigners” should be repatriated. Only 9 percent believe that all people are equal and should be able to live together. Only 3 percent agree that frontline states were damaged by apartheid and that citizens of such countries should be allowed to work and live here.

The economic wealth of the province draws in people from all backgrounds. In the inner city, a recent survey logged fifteen languages being spoken (South Africa has eleven official languages) of which French covered a whole range of West African immigrants (Rule, Yanta, Isserow, Everatt, and Jennings 1996⁹). The media has carried claims of immigrants across a range from 400,000 (from the head of Statistics SA) to 8 million (from the Human Sciences Research Council, the government's social science parastatal). As the economic situation worsens, immigrants are seen as exacerbating unemployment. All black non-South Africans are frequently grouped together as “illegal immigrants,” which has recently led to a heated exchange in newspapers between African-Americans in South Africa and some hostile local (black) South Africans.

Alexandra and Tladi residents had high expectations of post-apartheid South Africa. The realities have been harsh: no jobs, limited services, a spiraling crime wave, and intense competition for jobs. In the minds of many, solutions to problems are related to the desired efflux of new residents. To solve crime, Tladi residents wanted a deportation policy. To solve the housing crisis in Alexandra, survey respondents wanted foreigners sent home. But in Alexandra this went beyond non-South African migrants and took the form of a call for the return of a form of influx control. At the beginning of this paper we quoted a young man who “wished” there could be “a control system of people coming from rural areas like Pietersburg . . . so that we can be able to know whether you have come to seek work or visit.”

It is important to understand the significance of this statement. The pass laws, as influx control measures were commonly known, were amongst the most hated aspects of apartheid. Every black South African had to carry a *dompas* at all times. It showed whether s/he was permitted to be in “white” areas, and was a basic survival document. Pass burning campaigns were frequent. Now, only a decade after the pass laws were abolished (in 1985), a young man from a highly politicized township sees them as a useful tool for controlling rural and foreign movement into Alexandra; his counterparts in the focus group all nodded their agreement.

Non-South Africans comprise a visibly “different” group for South Africans to blame for the ills of the present day. This is bolstered by media headlines and a current national rhetoric that feeds into racist stereotyping and the suggestion of “solutions” that should be unthinkable for South Africans. These include the return of influx control, forced removals, and other weapons formerly in the battery of apartheid.

With all sections of Tladi and Alexandra deeply hostile to “foreigners,” a space opens for rabble-rousing and direct action—already a preferred community response to crime—with serious possible consequences. The last few months have seen deaths of migrants in different parts of Gauteng. Ongoing racism and harassment of non-South Africans continues to reinforce the notion of South Africa as a near-colonial regional power, whose economy dwarfs its neighbours, and whose citizens regard themselves as so much better than people from the SADC countries. Xenophobia seems destined to escalate from a local to a regional security issue.

Class differences, alliances, and organizations

In Tladi and Alexandra, the ANC is the dominant political player; from the perspective of many respondents, “all organizations fall under it.”¹⁰ This is particularly true of the civic associations, whose leadership is made up of the local elite, the formal-dwelling owners, local business people, and so on. For participants from backyard shacks and informal dwellings, there was no real difference between the ANC and the civic association. Backyard dwellers attend no meetings for fear of eviction by their landlords “because we will reveal their secrets.” Those from the informal settlements don’t go because “they promise us but at the end of the day nothing is happening, so we feel there is no use to attend any of their meetings.” As a result, self-appointed local leaders have emerged in the informal settlement to take the space left by organizations like the civic association and ANC, which do not function there. They extract rentals and in return try to win some benefits for inhabitants. For this they win grudging support. No other organizational work seems to be taking place among backyard shack dwellers either.

The civic association is “ours” to formal homeowners, familiar with its leaders and those of the ANC drawn from their ranks, but “theirs” as far as other residents are concerned. Formal dwellers in Tladi talked of the need for “constant contact” with their local councillor, and of developing a structure to formalize the relationship. This kind of thinking is a long way from the situation facing other residents of Tladi or Alexandra.

This is not an uncommon situation, where the better-off or better-educated people in a community also control local organizations. In development initiatives, the local elite has to be drawn in rather than excluded, if the project is to succeed. But the situation is not straightforward. The “civic” is no longer merely a local association focused on agitating for local improvements, but is part of the South African National Civic Organization, which has an electoral pact with the ANC and has real political power in local, provincial, and national government. This is coupled with a local perception that the civic association is both closely aligned with the ANC and is the preserve of socially and economically powerful groups in the township. The local elite in this case are under no pressure to extend their reach to their poorest neighbors.

Other groups do not attend meetings, and their attitudes toward the civic association range from indifference to hostility. Given that the same socio-economically powerful group LAO comprises the ANC leadership in the area, neither of the two key avenues of expression—civic association and political party—are not available to squatters or people living in backyards. The civic association is in danger of becoming a vehicle allowing elite capture of resources at the expense of backyard or informal dwellers. New vehicles for voicing the demands

of those currently excluded from ANC and the civic associations will inevitably emerge. This can be expected to occur over time as antiapartheid unity falls away in the face of more immediate needs and demands. How quickly will the conditions for this fracturing coalesce? In our case studies, at least, conditions seem to be quite advanced. Who will fill the vacuum? This deserves a detailed treatment on its own and is beyond the scope of this paper, but one part of the answer will briefly be considered here.

Direct action?

There are two main responses among squatters and backyard dwellers to the situation described above: resignation in the face of non-delivery, and blaming less-powerful social groups. In the context of a leadership vacuum, the more that “illegals” are singled out for blame, the more space will grow for loose formations to rail against migrants, with tragic results, such as the example cited at the beginning of this paper.

Taking direct action was a popular notion discussed by residents of Alexandra. They have suffered a spiralling wave of violent crime and ongoing police failure to clamp down on perpetrators who seem consistently able to escape from custody if arrested. Most Alexandra residents accept that they should report crimes to the police. Nonetheless, 18 percent believe that they should take matters into their own hands; another 16 percent would report crime to community structures, and 14 percent would go to the informal “people’s courts,” the latter two both forms of taking the law into local hands. Support for this notion came mainly from those who feel threatened and invaded by the changes of post-1994 South Africa: between 16 and 22 percent of those living in Old Alexandra (formal and informal, respectively) supported the idea of taking matters into their own hands, as opposed to only 1 percent of those in the Shtwetla shacks.

The dangers are obvious if particular groups, defined in class and spatial terms, decide to form vigilante groups to defend their property against poorer people living only meters away. When those poorer people are also from a different country, the stakes are raised again (Isserow, Morrison, Belvedere, and Selabe 1998:65-66). Conditions for this exist in Gauteng. Direct action against migrants is increasingly common. In a survey of migrants working in and around Johannesburg, half said they had been harassed, mainly by the South African Police Service, followed by ordinary South Africans (*ibid.*).

As the power of the national liberation movement to meld the vast majority of South Africans into a politically coherent bloc declines, so political spaces open up for others. New organizations representing class interests are an expected development. So long as they play by the political rules, and conform to the democratic principles of the new South African Constitution, their arrival is a welcome development. But the danger exists, at this particular political moment, for demagogues and bodies to emerge that play on the fears and poverty of those living in backyard shacks and informal settlements. Vigilante action may be their hallmark, in place of the slowness of the democratic political system.

Conclusion

A number of processes are taking place simultaneously in South Africa. A democratic political system has been designed and implemented but has still to become the norm. With it will come multiparty democracy, already supported by most South Africans, and political contestation. No single party will be able to represent “black South Africa” because class interests, already divergent, will become antagonistic. In addition, a unifying enemy no longer exists. All parties, including the ANC, will have to adjust to this new terrain.

Since 1994, class differences among Africans have emerged more clearly. Middle class and new ruling class elements have left the townships to live in formerly white-only suburbs, leaving townships more evenly poor. Significantly, they have been seamlessly absorbed into the suburbs. Class differences in townships are measured by more or less discrete signals—the kind of dwelling you live in, the clothes and food you can afford, the furniture you have. Resentment among squatters, backyard dwellers, and formal homeowners was very evident in the case studies.

At the same time, ANC hegemony is slowly diminishing. All South Africans now share equal political rights, but have very different economic, social, welfarist, and other needs. This is true among and between black South Africans. ANC appeals for township residents to pay their rent and service charges have been ignored. Although ANC political dominance is probably assured for the next decade, significant numbers of black voters are already looking for new political homes. This in turn impacts at the local level. In our two case studies, petty bourgeois elements are (and are seen to be) in control of the civic association and ANC. They dissuade poorer residents of backyard structures or informal settlements from active participation. They are making a concerted bid to win control of the local-level ANC.

Those living in backyard or informal dwellings lack an organizational home. They are potentially available to leaders who wish to play on their poverty and their fear that “foreigners” are taking what little is rightfully theirs. Such leaders have been associated with informal dwellers since the 1940s (Sapire 1990). The ANC cannot promise a radical transformation of South African society or economy, bringing poorer citizens back into the fold with talk of dramatic redistribution. The ANC is also focusing attention more on governing than on its party machinery, with the result that a dissonance is emerging between the national message of delivery to the poor and the local reality of shutting out the poor.

To some extent, much of this can be regarded as part of the normalization of South African politics. It moves beyond that, however, when the case studies illustrate the way in which black non-South Africans are increasingly blamed for the current crime wave and rising unemployment—and are increasingly the victims of violence merely because they are foreign. In a context of widespread poverty and deep inequality, anti-immigrant hostility is understandable.

But hostility has turned into fatalities. The case studies suggest that the basis of hostility—to keep outsiders away from what few opportunities exist—also threatens to turn against South Africans living in informal settlements. South Africa has to be successful, if the entire sub-Saharan region is not to be written off internationally as a no-hope region. SADC countries are already wary of South African dominance economically and politically and, through President Mandela, symbolically. The regional political project is sensitive, and will almost certainly not survive ongoing vigilante attacks on “illegals.”

There is no easy or quick solution. Democracy needs to be deepened, structurally and socially. Although social tensions run fairly high in post-apartheid South Africa, the tolerance that allowed a negotiated end to apartheid needs to be reinforced and widened. Underlying and feeding into the whole sequence described above is the deep poverty that afflicts large numbers of South Africans. Poverty is the ultimate cause of most negative factors discussed in this paper. Eradicating (not merely alleviating) poverty must remain the focus of policy makers.

Endnotes

¹ Data are taken from an as yet unreleased survey commissioned by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Independent News Group, conducted by Strategy & Tactics.

² Subsequent statistics are taken from Statistics SA 1998 or the sample surveys cited above in Everatt et al 1998a and 1998b, and Isserow and Everatt.

³ Statistics are taken from various sample surveys conducted by CASE, as cited above.

⁴ National sample survey of 3,801 respondents, commissioned by the Constitutional Assembly.

⁵ Data used include the Opinion '99 surveys of 1998-99 and surveys by S&T, Markinor, The Human Sciences Research Council, MarkData, and Idasa.

⁶ See note 1. Four in five South Africans supported both propositions.

⁷ Here and following, quotations are taken from focus groups of Tladi residents.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from focus groups of Alexandra residents.

⁹ Unless otherwise stated, inner-city statistics are taken from this source.

¹⁰ Here and below, quotations are taken from either Tladi or Alexandra focus groups.

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