

Chapter 12

Post-apartheid Housing Delivery as a (Failed) Project of Remediation



Zachary Levenson

Abstract Apartheid was a regime of socio-spatial relegation: racialised populations were banished to South Africa's urban peripheries and rural hinterlands. In the post-apartheid period, the ruling ANC framed its democratisation project as remedial, a corrective to centuries of dispossession. This entailed government providing the physical infrastructure required for black South Africans to return to cities, not as precarious squatters on the urban fringe, but as residents with an equal right to the city. Yet, more than a quarter century later, little progress has been made in any substantive sense. While South Africa has delivered more free, formal housing units than any other modern democracy, it has consistently failed to coordinate this programme with employment, transportation, and food security initiatives. This has left residents with homes to be sure, but typically delivered to locations where residents already live, rendering the geography of apartheid permanent. This chapter also accounts for the substandard quality of the units delivered; the slow pace of delivery; and the fact that the housing backlog continues to grow despite the ongoing provision of homes. It concludes with an analysis of the exclusionary effects of the government's equation of housing delivery with democratisation *tout court*.

Keywords Housing · Dispossession · Delivery · Urban space · Post-apartheid South Africa · Post-colonial Africa · African National Congress

Z. Levenson (✉)

University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC, USA

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

e-mail: zachary.levenson@uncg.edu

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189

12.1 Introduction

Apartheid was a regime of socio-spatial relegation: racialised populations were banished to South Africa's urban peripheries and rural hinterlands. The ascent of the National Party to power in 1948 was the culmination of three centuries of settler colonial rule, characterised by some variant of either the expulsion of black populations from urban space altogether, or else their temporary inclusion in a hyper-regulated migrant labour regime. We can think of rural areas as sites to which these expelled black urbanites were banished, and peri-urban areas as precariously legal sites where black labourers found shelter after completing authorised work in white cities. It should therefore be no surprise that apartheid is collectively remembered by black South Africans today as a struggle over the (dis)possession of land or, more precisely, over access to urban space: the right to the city.

This is why the country's ruling party, the ANC, framed democratisation as a remediation project, attempting to reverse centuries of dispossession and apartheid-era forced removals, so that black South Africans could return to cities, not as precarious squatters on the urban fringe, but as residents with a right to the city and formal housing. Access to decent housing was not a new demand: it occupied a central place in the ANC's 1955 programme called the Freedom Charter. All South Africans should have the right "to be decently housed" and "[u]nused space [should] be made available to the people". The Freedom Charter's most famous line – "The people shall govern!" – is inextricable from the redistributive demands that followed. The ANC articulated a conception of democracy as *distributive*: formal political rights only become meaningful when citizens have access to the material means necessary for exercising their citizenship.

This formulation of democracy, central to the Freedom Charter, was incorporated into the post-apartheid Constitution, ratified in 1996. In contrast to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century constitutions, which tended to grant political rights, various late twentieth-century post-colonial constitutions explicitly protected socio-economic rights as well (Sunstein 2001). The South African Constitution guaranteed "the right to have access to adequate housing" and insisted that the state "take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right". It also prohibited arbitrary evictions, associated in the collective memory with the forced removals of apartheid. Within 3 years of coming to power, the National Party had passed the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, which effectively authorised the forced relocation of any black residents the state deemed "illegal". Playing on this name, the post-apartheid Parliament passed the Prevention of Illegal Eviction (PIE) Act in 1998, which, in conjunction with a series of subsequent Constitutional Court cases, required the government to provide alternative accommodation when eviction was unavoidable.

The very legitimacy of the post-apartheid government was bound up with its success in realising democracy, which it articulated in distributive terms. In practice, this took two forms: delivery and dispossession. On the one hand, the post-apartheid state used housing delivery as a technology of managing the rapid urbanisation of

un(der)employed South Africans. Whether coming to cities from rural hinterlands or peri-urban settlements, delivery facilitated the relocation of these surplus populations to formal neighbourhoods typically located on the outskirts of cities, in effect augmenting the racial geography of apartheid, but in a way that allowed the government to proclaim the achievement of distributive democracy. The government simultaneously pursued a strategy of dispossession as a means of managing rapid informal urbanisation after this took off in earnest. Given that municipalities could not possibly deliver fast enough, new land occupations were inevitable, and the proliferation of shacks after apartheid was a visible symbol of the state's failure to realise material democracy (Levenson 2018, 2019). For that reason, governments tended to disperse new occupations, either incorporating them into the delivery process, or else further peripheralising them in urban space.

Before discussing delivery, however, I will analyse the context in which the post-apartheid delivery apparatus emerged. In the first section, I explain how South Africa's settler colonial and apartheid projects of shifting surplus populations set in motion the post-apartheid urbanisation crisis. I read the colonial state as a racialised iteration of what James Scott (1998) termed the high modernist state. In the second section, I trace how this trajectory played out, with informal urbanisation reaching its peak at the moment of democratisation, necessitating the twin strategies of delivery and dispossession. I focus in particular on the development of delivery policy during the transition. It is here that I explore the central research question of this chapter: how should we characterise the socio-spatial effects of post-apartheid housing policy, and what role did local government play in its implementation? Then, in the third and final section, I argue that, coupled with dispossession, housing delivery constitutes a strategy for managing surplus populations after apartheid. I conclude by noting some of the failures of post-apartheid housing delivery, explaining why this matters in ongoing debates about land reform in South Africa today and indeed issues of land governance elsewhere in SSA.

My approach does not separate *post*-apartheid policymaking from its *post-apartheid* context. I treat housing delivery as an active process with novel effects, but a process that only emerges after centuries of settler colonialism. In this sense, it accords nicely with Ann Stoler's (2013: 11; 2016: 350) concept of ruination: "Ruination is an *act* perpetrated, a *condition* to which one is subject, and a *cause* of loss". Delivery and dispossession are active forces effected by contemporary agents, but not enacted in an historical vacuum. In the analysis that follows, I explore the linkages, both forward and backward, between post-apartheid policy's unintended consequences on the one hand and the persistent effects of colonialism and apartheid on the other. To paraphrase Stuart Hall (1996: 247–8), thinking about post-colonial legacies does not entail a clean break with a formal colonial past, though this is of course part of the story. But just as significantly, it necessitates an analysis of the enduring effects of colonial violence. For this reason, the analysis that follows is based upon interviews with post-apartheid housing officials, policymakers and consultants, as well as archival materials and a careful reading of secondary sources. I think about "failure" (as in my title) not simply as a cause of loss, but as the collective experience of that loss. While this chapter is not particularly ethnographic,

this research was carried out while I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork (2011–2019) among subjects of the dispossession and delivery described here. Thinking about the post-apartheid moment then requires that new effects and enduring legacies be related to people's experiences – what Stoler calls the conditions to which people are subject.

12.2 Apartheid Trajectories

Like most iterations of colonial rule, apartheid entailed the violent shifting of racialised, ethnicised and tribalised populations to fit the high modernist designs of the colonial imagination (Scott 1998). Settler colonialism in South Africa was particularly extreme, with the National Party – the party of apartheid – passing the Group Areas Act within 2 years of its election in 1948. That law defined the most developed areas of cities as white spaces, or “group areas”, relegating other racialised populations to peripherally located townships and less desirable areas of the city. Within a few years, these forced removals would entail the formal expulsion of black residents from cities altogether, relegating them to rural reserves called “Bantustans”, sometimes euphemised as “homelands” – as if these far-flung areas were the authentic *patria* of South Africa's black ethnic groups. According to the most conservative estimates, 3.5 million people were forcibly relocated under apartheid, with the overwhelming majority expelled to Bantustans (Platzky and Walker 1985). The National Party attempted to engineer the realisation and augmentation of the 1913 Natives Land Act, which nearly four decades earlier had prohibited black South Africans from owning land in 93% of the country. The so-called native reserves, the 7% of the country where they could obtain title deeds, roughly correspond to the location of the Bantustans created by the apartheid regime. On the occasion of the passage of the Natives Land Act, Sol Plaatje, a founding member of the ANC, famously proclaimed, “Awaking on Friday morning, June 20th, 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth” (Plaatje 1996 [1916]: 21).

The case of Cape Town was particularly egregious, with the city defined as a Coloured Labor Preference Area. In other words, with the exception of a couple of smaller black townships constructed in the 1920s, black people could be expelled from the city altogether; Coloured residents would comprise this urban economy's cheap labour force and work the farms just beyond the city limits. In a city like Durban on South Africa's east coast, black residents were removed to Bantustans about a half-day's walk from the central business district; but in Cape Town, they were forced more than 1000 km eastward to two large Bantustans then called the Ciskei – “this side of the Kei River” – and the Transkei, “that side”. Both are substantially closer to Durban than Cape Town (see Fig. 12.1) but were defined as the independent homeland of the amaXhosa population, the predominant black ethnic group in both the Western Cape, where Cape Town is located, and the Eastern Cape, where both Bantustans existed until the end of apartheid in 1994. Forced removal

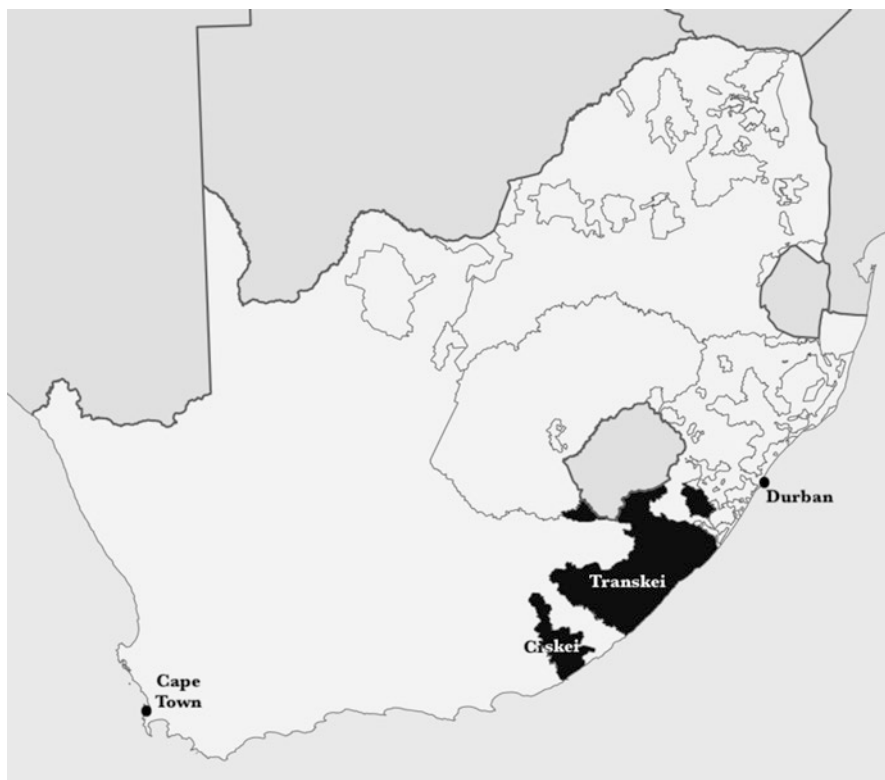


Fig. 12.1 Map of Ciskei and Transkei Bantustans in Relation to Cape Town

was framed by the apartheid state as the return of a people to its rightful homeland, rather than as the expulsion of all black Capetonians against their will to underdeveloped rural areas that they might have never actually known.

As with any high modernist project, however, the state failed to realise its designs fully. Lack of livelihood opportunities in the Eastern Cape, for example, led a number of black Capetonians to return to the city following their expulsion in search of employment. As the government came to realise it could not block urban “influx” altogether, it developed alternative strategies of managing surplus populations. The state also lacked the capacity to evict everyone, and besides, a conflict within the National Party was simmering just below the surface (O’Meara 1996). While its racist wing wanted to banish racialised populations as far away as possible, its industrial and agrarian capitalist employers, gaining power as apartheid developed, needed cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and did not want dogmatic racists cutting into their profits. By the 1970s, this pitted proponents of liberalisation – people we might broadly describe today as “neoliberals” – against racists and defenders of “racial Fordism” (Gelb 1987), those who wanted to reserve all decent

employment opportunities for whites. A welfare state for the best, spatial relegation for the rest, they insisted. But there were plenty of jobs that whites would not do, and so from the very beginning the apartheid state tolerated black workers living in peri-urban space. As South African cities began to industrialise in earnest following the Second World War, black residents constructed shantytowns on urban fringes around the country (Bonner 1990, 1995; Stadler 1979). In order to access spaces defined as white, they had to possess a *dompas* – an internal passport really – approved by authorised white employers. While the passbook system dates back to the late eighteenth century, it was not formalised until a series of laws passed in 1923, 1945 and 1952 extended it to all black South Africans over the age of 16. As of 1952, they could no longer legally reside in a white group area for more than 72 continuous hours unless they had maintained the same job there for a decade, lived there continuously for a decade and a half, or were born there and had never left (Hindson 1987; Levy 1982). This was a classic case of being grandfathered out.

Things were easier for Cape Town's Coloured population, but not much. Cape Town's most celebrated Coloured neighbourhood, District Six, was razed and is today the site of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. This neighbourhood, adjacent to the city centre, was redefined as a white group area, and all of its residents were forcibly relocated to newly constructed townships on the Cape Flats, the vast flatlands east of the city centre that became home to more than 60% of the city's population. Today a museum commemorates the neighbourhood and explains what happened to the 60,000 people who once lived there. In 2014 I visited the District Six Museum with Muhammad, whose family home was among those demolished. He immediately located two pictures of his father on the museum's second floor and began to reminisce. He was a small child when his parents were evicted from their home. "First they squatted in Belgravia for some years", he told me, referencing a largely Muslim area about halfway between the city centre and where they ended up. "But after waiting for those years, they got a house—a formal house in Mitchell's Plain". Today Mitchell's Plain is the second largest township on the Flats and the largest Coloured township in the country.

12.3 Delivery and Dispossession

By the mid-1980s, anti-apartheid struggles reached their peak, particularly on the Cape Flats. A neighbourhood in Mitchell's Plain (just up the road from Muhammad's shack) was home to the decade's most iconic struggle organisation, the United Democratic Front (UDF) (Seekings 2000; van Kessel 2000). While the UDF and other organisations campaigned against apartheid rule, other Cape Flats residents had to wage a more immediate sort of struggle: against evictions. Black urbanisation was ultimately legalised during this period, culminating in the abrogation of influx controls in 1986 (Smith 1992; Swilling et al. 1992). Apartheid urban policy often oscillated between extreme repression and bursts of toleration, but even during its more lenient moments, the repressive apparatus was still there, with black

squatters being criminalised and arrested, or their homes demolished, leaving them to fend for themselves. Making things even more difficult, these struggles were often refracted through competing factions on the ground. In one of the larger black townships of the time, for example, the UDF-affiliated settlement leadership became embroiled in a civil war with a black vigilante group called the *witdoeke* [“white cloths”], named for the strips of white cloth they used to identify themselves (Cole 1987), who were informally aligned with the apartheid police and helped facilitate the demolition of UDF-aligned shacks.

Despite the potential violence faced by squatters, both from the government and from contending factions, the final years of apartheid saw black residents returning to cities in large numbers. This trend continued into the post-apartheid period, with the proliferation of new shack settlements at an unprecedented rate (Harrison et al. 2008; Hunter and Posel 2012). Judging by population growth (see Fig. 12.2), Johannesburg more than doubled in size between the first post-apartheid census (1996) and the most recent social survey (2016), and two nearby cities (Pretoria and Ekurhuleni) came close to doing so. Cape Town, which was roughly the size of Johannesburg at the time of the transition, is today South Africa’s second largest city with a population of four million, having overtaken Durban.

A similar trend occurred for those living in informal housing over the same period. The government’s official count¹ for shacks nationwide has nearly doubled since the transition, now two million, with 1.3 million of these living in informal settlements, and another 700,000 in the backyards of formal houses – a practice

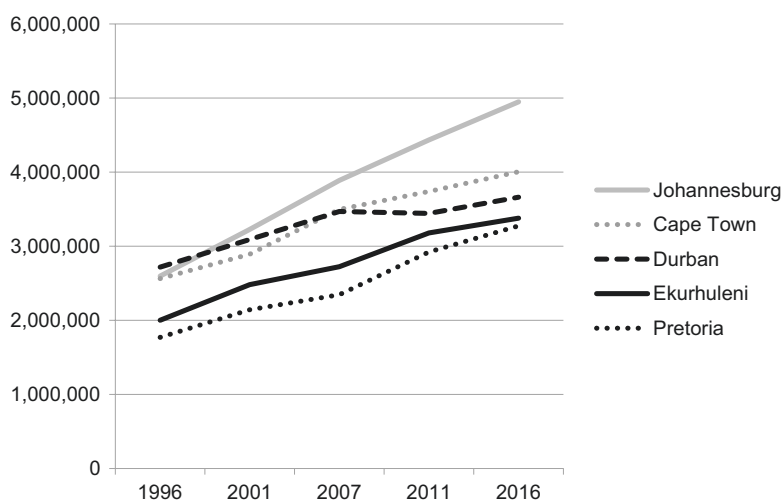


Fig. 12.2 Urban populations in South Africa, 1996–2016

¹ These figures come from the Department of Human Settlements, thanks to Steve Topham, at the time the Technical Team Leader for the National Upgrading Support Program (NUSP).

colloquially known as “backyarding”. By one measure, this is still an improvement, as informal housing as a percentage of total households declined from 16% in the 1996 census to 13% in the most recent social survey (2016), despite a brief uptick in the early 2000s. On the other hand, when we use a different measure, these results are not as clear. In addition to debates about substantial undercounting in the 2011 census (Tempelhoff 2014; Wilkinson 2014), we can examine figures on what the Department of Human Settlements – South Africa’s housing ministry – calls the housing backlog: those officially in need of formal housing. The national backlog stood at 1.4 million at the time of the transition and within 7 years had risen to nearly 2.5 million (Tissington 2011). It dipped below two million in the early 2000s, but by 2005 it was back to 2.5 million, and today it hovers between 2.1 and 2.7 million (Tomlinson 2015). In the Western Cape, where Cape Town makes up the bulk of the backlog, an even more pronounced trend is observable over the first decade of democratisation: just over 165,000 in 1996, up to 230,000 the following year, and levelling off in the low 200,000s until about 2005 (Tissington 2011). Then in 2006, the figure nearly doubles to more than 400,000 as new Capetonians are formally included in the housing programme (Wilkinson 2015). Today it fluctuates between 300,000 and 400,000 – more than a doubling of the backlog since the moment of transition.

This is particularly surprising given the scale of housing distribution after apartheid. South Africa has long had a large-scale formal housing delivery programme, with the construction of new peripherally located townships in the 1970s and 1980s underpinning its forced relocations. In the period following the Durban strikes (1973) and the Soweto Uprising (1976), after which point popular opposition to the apartheid regime would never again subside, the government began to use housing distribution as a technology of pacification, so to speak. Representatives of industrial and financial capital in the ruling coalition gained an upper hand over its more straightforwardly racist wing, with a newly formed free-market think tank called the Urban Foundation spearheading new urban policies (Barchiesi 2011; Bond 2000), most notably a housing delivery programme in peri-urban townships, often in the form of rent-to-own homes. The idea was to encourage black and Coloured homeownership, creating a nascent property-owning class against a background of racialised dispossession (O’Meara 1996: 184–6). The government sought to undermine black and Coloured unity, with the hope that new homeowners would be more interested in defending their property than risk losing it by participating in anti-state activities. There was also the hope that this would stratify and therefore polarise black and Coloured neighbourhoods, in which homeowners would resent informal settlements as threats to their property value and squatters would begrudge those in formal houses.

The strategy failed. As we have already seen, rapid urban influx accompanied the liberalisation of apartheid mobility controls in the 1980s, and debates over how to manage the sudden urbanisation of racialised surplus populations occupied a central place in transitional talks (Mabin 1996; Turok 1994a, b). In 1992, the ANC worked with apartheid-era opposition leaders, policy analysts and private sector consultants

to form the National Housing Forum (NHF)² to discuss policy options for addressing this emergent crisis of informal urbanisation (Rust and Rubenstein 1996; Bond 2014 [2000]). But the NHF was quickly dominated by the Urban Foundation, the neoliberal think tank discussed above, which effectively kept public housing off the table. The group produced the Housing White Paper in 1994, which contains the post-apartheid government's plan to build one million formal houses within the first 5 years of democracy, in line with its inaugural social spending programme, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP),³ although in the first 7 years of democracy most housing was actually constructed by private developers (Tissington et al. 2013: 13).

After 2001, however, new housing projects were primarily public sector driven, and now over four million subsidies have been released for RDP houses (Tomlinson 2015). According to official data on how many homes have been distributed, at the end of fiscal year 2016–2017, nearly 3.1 million formal (“RDP”) houses had been delivered since 1994 and more than a million additional “housing opportunities”. A “housing opportunity,” language popularised in DHS documents in the early 2000s, describes the provision of a partial top structure and a plot on a greenfield site, although how much these structures resemble housing has been progressively reduced over time, with the current iteration of “housing opportunity” closer to the old site-and-services approach – accent on the “opportunity” rather than the housing itself. The annual figures

reveal a few major trends (Fig. 12.3). First, if the ANC promised a million houses in its first 5 years, we see it scrambling to meet this promise in 1998–1999, followed by a drop-off and levelling out to between 130,000 and 170,000 formal homes annually. Second, an increased reliance on site-and-services from the early 2000s led the government to combine total figures (RDP houses and “housing opportunities”) to exceed all but the exceptional period 1997–1999. Third, a steady decline began in 2010–2011, with recent drop-offs marking a downward trend, or potentially scepticism about the financial sustainability of the government's housing delivery programme. Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu notoriously associated housing delivery with freeloading, insisting, “I don't know of a country that gives free houses to young people. Free housing in a few years will be something of the past” (Msimang 2014). She thus distinguished between those dispossessed under apartheid, whose socio-spatial relegation the RDP housing programme was designed

²The NHF was the multi-stakeholder body in charge of devising new housing policies during the transition. Patrick Bond characterizes the NHF's dominant bloc as advocating a “warmed-over neoliberalism”, blaming them for limiting post-apartheid housing delivery to individually owned sites rather than public rental stock.

³To this day, most South Africans continue to refer to state-delivered homes as “RDP houses”, despite the closure of the RDP office within 2 years. After a major housing policy shift in 2006 called Breaking New Ground (BNG), the Department of Human Settlements began officially referring to government-provisioned homes as “BNG houses”, but the term never caught on. All of my contacts on the Cape Flats continued to refer to these structures as “RDP houses” – more than 20 years after the demise of the RDP itself!

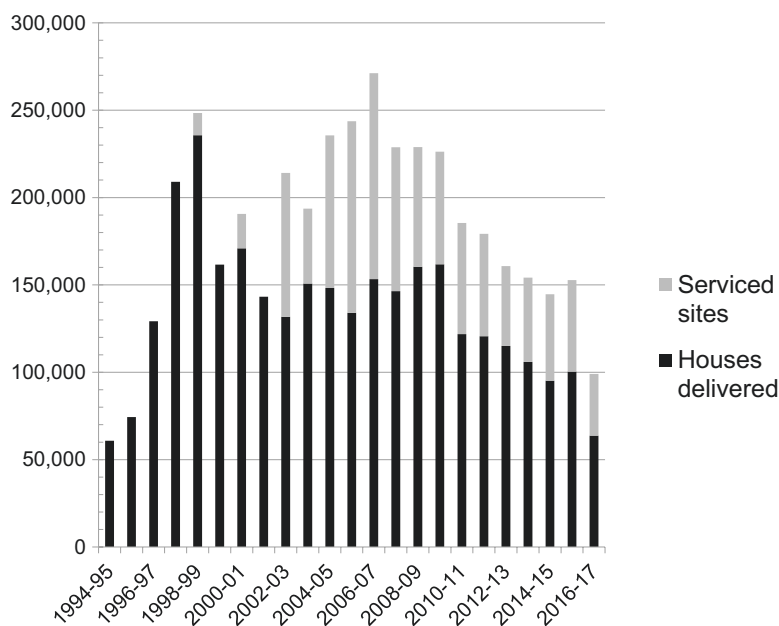


Fig. 12.3 Number of housing opportunities provided annually in South Africa, 1994–2017

to aid; and those born after 1994, who, she insisted, do not qualify as victims of apartheid.

Tokyo Sexwale, who succeeded Sisulu as Minister of Human Settlements, made a similar statement in 2011: “The solution will come not from free housing. There has to be a cut-off date for discussing that”. Of course, he added the qualifier, “But we can’t cut off the poor right now, particularly in the current national economic environment”, suggesting a hesitance to wind down the housing programme. When confronted about remarks Sisulu made at the Habitat III conference in Quito in 2016 about the limits of housing delivery, she responded, “The Department of Human Settlements will continue creating housing opportunities for all needy South Africans as part of living up to our ethos of respecting human rights and our people’s dignity”. Whether these scattered remarks represent an impending phase-out of the housing programme remains to be seen, but, according to my interviews with provincial and municipal officials in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, this is not currently being discussed.

In any case, the figures show that South Africa has distributed more free, formal homes than any other democratic governments in the modern period. Yet despite the scale of delivery, supply is continuously outstripped by demand. Municipalities cannot reduce their housing backlogs, most of which have grown since 1994. The number of shacks in the country has doubled since the transition, with informal settlements proliferating widely after the end of apartheid. While municipalities reluctantly recognise this fact, the national government refuses to acknowledge it

and recalibrate policies accordingly. As Sisulu proudly declared at the ANC's Policy Conference in 2017, "We've done exceedingly well, when you look at the latest stats from Stats SA in the delivery of formal housing whether by the government or the individuals themselves... We stand at something like 79% of people in this country are in formal housing", she beamed. But this represents no improvement from 1994!

12.4 Managing Surplus Populations

When the government first conceived of housing distribution in its 1994 Housing White paper, it emphasised the impartiality of its programme. Against the backdrop of "the specter of Zimbabwe" (Hart 2002: 305; 2006: 984) just next door, a case of redistribution rife with nepotism, not to mention the contentious debates over land reform during the transition at home (Hall 2004; Walker 2003), the transitional team tried to reduce the risk of local politicians using free homes as a means of securing political loyalty. While such cases are not unknown (Rubin 2011), control over distribution was centralised in provincial and municipal governments through the development of what is popularly known as the "waiting list". In its current iteration, registering on the waiting list requires the completion of a form at a local branch office of the DHS. Residents can typically find these offices in their own neighbourhoods. Applicants must produce a government-issued identification card and provide basic personal information. The receipt they receive, called a "C-Form", contains the date of registration, the key datum for ordering registrants. When a registrant is selected, the DHS releases a subsidy in their name to the contractor assigned to the given RDP housing project. The municipality advertises tenders in local newspapers, and through a public procurement process, applicants (both public and private sector) are selected to construct RDP developments with municipal subsidies.

But this programme is far from seamless. My fieldwork revealed numerous residents in Cape Flats townships with documentation proving to me that they had been on the waiting list for over 30 years, meaning that they registered under the old apartheid system.⁴ Some would wait for decades, while others would receive homes in a few years, contributing to perceptions of corruption, or that no waiting list actually exists (Tissington et al. 2013). Stuart Wilson, co-founder and director of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute, told a group of squatters in Cape Town that he estimates the current waiting period there at about 60 years (Maregele 2017) – assuming no one else registers for housing. In addition to these interminable

⁴Apartheid era waiting lists were typically consolidated into unified municipal lists. As the Cape Town municipality expanded to incorporate previously independent jurisdictions, these previously autonomous municipalities' waiting lists were amalgamated with Cape Town's to create a master "demand database" for the newly expanded municipality (interview with Brian Shelton, September 2013). So even those on apartheid-era lists were incorporated into the post-apartheid system.

waiting periods, municipalities sometimes make exceptions, incorporating squatters they view as potentially problematic into new housing developments – even when they are not next in line (Levenson 2017). While DHS officials tend to balk at these exceptions, they are typically requested by elected politicians for reasons of political expediency. Perhaps they made a direct promise to squatter constituents from another party and hope to win them over, or else a group of formally housed residents or a private developer saw an adjacent informal settlement as a threat; or maybe a new occupation impedes a government development project, and transferring residents to state-provisioned housing is the most expedient route to getting them out of the way.

All of this produces scepticism about the waiting list. Even those residents who are confident that it both exists and functions impartially rarely wait the decades required for a home. Some are relatively recent returnees from the Eastern Cape, having been expelled to Bantustans as “Africans” under apartheid; others grew up in houses delivered by the apartheid state, but without anywhere to expand their families. Housing delivery was an initial attempt to manage these migrants, both rural–urban and intra-urban, though of course it was hardly sufficient. As demand overwhelmed supply, self-provisioning became residents’ only viable alternative in the meantime. And this took the form of land occupations: the typically collective (though occasionally individual) auto-construction of housing on a plot of land to which the residents do not have legal title.

A large literature characterises the post-apartheid state as “neoliberal”, whether in terms of social policy retrenchment, liberalising capital controls, indiscriminate privatisation, industrial restructuring or some combination (e.g. Bond 2014 [2000]; Marais 2011). But if the South African state were truly neoliberal, it would tolerate (and even encourage) self-provisioning when this did not impede ongoing development projects, affect labour force dynamics or lead to the depreciation of nearby real estate values. In the cases I observed in Cape Town between 2011 and 2017, a different dynamic was in play. In the case of Rivenland, for example, a thousand residents built homes on municipally owned land that was out of sight, uncontested by neighbours and conformed to the general racial and political demographics of the vicinity. In short, it seemed an ideal solution for a neoliberal state shifting from formal housing distribution to provision of serviced greenfield sites (“housing opportunities”). But the city government still used its Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU) to monitor the occupation, issue legal threats and encourage the squatters to leave, while the South African Police Service (SAPS) regularly confiscated building materials and threatened arrest of residents pending a court interdict allowing them to do so. After a year of legal battles, all residents were evicted and the occupation was eradicated – but why?

If we think about the clearance of land occupations as an instance of managing surplus populations in the context of a crisis of rapid urbanisation, we need to ask why a government might devote so much in the way of energy and resources to regulating the social geography of poverty on the Cape Flats. If the first technology of spatial regulation is housing delivery, this always functions in tandem with a second: dispossession. I understand dispossession to be the physical separation of

residents from their homes, land and social networks. Eviction and relocation constitutes a moment of dispossession insofar as residents' new homes are divorced from established networks, lack access to expected services, and are further from employment opportunities. In its classical Marxian iteration, dispossession was theorised as coerced separation from the means of production (Glassman 2006; Perelman 2000). But this limited definition does not do much for us here, as its analytic power is trained upon the creation or reproduction of a formally free wage labour force. But all of the participants in the occupations I studied were already formally free. In the neighbourhood in which Rivenland was located, the real unemployment rate approached 60%. A functionalist conception of evictions as necessary for continual proletarianisation is patently ridiculous in a context in which an enormous percentage of the population is actively searching for work.

Another rationale for dispossession does not so much concern the people removed from the land as the land itself. Residents are removed so that land can be "developed" in order for its potential capitalisation to be realised. This is what sociologist Michael Levien (2012, 2018) describes in an Indian context as dispossession driven by land speculation. And while certainly this is in line with what much of what the recent "land grab" literature identifies as a shift in development strategy from labour to land (e.g. Borras Jr. et al. 2011; Li 2011), it does not accurately capture dynamics in post-apartheid cities. The Holfield occupation was officially tolerated even though it was highly visible, clearly growing and across the road from a well-organised middle-class neighbourhood that wanted the squatters removed. And Rivenland, which unlike Holfield was not located on private property, was evicted in 2012, but nothing has been done with the land since, and no plans are in place for its private use. Far from an anomalous case, this is a fairly regular outcome. An occupation four times the size of Rivenland was organised just a kilometre down the road in the same week. It too was located on public land and did not threaten any neighbours. After all 4000 occupiers were evicted in 2012, it lay vacant for years – and remains so today.

These evictions then were not sanctioned to recover valuable real estate, nor to create more labour power in an oversaturated labour market. Instead they were part of a larger pattern of state-driven dispossession that involved managing the rapid urbanisation of surplus populations following the demise of apartheid. Rapid urbanisation since the waning of authoritarian rule occurs in many (if not most) post-colonial contexts. In South Africa, the envisioned solution of market liberalisation came with a corollary: the liberalisation of labour and therefore of movement. And so the post-apartheid state needed to deal with this crisis of sudden urbanisation, but it could no longer simply shift them around at will. It was a democratic state, after all.

Without any economic resolution of the question of unemployment, dispossession is the post-apartheid state's primary strategy of containment – a holding pattern so to speak. This does not mean we need to adopt a formulation in which state actors are involved in some strategy of counterinsurgency. Wishful characterisations of South Africa's surplus populations notwithstanding (e.g. Gibson 2011; Pithouse 2008), they do not currently pose a credible threat to the ruling party. If anything,

their frustration with the ANC (and in Cape Town, with the DA) manifests in declining electoral support, but evicting these populations would make them even less likely to support the ruling party in their respective municipalities. Clearing land occupations is less a conscious strategy on the part of an instrumental state, and more of an attempt to implement stopgap measures. In South Africa, this means dispersing disorganised squatters, who are viewed by housing officials as impediments to realising the goals of social policy. Whether this is the distribution of free or affordable housing, the provision of healthcare or the coordination of labour markets, state projects of distribution require order. The local state demands formal rationality, but disorganised residents remain illegible to the delivery apparatus. It cannot see them as its potential beneficiaries, for only organised populations qualify for this status. Instead, disorganised squatters are perceived as a threat to the very functioning of this apparatus, and they are dealt with accordingly. Eviction then is a means of dispersing these potential threats in the only way local states know how: legally justified coercion.

12.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to make sense of how South Africa's post-apartheid housing delivery programme impacted its racialised, working class population. In particular, I asked what sort of socio-spatial effects resulted from housing delivery, and what role local governments played in its implementation. Now, more than a quarter century into the ANC's housing delivery programme, little substantive progress has been made in reversing the spatial inequality resulting from centuries of colonialism, segregation and apartheid. Despite the scale of delivery, South Africa's post-apartheid government has failed to align this programme with employment, transport and food security initiatives, leaving residents with homes in locations where residents already live and rendering the geography of apartheid permanent. A straightforward count of the number of units delivered is fairly meaningless when these are far from schools and employment. What appears as a blessing can actually be a curse, driving up each household's transport costs. Without coupling housing delivery with adequate employment, new homeowners cannot afford these increased costs, and tend to sell off their homes as a result, often moving back to the very informal settlements from which they were relocated. Since it remains illegal to sell an RDP house before its occupant has possessed the structure for a decade, residents typically sell them off for a fraction of their market value. Once residents move back to their shacks, they are perceived by housing officials as threats to the realisation of democracy.

But of course the fact of squatting hardly impedes democracy. The primary obstacle to reducing the housing backlog at this point is the government's consistent refusal to redistribute land. The ANC rejected radical land reform, explicitly prohibiting expropriation in the same 1996 Constitution that guarantees adequate housing for all. Since 1994 there has been minimal land restitution, with the government's

“willing buyer, willing seller” programme limiting redistribution efforts to voluntary market exchange (Kepe and Hall 2018; Lahiff 2007). After more than two decades of democracy, less than 6% of white owned land has been redistributed to black South Africans (Hendricks 2013: 48–49).

Even when municipalities do possess better located land, they often hold it for investment purposes, deeming the land too valuable for RDP houses. Some analysts do remain hopeful, pointing to President Cyril Ramaphosa’s promise to carry out “expropriation without compensation”, backed by more than three-fourths of the South African Parliament. In the popular imaginary, land reform remains an agrarian question; but South Africa is now an overwhelmingly urban country, and thus the question of land reform is primarily an urban one. Will the ANC and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) form an unlikely alliance and pass substantive land reform measures for the first time in South African history? Given Ramaphosa’s status as the darling of the international business press, we should not hold our breath. Besides, even if such legislation were to miraculously pass, it would surely be overturned by the Constitutional Court (ibid. 2013). Yet without such a volte-face in South Africa’s approach to land redistribution, housing delivery’s prospects appear dim at best.

On the international scene, policymakers and employees of multilateral institutions would do well to heed the chorus of long-standing critiques of UN-Habitat’s one-size-fits-all approach to “slum” eradication. As this chapter makes clear, housing insecurity cannot be ascribed to some naturalised conception of poverty, with policy implementation its singular remedy. Such policies have unintended consequences as evidenced by the fate of housing delivery in post-apartheid South Africa. We could just as easily trace the ways that the technocratic refrain of creating “cities without slums”, following from the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 11, has served as a pretext for local governments evicting residents en masse without providing any adequate alternative housing (e.g. Huchzermeyer 2011). Likewise, the publication of the NUA following Habitat III demonstrates the extent to which these sorts of technocratic solutions continue to be viewed as universally applicable, with no reference to the histories of colonial land dispossession that inscribed (and continue to inscribe) racial subjugation into urban space, let alone the concentration of well-located urban land *qua* real estate in the hands of elites. Instead, this document appropriates a Marxist mantra, calling for a “right to the city” (UN-Habitat 2017: 5), while naturalising poverty as the sole cause of socio-spatial exclusion. If we know why post-colonial cities are riven by extreme forms of urban inequality, grounded in specific racialised and class-based histories of expropriation, tinkering with housing delivery while leaving the structure of landownership untouched will lead to a Habitat IV in which the same technocratic proposals are repackaged in seemingly novel conceptual garb.

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