

# “Such elements do not belong in an ordered society”: Managing rural–urban resettlement in democratic South Africa

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## Abstract

In South Africa, the scale of rural–urban resettlement after apartheid continues to overwhelm the capacity of the government to house city dwellers in need of shelter. But the legitimacy of the postapartheid government rests on its ability to secure the rights of citizens who enjoy constitutional guarantees, including the right to housing. Because the government cannot simply repress this unhoused surplus population, it seeks instead to delegitimize some portion of it. It does so by developing a number of moralizing discourses, the subject of this paper, which distinguish between patient, deserving citizens, and unruly queue jumpers perceived to threaten the democratic project itself. Housing officials misrecognize squatters as a cause, rather than a consequence, of the state's failure to deliver, policing new land occupations with a draconian severity. They justify such repression in the name of protecting the democratic order, which is assumed to require waiting instead of improvisation.

## KEYWORDS

dispossession, eviction, informal housing, postapartheid South Africa, rural–urban migration, surplus populations

## 1 | INTRODUCTION: JUSTIFYING EVICTIONS IN AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

In a single week in March of 2018, there were 65 new land occupations in Cape Town, South Africa. And in a single day of that week, the municipal government removed 1,200 “illegally erected, unoccupied structures” (GroundUp Editors, 2018). The Mayoral Committee member in charge of informal settlements, Xanthea Limberg, criticized these occupations as “large-scale, orchestrated land invasions,” describing them as a “scourge.”

Her sentiment is hardly exceptional. Although municipalities do not make data on removals publicly available, even a cursory perusal of a local newspaper would reveal the scale of both new occupations and their contestation by municipal governments. Just a few years earlier, when a thousand-person land occupation was evicted from one of Cape Town's townships, the Mayor's office celebrated the High Court ruling that upheld the injunction. A spokesperson told a community newspaper, “We welcome the ruling and hope that all affected parties would respect it. We need to distinguish between people who illegally invade council land and/or property in an attempt to get around the housing waiting list and those who are homeless” (Mpalantshane, 2011, p. 8). She, like most employees I encountered at the City's Department of Human Settlements (DHS), projected an *ex post facto* rationale onto the case: participants in the occupation were impatient, refusing to wait their turn for government-provisioned housing. Instead, they simply seized land.

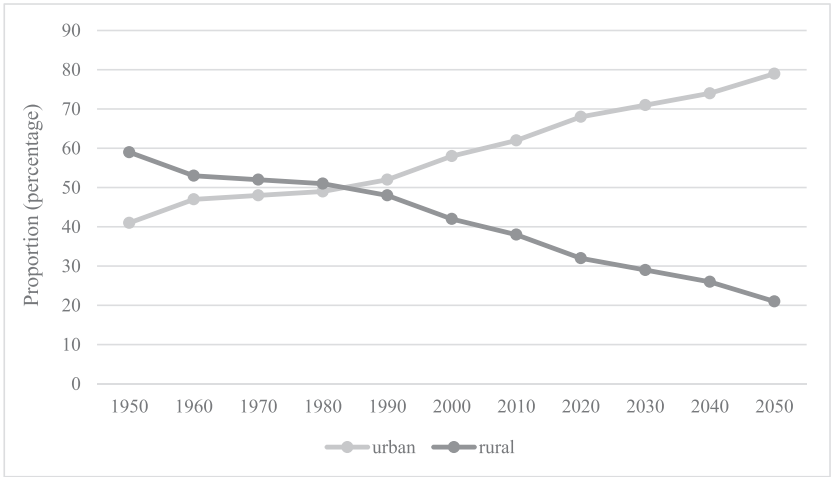
Notably, the spokesperson counterposed a category of indecorous opportunists to “those who are homeless,” suggesting a distinction based on need. Truly houseless individuals have no alternative but to erect shelter, whereas opportunists do so despite having other options. But I knew this case well, as I had been studying this particular occupation ethnographically since its inception. Although its participants came from diverse backgrounds, the majority of them settled on the land because they had no alternative. Khwezi, for example, works full time as a bus driver and is a shop steward in his union. But he supports so many extended family members with his meager wage that he cannot even afford to rent an apartment. For more than a decade, he lived in an informal settlement in the next township over, but he was forced out by violent conflicts related to overcrowding. Before that, he lived in another nearby informal settlement but was driven out by the police in the 1980s. All of his family members were likewise “deported” from Cape Town under apartheid. With nowhere else to turn, he joined some of his neighbours and tried his hand in the occupation.

Mncedisi, meanwhile, was renting a space behind a formal house just down the road from Khwezi's old settlement. Like Khwezi, her family had been expelled from the city under apartheid. She built herself a backyard shack and found it sufficient for her needs. But she had also been out of work for 5 years, and she had no immediate prospect of finding employment in a context in which the recorded unemployment rate is approaching 30%, and the real unemployment rate is roughly twice that in her neighbourhood. When Mncedisi's landlord raised the rent on her backyard tenancy, she had to leave her home behind. When she heard about Khwezi and his neighbours occupying a plot down the road, she decided to join them.

Kathy was in a similar predicament. She was living in a backyard shack with three children under five. For years, their father had paid the rent, but after he beat her one too many times, she convinced a neighbour to chase him off. This meant that she and her children were now homeless. Yet she was among those occupiers who the Mayor's spokesperson attacked as impatient opportunists.

Why do municipal officials fail to recognize land occupations as a logical outcome, if not necessary one, produced by the dire situations in which people like Khwezi, Mncedisi, and Kathy find themselves? In this article, I argue that officials' moralizing rhetoric is a rationalization that they employ in the face of an impossible situation. The abrogation of influx controls in apartheid's final decade enabled mass migration to cities (see Figure 1), signalling the end of racialized restrictions on population mobility. But without adequate formal housing available in the vicinity of urban employment centres, these rural–urban migrants constructed their own informal housing, leading to the proliferation of new settlements at unprecedented rates.

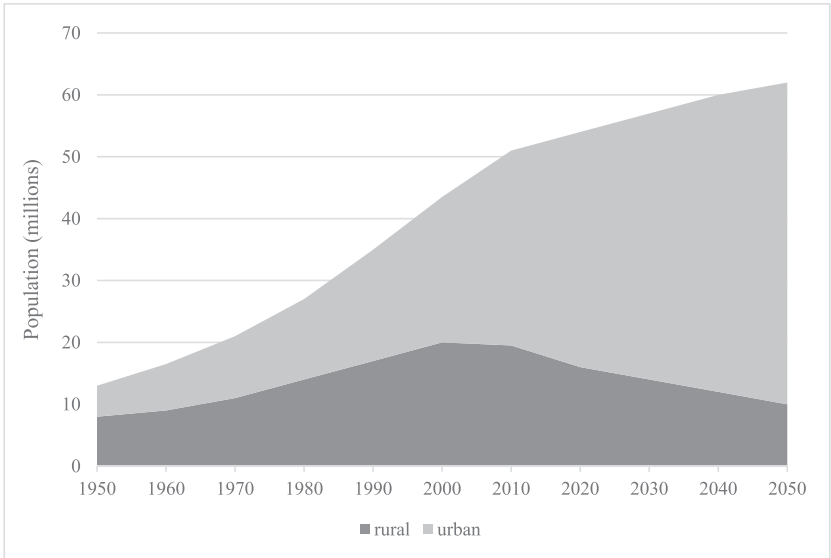
This is not to suggest that there were no efforts to address the housing crisis. When the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, the government provided free and subsidized housing on a mass scale, in



**FIGURE 1** Proportion of population urban and rural, South Africa

line with the postapartheid Constitution's guarantee: "Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing." This commitment is to be progressively realized by the state through "reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources" (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). But the rate of rural-urban migration did not slow at any point during South Africa's first two decades of democracy (see Figure 2), meaning that the gap between demand for housing and the government's inability to supply it continued to grow. Given fiscal constraints on housing provision, as well as the ANC-led government's reliance upon private sector construction firms and its reluctance to expropriate land (Bond, 2000; Huchzermeyer, 2011), the growth of the housing backlog exceeded the scale of delivery in nearly every major city (Levenson, 2017).

DHS employees are perpetually frustrated by their inability to close this backlog, seeing themselves as the protagonists of the democratic project of housing distribution. They therefore view any forces hampering their delivery



**FIGURE 2** Urban and rural populations, South Africa

efforts as in direct conflict with democratization, and in their most immediately observable form, these forces are land occupations. Thus rural–urban migration, a force which necessitates housing delivery in the first place, has come to be viewed not as delivery's rationale but as an impediment to its realization. It is this transformation that undergirds DHS officials' moralizing discourse, which displaces blame from structural forces onto houseless individuals.

With moralizing discourse comes repression, which in this case means eviction. The Constitution prohibits “arbitrary evictions,” requiring an “an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances” (RSA, 1996). Subsequent legislation, the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act, further specifies the conditions under which it is “just and equitable” for a judge to authorize an eviction (RSA, 1998). These legal limits on forced removals mean that DHS officials sometimes display disdain for court rulings, viewing them as a further limit on their ability to implement housing delivery. Given housing delivery's association with the broader project of realizing democracy, it is particularly ironic that they would speak contemptuously of constitutional guarantees. Yet as I argue in this paper, this is how municipal housing officials tend to make sense of the emergence of land occupations in the postapartheid period. Occupiers, meanwhile, find themselves subject to a new crisis upon migrating to cities, caught between the choice of “waiting” in peri-urban areas far from employment centres, or else trying their luck in land occupations. In a democratic context, occupations have at least the possibility of being tolerated, which can greatly improve residents' economic prospects. But housing officials misrecognize these new occupations as a cause of the crisis, rather than one of its many consequences. Their hostility translates into a new round of dispossession in which squatters are forced from their recently constructed homes.

Such evictions then challenge prevailing explanations for dispossession. Forced removals cannot be reduced to the logic of the land grab through which residents are displaced and the land is transformed into “real estate.” Rather than latter day enclosures (e.g., de Angelis, 2007; Harvey, 2003; Sassen, 2014), this type of dispossession is the paradoxical consequence of well-intentioned housing officials trying to remedy previous rounds of dispossession. By failing to understand urban evictions in relation to the agrarian question in South Africa, what I have called an “impossible situation,” DHS employees lay blame at the feet of the most immediate obstacles they face: squatters. This paper then moves beyond the reductive attribution of all dispossession to some overdetermining logic of accumulation, typically branded “neoliberalism” in the literature. This is not to bend the stick and insist that dispossession is always the result of a political as opposed to an economic logic but rather to suggest that we analyse each instance of dispossession in its proper context. It is in its inattention to local contexts that much of the literature linking dispossession to neoliberalism has proved unhelpful, both analytically and strategically.

In order to develop such a contextual analysis, I carried out 13 months of fieldwork in Cape Town and an additional 4 months in Johannesburg and Durban between September 2011 and August 2017. During this timeframe, I studied new land occupations facing eviction, as well as existing occupations that were ultimately tolerated. Over the same period, I interviewed 30 officials at the DHS, as well as relevant housing policy consultants, non-governmental organization workers, lawyers, and activists. As is evident from the duration of my research stints in each city, the bulk of my study was carried out in Cape Town, though I explored similar processes in Johannesburg and Durban for comparative purposes.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section situates the regulation of surplus populations<sup>1</sup> in the context of longer standing debates over repression in peripheral<sup>2</sup> national contexts, taking the work of Giovanni Arrighi and

<sup>1</sup>I define *surplus populations* as houseless residents who could not be absorbed into relations of waged employment. McIntyre and Nast (2011, p. 1468) point to the typically racialized nature of surplus populations, identifying them as “the effect of racially striated regimes of biological reproduction.” Although they may be correct that surplus populations are usually stigmatized (with racialization but one possible mode of stigmatization), this is not an essential part of defining the concept. My own understanding is closer to that of Tania Murray Li (2009), who argues that these populations are surplus to the needs of capitalist production. She is careful to distinguish them from what Marx called a “reserve army of labour,” which is not surplus to the needs of capital insofar as its very existence depresses wages.

<sup>2</sup>In this paper, I use *peripheral* to designate positions in the global capitalist economy that are competitive but do not accrue monopolistic profits (Arrighi & Drangel, 1986; Arrighi & Piselli, 1987). South Africa might be considered peripheral insofar as domestic production is overwhelmingly organized around a minerals–energy complex at the expense of economic diversification (Fine & Rustumjee, 1996). In addition, financialization of the minerals–energy complex has led to the systematic offshoring of surplus and increasingly foreign control of market capitalization on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (Ashman, Levenson, & Ngwane, 2017).

Harold Wolpe as a point of departure for explaining the postapartheid housing crisis. The second section maps out the DHS, identifying its key functions in relation to the task of governing surplus populations. The third section turns to these populations themselves, demonstrating the impossibility of simply “waiting” until housing is delivered. In failing to place land occupations in their proper context, namely, the long arc of dispossession, DHS employees ascribe a false choice to residents: between patiently waiting and preemptively “invading” land. The fourth section explains the practical consequences of this decontextualization, tracing governmental employees’ production of moralizing discourses, which in turn legitimize new rounds of dispossession. The municipality responds to new occupations by policing them with a draconian severity, clearing entire informal neighbourhoods in the process. Such repression is the focus of the fifth section. The conclusion explores the implications of the fact that these moralizing discourses arise from a technocratic approach to democratization rather than some narrowly construed neoliberal drive towards accumulation. It suggests that instead of rooting all ongoing dispossession in a necessary logic of accumulation, we should examine dispossession conjuncturally, which means taking the stated motivations of its architects seriously.

## 2 | DISPOSSESSION: THEN AND NOW

In the 1970s, Arrighi, Wolpe, and a number of like-minded scholars based in Southern Africa researched a peculiarity of so many colonial regimes (Arrighi, 1973; Arrighi & Piselli, 1987; Burawoy, 1976; Meillasoux, 1972; Wolpe, 1980). At the time, the prevailing approach was that of modernization theorists (Apter, 1967; Lipset, 1981; Organski, 1973; Rostow, 1991), who insisted that capitalist social relations, once introduced into a given national context, would run roughshod over any remaining “precapitalist” enclaves, which were understood to be merely residual. But this emergent group of writers challenged the modernization paradigm, demonstrating that across the periphery, capitalist governments often worked to maintain these spaces. Arrighi (1973), for example, observed the active fostering of subsistence enclaves in colonial Rhodesia as a means of subsidizing<sup>3</sup> capitalist wage labour. Likewise, Wolpe (1980) described the early 20th century in South Africa as the government’s attempt to defend “African redistributive economies.” Although the story is not as straightforward in Arrighi and Piselli’s (1987) account of peripheral development in southern Italy, they similarly observed the compatibility of subsistence farming and wage labour in the development of capitalism.

However, none of these authors conceived of this social formation as particularly stable; hence, nearly all of their writings noted that the burden fell on the state to fortify subsistence production. Even so, some section of the agrarian semiproletariat was itself incrementally proletarianized, forced to sell its labour-power for a wage. For example, as South Africa developed a substantial home market in the late 19th century, landowners decreasingly realized profits from renting their land. Increasingly, they relied upon the sale of farm produce, which correspondingly entailed the elimination of the Black peasantry (Bundy, 1988), transforming them into rural wage labour. Indeed, by the 1920s, peasant production was quite rare (Morris, 1976, pp. 206, 212, 215). In all of the cases discussed in this literature, the incipient proletariat was met with state repression. In Wolpe’s (1980, p. 310) account, coercion was the apartheid state’s response to Black workers’ demands for higher wages, for union representation, and for better working conditions. As former peasants became unable to make ends meet in rural areas, they sought out supplementary sources of income in cities. Or in the Arrighi and Piselli (1987, p. 654) version of this narrative, peasants become semiproletarianized, forced to supplement subsistence production with the sale of labour. And when this happens,

<sup>3</sup>Marx (1933, p. 26) understood the absolute minimum wage as “the cost required for the maintenance of the labourer as a labourer, and for his education and training as a labourer.” In other words, this was conceived as an iron floor below which wages could not possibly sink. But Arrighi, Wolpe, and others point out that these wages actually *can* be depressed if workers receive a portion of their means of subsistence from outside the marketplace. If authoritarian regimes can successfully limit unbridled proletarianization, shielding a certain number of subsistence producers from dispossession, peasant production can be used to cover some of the maintenance costs of wage labourers (Burawoy, 1976). It is in this sense that we can think of subsistence enclaves as “subsidizing” the cost of reproducing labour-power, which amounts to lowering the iron floor, reducing wages below what was previously understood to be a biological limit necessary for subsistence.

governments respond by “supplement[ing] the invisible hand of the market with the visible hands of repressive apparatuses” (Arrighi & Piselli, 1987, p. 703).

In South Africa, increasingly proletarianized rural producers migrated to cities in search of waged employment (Kok & Collinson, 2006; Mabin, 1992). Apartheid, in Wolpe's telling, represented a political effort to counteract these economic forces “in the face of the disintegration of the pre-capitalist economy” (Wolpe, 1980, p. 296); or to put the same point differently, to manage, and in some cases actually reverse, processes of urbanization. In apartheid South Africa, colonial Rhodesia, and 19th century Italy, authoritarian regimes could do just that, trying to counteract the dull compulsion of the market by politico-coercive means. But how might this process unfold in a *democratic* context?

As apartheid's racialized restrictions on population mobility were progressively lifted in the 1980s, an increasing number of residents began to flee the underdeveloped rural areas that were called Bantustans under apartheid (Jensen & Zenker, 2015; King & McCusker, 2007; Westaway, 2012; Xulu, 2012), leaving for cities in search of work. It was in this context that informal settlements proliferated on the margins of South Africa's cities, with roughly a quarter to a third of South African urbanites living in shacks by the early 2000s (Hendricks, Ntsebeza, & Helliker, 2013, p. 6). Meanwhile, the government failed to link housing provision to employment opportunities (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Zack & Charlton, 2003), which were declining substantially in any case. Against a backdrop of longer term deindustrialization and financialization, unskilled employment plummeted at alarming rates (Seekings & Nattrass, 2002), and the official unemployment rate exceeded 30% by the early 2000s (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren, & Woolard, 2008), rarely falling below 25% in the years since.

Why did the postapartheid government not pursue an agrarian strategy that might have reduced push factors in the former Bantustans, potentially slowing the pace of rural–urban resettlement? First and foremost, the ANC lacked the political will to implement land reform. Expanding rural land for Black farmers would have required expropriation on a mass scale, but the ANC refused this option early on, enshrining the right to property in the 1996 Constitution (Hendricks, 2013; Ntsebeza, 2007). The ANC's land reform policy, which came to be known as “willing buyer, willing seller,” limited land redistribution efforts to voluntary market exchange (Hall, 2004, 2007; Kepe, 2009; Kepe & Hall, 2018; Lahiff, 2007). During the programme's first two decades, less than 6% of White-owned land was redistributed to “Africans” (Hendricks, 2013, pp. 48–49; cf. Borras, 2003; Lahiff, 2007). Some scholars explain this outcome by pointing to the ANC's willingness to grant concessions to the apartheid National Party during the transition (Ntsebeza, 2007, pp. 110–117), whereas others point to the party's preference for creating a Black commercial farming class over redistributive measures (Hart, 2002, p. 11).

Second, the antiapartheid movement, which would come to constitute the ANC's primary base, was overwhelmingly urban (Hart, 2002; Murray, 1987). Today, elected leaders have more to gain by distributing housing and services to peri-urban squatters than they do from land redistribution and restitution in South Africa's rural hinterlands. Third, the scale of dispossession in South Africa was so extensive—nowhere else on the continent compares—that, even if the ANC had wanted to do so, there was no possibility of reviving an independent, surplus-producing peasantry (Hendricks, 2013, pp. 47–49), which, in any case, had not existed in numbers since the 19th century. Indeed, the majority of the rural population remains un(der)employed, without direct access to land, and heavily dependent upon cash transfers (both state grants and private remittances) for survival. Fourth, as Barchiesi (2011, p. 64) powerfully demonstrates, the ANC inherited a workerist bias that “allowed the government to translate its concerns for the poor into a commitment to job creation,” avoiding redistributive measures altogether. And fifth and finally, the ANC struck a careful balance with traditional authorities in the former Bantustans, entrenching a deeply undemocratic system of land governance in many rural areas (Ntsebeza, 2005, 2013). The ANC was more concerned with a strategy of reconciliation than remediation, and therefore, as with the National Party, it was quite willing to compromise with potentially hostile parties.

With agrarian redevelopment off the table, rural–urban resettlement saw no sign of slowing down, and with it came the proliferation of new land occupations. Given the failure of housing delivery to even partially resolve this predicament, municipal governments have turned to dispossession as a means of regulating the emergence of new occupations. In so doing, they target those most affected by South Africa's housing crisis, erecting a moralizing

discourse that effectively blames squatters for their own dispossession, though it does not do so indiscriminately. Instead, it distinguishes impatient, disorderly occupiers from “good citizens” who wait their turn. This account challenges narratives of urban dispossession that reduce the concept to the pertinacious logic of capital accumulation. Here, we see a very different neoliberal rationality in play: rather than straightforwardly evicting in the name of the growth machine, urban dispossession happens in the name of shoring up the postapartheid government's status as democratic. As James Ferguson (2010, p. 171) has argued, we cannot make sense of actually existing macroeconomic strategies in postcolonial contests without thinking neoliberalism in relation to “the contingencies of democratic politics.” It is for that reason that I consider rationales for repression in the context of South Africa's democratization. When both municipal officials and land occupiers articulate their projects as components of democratization, we need to be able to distinguish between them, as well as understand how these competing conceptions interact to produce governmental decisions. It is to these governmental decision-makers that I now turn.

### 3 | THE DHS: AN OVERVIEW

DHS oversees both formal housing distribution and informal settlement policies. It has offices at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, with the national Minister of Human Settlements appointed by the President—typically a career politician without a background in housing policy. By contrast, most employees of the national DHS as well as at the provincial and municipal levels are longer term housing policymakers. Over time, decision-making capacity has devolved onto the municipalities, with the municipal DHS broadly coordinating three main tasks relevant for our purposes.<sup>4</sup> First, it manages the *provision* of formal housing and increasingly, what it calls “housing opportunities”—the distribution of greenfield sites and building materials, the latest iteration of a self-help housing scheme, as well as access to potable water and toilets. In order to gain access to these homes and “housing opportunities,” each prospective recipient household must make below R3,500<sup>5</sup> in combined monthly income and register at a local branch office of the DHS. Registration provides potential recipients with a place on a waiting list. Although DHS officials maintain that the list is impartial, consistent complaints about irregularities have called these claims into question (Levenson, 2017; Tissington, Munshi, Mirugi-Mukundi, & Durojaye, 2013). Once a registrant is selected, the DHS releases a subsidy in their name to the contractor who successfully bids for construction rights.

The second major task of the DHS is to keep track of new land occupations and coordinate *removals* where necessary. In Cape Town, it does this through a proxy agency called the Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU), whose offices are located in a compound more than 20 km east of the city centre. This puts them in close proximity to the region of the city where new land occupations tend to occur, colloquially known as the Cape Flats and home to a majority of the city's population. ALIU does not, however, have the legal ability to actually implement evictions. Instead, across a footpath from ALIU's main office is a branch office of the South African Police Service (SAPS). If ALIU monitors new occupations through regular site visits and a fleet of sports utility vehicles patrolling the Flats, it is SAPS that actually oversees the removal of physical housing and other possessions.

Third and finally, DHS coordinates the *regularization* of new informal settlements. When land occupations are deemed legitimate by the courts, they are officially tolerated by the City's DHS. Regularization entails coordination with other departments, including the installation of potable water taps and sanitation facilities. It also involves a

<sup>4</sup>This characterization of the DHS is drawn primarily from interviews and observations in Cape Town. Although the broad contours of this narrative apply to other municipalities in South Africa, the institutional configuration of the DHS as a whole must be understood as regionally differentiated along multiple axes. First, some municipalities have greater autonomy vis-à-vis provincial and national levels of government based upon degrees of accreditation and policymaking strategy. Second, each municipal DHS's approach to housing delivery needs to be understood in relation to spatial context. For example, city-centre evictions are a major issue in Johannesburg, whereas they are fairly marginal in Cape Town. And upgrading settlements closer to the central business district is more frequent in Durban than in Johannesburg or Cape Town. Third, municipal and provincial autonomy vis-à-vis the national department can vary in relation to which party is in power. The Democratic Alliance has controlled both Cape Town and the Western Cape for over a decade, that is, at the municipal and provincial levels, whereas in Durban, the ANC governs at both levels. (The Democratic Alliance, South Africa's affiliate to the Liberal International, is the official opposition party to the ANC.) This affects how they each relate to the DHS at the national level, which is firmly under ANC control.

<sup>5</sup>At the time of writing, this was just under US\$290.



process called enumeration in which DHS representatives paint numbers onto each shack, providing an informal address of sorts. Sometimes, regularization entails the reconfiguration of the spatial layout of a settlement—a process called reblocking that allows internal roads to be widened in order to facilitate the entry of emergency vehicles.

DHS' first and third tasks—provision and regularization—stand in stark contrast to its second: removals. The project of managing the rapid urbanization of surplus populations in a newly democratic context does not simply entail some combination of welfare functions (provision and regularization) and repression (evictions). Instead, municipal governments must decide on a case-by-case basis which residents to evict and, conversely, which to tolerate, providing them with new housing or regularizing their existing settlements.

## 4 | WAITING AS AN IMPOSSIBLE IDEAL

The state that decides who to evict and who to tolerate is, of course, a complex agent. Municipal governments are not monolithic actors who straightforwardly project their decisions onto passive populations below. For one thing, a diverse set of motivations undergirds the actions of each individual working for DHS, each of whom operates within specific institutional constraints and political contexts. Yet this heterogeneity does not preclude a degree of state coherence, which, as Bénéit-Gbaffou (2018, p. 2154) has recently argued, tends to coalesce in an ad hoc and temporary fashion in relation to events framed as “public issues.” In the case of informal housing policy, this means that moralizing discourses cohere in relation to new land occupations and, more specifically, in relation to groups of squatters collectively erecting housing on land to which they have no immediate legal claim.

DHS employees tend to describe housing distribution as a formally rational process (Levenson, 2017). In June 2014, I attended a public forum on the waiting list. An occupier from a primarily Black township interrupted the presentation to insist that she had followed all of the City's protocols, but years later, she was still waiting for housing. It was for this reason that she occupied a tract of land, as she had no other long-term solution. “They say they have a process,” she shouted, “but it's a complete mess. We wait and wait until we have to burn tires in the road. Why must we come to a crisis to get information?”

A representative of Cape Town's municipal DHS cut her off. “This issue is not about allocation or the database. We have to ask instead, why are so many people coming to the cities?” Another occupier, this one from a Coloured township, was not satisfied with her answer. “The real problem is municipal corruption,” she insisted. “We can't get information even though we submitted our forms, and then when we ask about it, they tell us, ‘We're not obligated [to share information].’ Not obligated? This is what they tell us!” The DHS official asked her if she were on the waiting list. “I've registered for the waiting list twice already, and to be honest, at this point I'm not interested,” she replied in disgust.

The DHS official lectured her: “Citizens need to update their information regularly every time they move. Go to your local and regional offices. Otherwise we can't keep track of where you are.” A second DHS official, this one from the provincial level, agreed with his municipal counterpart: “The biggest problem we have is not finding people even if they are on the waiting list. Please let us know if you move!” Both officials' responses claimed that the list was exceptionally responsive to the populations they ostensibly governed. They insisted upon the comprehensive nature of the list, displacing blame onto residents themselves, who they assumed failed to follow proper procedures.

And sometimes they did fail to register properly. Another land occupier from a Coloured area told me that she could not get onto the municipality's waiting list because she did not have a government-issued ID card. I asked her why she did not apply for one. “It's too expensive,” she told me. “A hundred and twenty rands for the ID, plus 30 for a temporary, plus some fees. Altogether it's like 200.” Although this is less than USD\$15, it was a sufficient barrier to keep her from registering. I encountered many others in the same occupation and neighbouring settlements who made similar claims. A squatter in a mixed Black and Coloured settlement told me that his family and eight of his neighbours' families were left out of an upgrading project because they lacked ID cards. I asked him why he did not try to replace them. He told me that for a family of six, that would cost over R1000 [>US\$70], and he did not have the cash on hand.



A more common refrain was that they did register properly but could not find themselves on the list when they searched the online database. Or else they received confirmation that they were on the list but observed irregularities. One of the squatters quoted above alleged “municipal corruption.” This was a constantly circulating assertion, typically substantiated by rumours, though occasionally corroborated by DHS employees. Mary’s experience is a case in point. She currently lives in a temporary relocation area (TRA), having been relocated after her shack elsewhere in the city was deemed illegal and demolished. In reality, it was hardly a temporary arrangement, as she had already been living there for 4 years when I first met her, and she remains there today, more than 5 years after that. Earlier that year, a number of residents in her TRA were moved into formal, state-provisioned housing constructed from a Styrofoam-like substance and coated in corrugated zinc sheets—so-called Nutec houses. “Why was I not moved into a Nutec house?” she asked me. She pointed out that residents who had arrived only recently in her TRA were able to secure spaces in this new development, whereas she had been there for years and was excluded from the option. “I know they were sold off for bribes of less than five hundred rands,” she insisted to me. “This is what the City wants: you pay your own people!”

Rumour or otherwise, it was difficult to envision squatters as having faith in the system of housing distribution given how widely these discourses of corruption, disorder, and material barriers to registration circulated in their neighbourhoods. Sometimes, these were not rumours at all. For example, the majority of the squatters in an occupation in Grassy Park were relocated to a formal housing development, allowed to “jump the queue” ahead of people who had been on the waiting list for decades. People in land occupations in the surrounding townships cited this case to me when I asked them about their perception of the waiting list. A squatter in Overcome Heights, not far from Grassy Park, told me about what happened in the occupation and concluded, “If people still get houses before us, even if we register properly and all that, why should we bother with a list? It makes no sense.”

This particular exception was confirmed to me in a joint interview with the DHS’ Director of Public Housing and its Head of the Housing Information Branch. I told them that I spent some time in the Grassy Park occupation and had heard rumours circulating about the impending move. One of them blamed it on the City Council, complaining that politicians constantly interfered with the DHS’ calculable approach to distribution. A former mayor had promised the squatters houses, and even though she had been out of office for years by this point, her party controlled the Council. Both of them were visibly irate. In making the exception, however, the damage was done. Squatters do not tend to disaggregate the multiple actors and institutions that comprise what we might describe in shorthand as “the state”; instead, they condense these various forces into a single entity, to which they then ascribe the dysfunctionality of the system of housing distribution.

A growing literature examines how such perceptions of a monolithic and oppressive state apparatus shape squatters’ political subjectivities. For Auyero (2012, p. 9), this is a subjectivity of submission and compliance. “The urban poor,” he writes,

*in their frequent encounters with politicians, bureaucrats, and officials, learn to be patients of the state. In recurrently being forced to accommodate and yield to the state’s dictates, the urban poor thereby receive a subtle, and usually not explicit, daily lesson in political subordination. This has the effect of “mold[ing] a particular submissive set of dispositions among the urban poor.”*

Other scholars reject Auyero’s formulation of the state as a monolith capable of producing patiently compliant subjects. Oldfield and Greyling (2015) point out that people waiting for houses often learn to “work the system” in order to secure exactly the sorts of exceptions on display in the Grassy Park occupation. They are hardly patients in waiting as in Auyero’s account. Or else they extricate themselves from the housing bureaucracy altogether, “tak[ing] charge by dodging, resisting, defying, commandeering, diverting, building homes, earning incomes and attempting in many other banal and spectacular ways to improve their lives” (Ballard, 2015, p. 220). More concretely, this is akin to what Bayat (2013, p. 35) calls the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary”: “noncollective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives ... in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion.” Thieme (2018, p. 542; cf. 2017) describes this approach as “hustling,” by which she means “a

potentially progressive politics of adaptation and experimentation.” This is not to suggest that we should idealize squatters as militants or insurgents. But it does mean that we must refrain from seeing them as governmental actors tend to, namely, as passive material that can be manipulated at will from above.

Indeed, the governmental expectation that squatters wait patiently, passively, and indefinitely produces a situation in which quiet encroachment and hustling are their only options; waiting as such becomes an impossibility. Yet as I show in the following section, this is precisely how DHS employees think about squatting. They tend to normalize waiting, despite its impossibility, which has the effect of rendering self-provisioning in the interim as deviant, threatening, and nefarious. At the same June 2014 forum, I watched another squatter from the same township bring up examples of corruption—state-orchestrated queue jumping, really—in her own township. She insisted that she had been on the waiting list for 15 years and that she could not wait any longer. The provincial DHS official, one of the architects of the City of Cape Town's waiting list, responded as if 15 years were not a long time at all. “We work off the oldest applications,” he explained. “We had some, believe it or not, that went back to the 1960s. That's how behind we are. There were others from the 70s and 80s.” He was clearly admitting that postapartheid housing delivery had yet to begin; they were still using apartheid-era waiting lists. How then were residents supposed to hold out hope that they might receive housing in their own lifetimes, let alone the immediate future?

## 5 | MORALIZING DISCOURSES

It is in this context that residents decide to occupy land. Against a backdrop of a lack of other options, occupations are effectively facts on the ground. Yet the logic of their necessity does not figure into governmental evaluations of their legitimacy. In this section, I discuss three recurrent tropes I encountered while conducting interviews with DHS employees: squatters as political impediments, as undeserving migrants, and as improper citizens. Each will be considered in turn.

### 5.1 | Squatters as political impediments

As I demonstrate in the previous section, even if inadequately housed residents were willing to wait, there is no feasible way for them to do so. TRAs are mostly at capacity, and besides, they are notoriously undesirable (Levenson, 2018; Ranslem, 2015). The extent of overcrowding means that staying with friends or relatives is not always possible. But these needs are rarely taken into account. More commonly, the various nuisances that housing officials and judges might associate with the growth of informal housing are transposed onto residents themselves (Ghertner, 2011, p. 287), as if they were deliberately attempting to confront the state as opposed to self-provisioning, hustling, and “making do” in the perpetual meanwhile (Simone, 2004; Simone & Pieterse, 2017; Thieme, 2018).

As scholars of informal housing politics in India have repeatedly observed, squatters are typically excluded from being able to make legitimate demands on local government. Chatterjee (2004, p. 38) characterizes them as “[im]proper members of civil society” who lack recognition by institutions of the state. Similarly, Ghertner (2008, p. 62) describes them “as a secondary category of citizens whose ‘social justice’ becomes actionable only after the fulfillment of the rights of” formally housed residents. Indeed, as Bhan (2009, p. 139) demonstrates in the case of Delhi, necessity is written out of the governmental calculus altogether: “in order, ethically, to justify denying a national citizen his text-based rights, it becomes necessary to make the informal settler into an ‘improper’ citizen.”

Yet squatters are left in a material bind. Even if they were to abandon immediate demands in favour of comporting themselves as “patients of the state” (Auyero, 2012), they would still need to self-provision, auto-constructing shelter for their families in the interim (Caldeira, 2017; Holston, 2008). But as Cape Town DHS' head of land acquisitions insisted to me in 2013, “Urbanisation alone is a reality that we need to cope with, but I think a lot of it is politically motivated and purely aimed at embarrassing and/or just jumping queue. I mean, this is really the issue.” She minimized the objective pressures of the postapartheid housing crisis, ascribing a willfully obstructive

bent to participants in new land occupations. They were either pawns of rival parties, or more likely from her perspective, attempting to force a government that frowned upon unregulated settlements to bump them to the top of the waiting list and give them formal homes on the spot.

In all of the time I spent studying new occupations in Cape Town, I never encountered a squatter who saw self-provisioning as a means of jumping the queue. The majority described their project as one of necessity: they had to live *somewhere* until they made it to the top of the list, a position to which they had no guarantees. Others framed occupations as participating in the project of democratization, fulfilling their constitutional right to adequate housing where the state had failed to do so. In one such occupation in a Coloured township, residents of an emergent occupation described their encounters with representatives of the state as limited to a repressive capacity. The state, in this telling, was not fulfilling the democratic promise of housing distribution, but instead acting as a potential initiator of eviction proceedings. Their elected leadership consistently invoked Section 26 of the Constitution, denouncing eviction threats as constituting “arbitrary evictions.” They reference their “right to have access to adequate housing,” reasoning that if this were not provided by the government, they would have to do it for themselves.

In another Coloured occupation just months earlier, squatters were convened by an organization called the Backyard Dwellers' Association (BDA). BDA leaders represented the occupation as a part of the government's housing delivery project, and for that reason, on the day the occupation began, residents thought they were participating in a legitimate, state-sanctioned housing programme. The land was owned by the municipal government and was an open field next to a commuter railway station. They paid a small fee to the BDA, and when they arrived along with a thousand others that day, people were on their hands and knees with members of the association, marking out plots of land with bits of string and wooden stakes—almost as if it were actually private property. Even if the homes were flimsy and the plots small, residents perceived themselves as homeowners in the making. This sentiment is akin to what Makhulu (2015, p. 25) describes as “making freedom,” a quotidian politics that draws “strength from an organic and ever-evolving set of needs and demands on the part of ordinary people in the course of daily life.” As one participant in the occupation told me at the time, “We wanted a home. We didn't want to be by my ma and pa any longer. We wanted *our* place.” Yet squatters' articulations of democratic politics that they understood as consistent with the constitutional right to housing came into direct conflict with the DHS formulation. Residents were not seen to be upholding or even implementing democratization; rather, they were preventing its realization.

## 5.2 | Squatters as undeserving migrants

In addition to political impediments, I encountered DHS employees deriding squatters as migrants, as if this rendered them undeserving of access to urban housing. The term “migrant” is racially charged in the South African context in a double sense. First, a popular racist narrative holds that Bantu-speaking Africans migrated to South Africa from elsewhere on the continent, arriving contemporaneously with Dutch colonists in the 17th century. Though this narrative was thoroughly disproven in the 1970s (Maylam, 1986; Sparks, 1990), dating their arrival to the Iron Age, it remains in circulation today. It is not only White South Africans who draw on this trope. An increasingly popular Coloured nationalism invokes the rhetoric of indigeneity in order to claim descent from the Western Cape's original inhabitants, the Khoikhoi and the San. Drawing upon phenotype, they would associate their brownness with indigeneity, disavowing blackness as foreign or a sign of being out of place.

A second way that the trope of the “migrant” is deployed against Black Capetonians is to define them as internal immigrants from the Eastern Cape who are coming, not returning, to Cape Town. Under apartheid, they were forcibly expelled to newly created Bantustans in that province. This meant that all Black South Africans were defined as transient workers if they were granted permits, or else as illegal occupants of the city. When they returned years later, both pushed by rural underdevelopment and pulled by urban employment opportunities, they were called “migrants” by Whites and Coloureds alike, stigmatized as inherently agrarian people.

Because of the charged history of the term, I was surprised to hear DHS employees dismiss land occupiers as “migrants.” “In many instances, they don’t see this as home,” Marlize Odendal told me unprompted when I interviewed her in 2013. She oversees both preemptive and retroactive municipal land purchases for the DHS in cases of resettlement. “It’s purely an economic opportunity, and you’ll find in December there is literally an exodus for people going back to their homes.” Every December, the height of South African summer, the city virtually empties out. Many isiXhosa speakers visit relatives in the Eastern Cape, and many other residents go on vacation. But Odendal took the rural–urban connections generated by apartheid to signal Black residents’ foreignness. “They don’t refer to Cape Town as their homes—not because it’s a hostile place or whatever, but it’s that there’s a linkage, a traditional linkage, to very specific areas in the Eastern Cape.”

This explains Black rural–urban resettlement in Cape Town. But in addition, Coloured residents often resettled within the city. After more than 60,000 were forcibly evicted from the city centre between 1960 and 1980, they were moved to newly created peri-urban townships. Evictees either received free formal housing or else they participated in rent-to-own schemes. These neighbourhoods were industrially mass-produced, with blocks often indistinguishable from one another, and each concrete home nearly identical. Typically, each section of a neighbourhood would have thematically named streets. For example, when I stayed in one such house for a year in a large Coloured township, it was on Snooker Street. Nearby streets included Hopscotch, Judo, Karate, and Netball.

But as Coloured families expanded, the postapartheid state could no longer keep up with proliferating demand. The mass influx of residents in search of employment, coupled with the expansion of families already there, overwhelmed the delivery apparatus. Given the exceedingly slow pace of housing distribution, many children of relocated couples, now in their 40s and 50s, seek out homes of their own. Sometimes, this takes the form of backyarding, the predominant type of informal housing in Cape Town’s Coloured townships (Lemanski, 2009). Many residents simply erect a shack in the backyard of a formal house, favouring the security of this arrangement over that of an informal settlement. Backyarders may be able to obtain access to water, toilets, and electricity; reduce their risk of falling prey to violent crime; and, perhaps most importantly, evade the wrath of the SAPS or the ALIU.

Under apartheid, the government could forcibly evict offending squatters, either incarcerating them, destroying their shacks and leaving them to fend for themselves, or forcibly expelling them from the city limits. But after apartheid, at precisely the moment when the crisis of unbridled urbanization reached its peak, the state could no longer simply deploy coercion as a means of clearing irksome settlements. Instead, the newly installed ANC government emphasized the democratic nature of its rule, explicitly counterposing it to the authoritarianism of apartheid. Any forces that inhibited the project of housing delivery were represented as obstacles to democratization. Ironically, it was the intended beneficiaries of this delivery project who came to be construed as impediments to its implementation. The moralizing distinction between residents whose behaviour is conducive to democratization and those whose actions threaten the democratic project is then an ad hoc justification for removals in a case in which closing the housing backlog is a structural impossibility.

### 5.3 | Squatters as improper citizens

In constructing this distinction, which residents are construed as threats to democracy? This brings us to our third trope, that of improper citizens. Officials and judges construct an elaborate moralizing narrative that privileges “good citizens” who wait their turn over “opportunists” and “queue jumpers” who do not, with a total disregard for the material pressures on squatters as discussed above. Sometimes, this moralization even pits various governmental agencies against one another, revealing the limits of any monolithic conception of a consciously acting state. For example, housing officials are often at odds with the courts, as when one DHS employee complained to me about a judge’s ruling that upheld the right of a group of squatters to stay put. “That actually encourages that delinquent behavior!” she exclaimed. “It encourages it! I just can’t believe that the Court is starting—I can understand that the Court could rule in such a way if it understood the City’s—if the City didn’t have any plans or programmes in place, if the City was failing in its duty to provide housing within the resource constraints that exist in any country.”

In this particular case, the land occupation was tolerated. But when two nearby occupations were ruled illegal by a High Court, the judge described his rationale for granting the City its eviction interdict: "Such elements do not belong in an ordered society," he insisted, "who then abuse their own people who are vulnerable to their schemes." In attacking the group that had organized the occupation, he denied that it was a group that "fights for the rights of backyard dwellers," claiming instead that it was a faction engaged in "haphazard business." An "ordered society," he suggested was essential to the project of democratization; when squatters upset this required order, they threaten the technocratic understanding of democracy as a project.

The judge proceeded to call the occupiers "opportunists" in Afrikaans before lecturing them, tongue in cheek: "That piece of land seems to me to be very nice with the sea air blowing over the hill," he joked. "I want to stay there, so now I'm going to take me a piece of land so I can just sit there. Then it takes the City Council months to get to me, and since I built my place and brought my children, even if I'm brought to court, it's now too late to evict me. It does not work like that." As indicated in the introduction, the Mayor's spokesperson concurred with the judge. She drew a moralizing distinction between people who threaten the administration of democracy—who can even be evicted in the name of upholding democracy—and those who are "homeless," meaning they comport themselves so as to be recipients of government aid.

What does it mean to comport oneself as a "good citizen"? According to Alida Koetzee, DHS' head of public housing, the housing waiting list includes "those who expressed a need and actually came forward to register like a good citizen should." Residents who register with the government and then wait patiently are "good citizens," she rationalized, whereas those who are late to register or else remain skeptical of the delivery system are delinquents. She suggested that recipients of free government housing would frequently refuse to live in their newly constructed homes. Instead, they would either hold them as capital and rent them out to supplement household income or, else, they would sell them illegally.

Heinrich Lotze and Herman Steyn oversee new settlements for DHS. They explained to me that government home recipients are prohibited from selling the structures for 8 years. In some instances, they sell them anyway, but far below market value, as the sale is illegal. Sometimes, they may need immediate access to cash, but more likely, housing delivery without the attendant provision of employment and affordable transportation makes accepting a peripherally located home unwise. For example, if one needed to seek out work in the central business district but took a house on the peri-urban fringe, the cost of a daily commute might double or even triple as compared with a more central location. Becoming a homeowner does not cover the cost of taxi or train fare; only liquid cash does. Often in this case, residents rent or sell their homes at submarket rates and move back to the very informal settlements from which they were relocated in the first place. "He subtly rents it," Lotze told me, referring to what he condemned as hypothetical profiteering by the recipient of a government home.

More generally, officials emphasized what they claimed was the objective inaccuracy of residents' criticism of the housing distribution system. "There's a lot of mistrust against the system," Stein asserted. "You've probably picked it up. People out there are not necessarily convinced that the correct people got the houses." I encountered countless residents during my fieldwork who alleged fraud, or else who could not understand the logic of the waiting list. They knew some residents who registered and received homes within a few years, whereas others who had been on the waiting list since before the transition in 1994 were nowhere close. "There's always allegations that yes, there's someone that came from the outside that was very fairly new on the list, that he or she got a job or a house because they slept with this one or they paid that one or the whatever. So there's always that allegations .... But besides one or two single incidents, we have never been able to ... obtain evidence to the effect that there was corruption or any foul play in any of those allocations." Residents made claims all the time, but they were based on rumours, Stein and Lotze insisted. In proper bureaucratic form, corroboration requires written documentation. As Lotze nodded, Stein reiterated, "People come with allegations. It's easy to make an allegation. But as soon as you must provide evidence, written evidence, then they are, well, 'I don't know.' Where's the letter you sent? 'Ja, I can't find the letter now.' You know, this story."

Another pair of DHS officials—Alida Koetzee, who was introduced above, and her colleague Michael Goodwin, head of DHS' Housing Information Branch—made a similar point to me: I asked them about the difficulties squatters face in keeping track of key forms. Many of those I encountered carried around plastic bags with all of their housing documentation, but these were often lost in shack fires, through theft, or else simply misplaced, as overcrowded shacks can be quite chaotic. The backyard dweller with whom I was staying at the time had misplaced her identification card, and when I told this to Koetzee, she was stunned.

"You *must* have an ID!" she insisted.

Goodwin agreed. "You *have* to! You have to provide an ID. We can do nothing with you without an ID. You must go and apply for one." I thought of the squatters introduced above who explained to me why they lacked identification cards despite the apparent low barrier of entry. In every occupation and informal settlement I visited, I encountered many residents without IDs. Goodwin suddenly switched gears, expressing frustration not only about those lacking proper documentation but also about the disorderliness of squatting more generally. "If you sit in an informal settlement, and we need to upgrade that informal settlement, we may not evict you." He was referring to the constitutional guarantee against arbitrary eviction.

Koetzee interjected: "We [are] paying for people, so you can imagine how they abuse the system." I was reminded of Lotze's claim that squatters "subtly rent" their houses and move back to shacks. "They will benefit from a house," she insisted. "They sell it, or they rent it out, and they go and sit in an informal settlement."

In all of these DHS narratives, squatters are framed as devious and deviant: devious in that their activities are understood by these officials as preconceived strategies, and deviant in that their demands appear as exceptions, as irrationalities, from the perspective of technocratic administrators. Squatters are queue jumpers, delinquents, opportunists, and schemers out to make a quick buck, and to identify and exploit loopholes in the bureaucratic system of housing distribution. Yet land occupiers rarely demand formal homes from the government, or even inclusion in government housing projects. From the technocratic perspective in which democratization is construed as a problem of administration, land occupations appear as so many thumbs in the eye of the state. These disorderly threats to housing delivery are therefore perceived as threats to democracy itself.

## 6 | "REARRANGING THE DECK CHAIRS ON THE TITANIC"

And how does this moralizing distinction translate into actual repression? Given constitutional and other legal protections against arbitrary eviction, the government cannot indiscriminately steamroll shacks. Yet it needs to force the order it deems a requirement for administering democracy into being. It does so with legal cover through the interpretation of the caveat added to the guaranteed housing clause discussed in the introduction: "The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right." (RSA, 1996). Thus, the abstract principal of guaranteed housing requires coordination with material means through which this access can be assured. The concept of "progressive realization" means that as long as courts recognize municipalities are attempting to close the housing backlog to the best of their abilities given limited material means, they have taken reasonable legislative measures.

The Constitution also prohibits "arbitrary evictions," requiring a judge to consider "all the relevant circumstances." Decisions regarding when to evict and when to tolerate are fought out in the courtroom, with "relevant circumstances" identified as the defining factor. In practice, this means that municipal governments must offer "alternative accommodation" in most cases of eviction. Often, this means potential inclusion in one of the state-run temporary encampments (TRAs) discussed above. These are widely despised by residents in Cape Town, viewed as particularly dangerous and overcrowded (Ranslem, 2015). At the very least, they sever residents from their existing social networks, substantially impacting their livelihood strategies (Levenson, 2018). Once the TRA option is refused, eviction may legally proceed.

Each major metropolitan area has a different means of enforcing eviction. In Johannesburg, the municipality contracts private security companies, one of which, Red Ants,<sup>6</sup> stands metonymically for all eviction enforcers in popular discourse. In Durban, the DHS has its own ALIU much as in Cape Town. When I interviewed the head of Cape Town's ALIU, he told me, "[W]e have a constant team on patrol throughout the city ... to act in terms of what law calls 'counterspolution'. I don't know if you've heard the term before?"

I asked him to elaborate.

*"Counterspolution" means that if I take your quarter, you have the right to take it back before it becomes my possession. So we are entitled to act before it becomes their home and before the structure is completed and that they have possession over the ground. Instead of going through the whole process of going to court and getting an eviction order, what we first do is to stop an invasion [from] growing.*

I could not help but think about counterspolution in relation to the moralizing distinction. Once an occupier's structure became a "home," however defined, DHS officials worried that this would be sufficient justification for a judge to rule that a squatter was entitled to stay on land to which they had no legal title. Even if DHS employees tend to view all occupiers as threats to their project, they therefore take special care to prevent occupations from becoming established for the purpose of preempting judges from deeming occupations to be legitimate.

In cases of eviction, residents are typically left to fend for themselves. Sometimes, they find shelter in friends' or relatives' backyards, or else they remain mobile. During the course of my fieldwork, I observed evicted residents moving to a new home every few months, if not more frequently, staying with anyone they could. Otherwise, they would continually build anew, participating in subsequent land occupations, or else finding a temporary place to squat until they find an occupation in which they can viably partake.

Nearly 150 years ago, Engels (1872) wrote about slum clearance policies in Manchester: "This is a striking example of how the bourgeoisie solves the housing question in practice." He could have been writing about Cape Town today. "The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also."

Or, as one of the housing officials I interviewed succinctly put it, "All we're doing is rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." A squatter from an occupation in a Coloured township made the same point when interviewed by a community newspaper on eviction day. "We will always be the City's problem and we'll pop up somewhere. The City can evict us wherever we invade, but the problem won't go away. Must I turn 60 or die before I get a house?" (Mpalantshane, 2012, p. 10).

From residents' point of view, the translation of democratization into a technocratic system of distribution is beside the point. Squatters do not typically occupy land to get something in return; rather, it is frequently an end in itself, the auto-construction of a home. If the clearance of land occupations is seen by officials as an imperative, an ordering process in the name of protecting democracy, in practice, it hardly functions that way. When squatters in need are evicted, they invariably occupy land elsewhere, usually nearby, and begin to erect shacks. But evictions proceed apace, like a cruel game of mole whacking that never quite manages to get to the root of the problem.

## 7 | CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY'S ADMINISTRATORS

How then does all of this speak to our understanding of urban land dispossession after apartheid? We might expect evictions to constitute a governmental strategy for controlling unruly surplus populations. Given the recent history of violent housing and service delivery protests in South Africa (Paret, 2015; von Holdt, 2013), government officials

<sup>6</sup>"Red Ants" is actually a nickname for a company called Wozani Security. They were initially also known as *Rooi Gevaar* ("Red Scare"), a tongue-in-cheek reference to both their red uniforms and the apartheid regime's obsessive anticommunism, which it used to justify its intensification of repression under apartheid (Bénit & Gervais-Lambony, 2005).



might deploy eviction as a strategy for containing or displacing the problem. Yet evictions do not dissipate the conflicts inherent in land occupations; instead, they precipitate new ones. In the context of a rising wave of protests since the early 2000s (Alexander, 2010), only one grievance has been more frequent than inadequate access to housing: inadequate access to municipal services (Alexander, Runciman, & Ngwane, 2014; Powell, O'Donovan, & De Visser, 2014), itself another major cause of new occupations.

In addition to repression in the name of counterinsurgency, we might expect a state as frequently described as “neoliberal” as South Africa to follow the lead of Hernando de Soto (2003), authorizing squatting after the fact and using self-provisioning as a pretext for retrenching social spending. But this would be to assume a generic conception of neoliberalism in which cost recovery is the only rationale on the table. To recall Ferguson's (2010, p. 171) argument, understanding governmental rationales in postcolonial contexts requires us to think neoliberalism in relation to ‘the contingencies of democratic politics.’ In the case of South Africa, the project of postapartheid democratization is understood by housing officials as one of administering delivery. But fiscal pressures and the sociospatial legacy of apartheid have ensured that closing the backlog remains a pipe dream. As land occupations and housing-related protests continue to grow over time, these are the most visible reminders to officials of their own failure to meet delivery targets, and so they misrecognize them as sources, rather than results, of the crisis.

This is a crucial point, as it means that the clearance of new occupations cannot be reduced to some generalized strategy of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2003) executed by South Africa's municipal governments. If, *pace de Soto*, the state is not in the business of straightforwardly devolving responsibility onto individuals (Brown, 2015, p. 131–134), there are likewise very few documented instances of postapartheid municipalities evicting in the name of speculative investment in real estate or the development of peri-urban land. In South Africa, the forcible separation of residents from their homes is orchestrated not in the immediate interest of profit but because the administrators of democratization see “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2002) as a threat to democracy's material realization.

To be clear, this is not some transhistorical aesthetic preference on the part of democracy's administrators. Indeed, in a previous period, as Arrighi and Piselli (1987; cf. Arrighi, 1973; Wolpe, 1980) take great pains to emphasize, repression was deployed in the name of profitability. When a sizable peasantry was the material basis of wage “subsidies,” proletarianization undermined this basis, forcing employers to increase wages. Repression was then deployed not as a means of counteracting market forces, but, paradoxically, in the name of maximizing surplus extraction. But this formulation no longer holds in the context of democratization. The postapartheid government needed (and continues to need) to reproduce its legitimacy as democratic; it cannot, therefore, openly deploy repression as could the authoritarian regimes described by Arrighi and Piselli, Arrighi, and Wolpe. In the postapartheid context, officials' consistent invocations of “orderly urbanization” serve as a means of reconciling the “need” for repression with the government's desire to appear democratic. This discourse coheres as a rationale for dispossession in a context where material constraints have to be articulated in a way that reconciles democratic aspirations with the legacy of apartheid.

Finally, we can only fully understand urban evictions in relation to a broader understanding of the agrarian question. Given both the exceptional extent of dispossession in South Africa and the insubstantial contribution of agriculture to its GDP, only a concerted programme of land reform might have slowed the pace of informal urbanization. But the ANC resolutely rejected such a possibility in the transition, enshrining prohibition of expropriation in the 1996 Constitution and opting for voluntary market-based transfers instead. It is for this reason that there has been minimal land restitution and redistribution after apartheid, with “willing buyer, willing seller” as the government's sole programme.

The ANC's refusal to implement land reform has contributed to its haemorrhaging of support. In response, shortly after assuming office in February 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa elevated land reform to the centre of his programme. More than three-quarters of Parliament voted in favour of a policy of “expropriation without compensation,” though ANC members are mixed over whether this would require amending the Constitution's property clause. Lip service to expropriation certainly serves as a dog-whistle to the ANC's declining base, but as Fred Hendricks

(2013) points out, it will inevitably be ruled unconstitutional following lengthy court battles. Moreover, even if it were to come to pass, more than two thirds of South Africans currently live in cities. Would expropriation without compensation hold there as well? The earliest signs are disheartening. Just weeks after Parliament called for land reform, Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba invoked the policy in terms antithetical to its intention, calling for the expropriation of squatted inner-city buildings and the eviction of their current occupants (Nicolson, 2018). As the rhetoric of agrarian reform makes its way to the cities, we should not be surprised to see that there too it is constrained by the twin forces of neoliberalism and democratization.

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