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Urban identity in post-apartheid Soweto

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Thesis Abstract

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Title: Urban identity in post-apartheid Soweto - *A case study of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee*

This research report is an examination of urban identity in post-apartheid Soweto, using the SECC as a case study. The report examines the emergence of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC), one of a number of post-apartheid social movements in urban areas around South Africa. The SECC have emerged in response to the policy of cost-recovery and cut-offs in the provision of services to poor communities in Johannesburg, and have also managed to tap into a broader discourse of anti-privatisation. While the SECC maintain a political agenda, and are affiliated to a number of overtly political organisations such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), I argue in this report that the SECC affirm a particular set of post-apartheid identities. This set of identities is constituted within a very particular relationship to place; the SECC emerged and lives in Soweto.

Through the everyday activities in the branches of the SECC members of the SECC actively construct themselves and the places in which they live. The report draws on a literature that has considered the emergence of social movements in Latin American and post-colonial cities since the 1980s. This literature argues that social movements contest not only the material conditions but also the cultural and symbolic order of space and the city. The report then considers how the SECC is constituted across different scales. These different scales of movement activity represent a potential tension within the organisation between the leadership and the branches of the SECC. It is in the branches that the SECC exists from day to day, and it is in the branches that a strong sense of place is constructed through the everyday activities of the SECC branch. The report concludes that the everyday practices of the SECC at the scale of the local branches are part of a broader process of remaking place and identity in post-apartheid Soweto.