

https://dspace.org/

Nobody's baby: The politics and perceptions of informal housing in Alexandra Township

Lucas, Justine

1996-05-13
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9064

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

SEMINAR PAPER
TO BE PRESENTED IN RICHARD WARD BUILDING
SEVENTH FLOOR, SEMINAR ROOM 7003
AT 4 PM ON THE **13 MAY 1996.**

TITLE: 'Nobody's Baby': The Politics and Perceptions of Informal Housing in Alexandra Township.

BY: **JUSTINE LUCAS**

NO: 400

'Nobody's Baby': The Politics and Perceptions of Informal Housing in Alexandra Township.

Justine Lucas

Department of Social Anthropology

University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction

In late February 1996, a group of property-owners in northern Johannesburg attacked residents of a squatter camp that had sprung up on their doorstep, and burnt down several shacks. Local government officials, while not condoning the action, promised to relocate the squatters to another site. The squatters, who were not told where they would be rehoused, refused to move, prompting further threats from the enraged property-owners. On April 29, there was an attempt to move the squatters to Diepsloot, far from their current homes and jobs. They resisted, and in the ensuing struggle police fired teargas and rubber bullets.

This has been a familiar story over the last decade, as local government battled against endless waves of 'land invasions' while a new democratic dispensation was being negotiated, and mainly white property-owners protested against the rising crime and drop in property prices that they feared would result from informal settlement. But there is a twist to this tale. In 1996, two years after South Africa's first democratic election brought in a new housing policy, and several months after local government was elected to provide urban municipal services, the angry property-owners in the above account are residents of Alexandra township's East Bank suburb. Many of them are members of the ANC, and are represented by the ANC-aligned East Bank Civic Association. The local government officials who have promised to remove the squatters are also mainly ANC members; several of them former civic activists from Alexandra who championed the rights of squatters in the 1980s.

Land invasions do of course present a problem for new democratically-elected local government, and the East Bank squatters in Alexandra are occupying land that has been set aside for low-cost housing development. This confrontation resonates with a nationwide concern about the obstacles informal settlements - generally seen as uncontrolled, unstable and violent - present to urban planning and development. In a thought-provoking discussion of these challenges, Mabin[1] asserts that both apartheid and its opposition were characterised by modernist conceptions of planning which are inappropriate to today's 'postmodern' urban environment.[2] Here, Mabin is in part referring to the social fragmentation that is the legacy of apartheid and the liberation struggle, and the inappropriateness of totalising ideologies to deal with this complexity. But he is also referring to a global shift in the make-up of urban space that confounds a modernist conception of urban planning based on the assumption of unilinear economic growth. A decline in mass industrial production has led to the suburbanisation of new information-based and high technology industries, leaving urban centres with a growing informal economy. In the absence of public housing programmes, private investment is put into offices and luxury housing, which coexist with slums and ghettoes. With this growing polarisation, the unemployed are excluded from the benefits of economic growth and forced into informal settlements, leading to new forms of social and spatial segregation. In South Africa, Mabin argues, these dynamics undermine the Freedom Charter's vision of redistribution, which was formulated in a period of mass production and industrial growth. And while the newly emerging planning idea of the 'compact city' aims to overcome fragmentation and segregation by bringing together working and living spaces, Mabin suggests this is unlikely to have much impact given the zoning power of a deregulated land market.

The growth of informal housing is therefore not simply a consequence of rural-urban migration, but is one of the products of changes in the urban economy. This counters assumptions not only about unilinear economic growth, but also similarly modernist conceptions of urbanisation. Informal housing has however generally been understood as a transitional stage of a unilinear process in which people move closer to the city step by step, while necessarily maintaining a rural household base for security[3]. The social, political and cultural characteristics of shack-dwellers are then presumed to emanate from this liminal position between town and country. Bonner thus talks of a "transitional migrant culture" which, instead of assimilating into the broader urban culture, "lives on, in grotesquely parodied form",[4] and Cole describes practices and institutions in Crossroads, modelled on "the invented tradition of bantustan structures", which "served to reinforce and perpetuate material and ideological linkages with the rural areas".[5] In other words, informal settlements are understood to be culturally closer to the rural areas than to the city, but nevertheless culturally distinct: neither urban nor rural. Current changes in the urban environment however contradict this perception. Increasing numbers of urban-born people are moving from formal to informal housing,[6] and the continued persistence of circular migration challenges the assumption that it is merely a transitional stage in a unilinear process of change.

Population movements between town and country, and between informal and formal housing, are in reality flexible and multi-directional, and subject to changing strategies in an uncertain future. Recently, there has been some recognition that a modernist framework is inadequate to explain these dynamics. The search for a new approach has been described as a need to look at the social character of urbanisation. So, for example, Mabin[7] argues that understandings of urbanisation which ignore social processes such as circular migration are not adequate to explain the dynamics of urban settlement, and particularly of informal housing. He discusses the contributions of 'rural' activities towards 'urban' households, and how variations in 'rural' households affect patterns of 'urban' settlement.[8] Mabin concludes his review of urbanisation since 1960 with the statement,

> Moving into the 1990s, it appears that some social processes affecting urbanization, such as circular migration, may persist for substantial periods and prove little affected by policy changes. At the same time, informal urbanization has challenged authority and altered the make-up of cities - it may yet challenge their whole structure.[9]

Bonner[10] also responds to the "hidden assumptions" underlying modernist analyses of urbanisation with a historical exploration of its social character. He uses life histories to move away from grand narratives to more finely contextualised accounts of urbanisation. These life histories demonstrate how poverty and social instability in an "extraordinarily fluid and heterogeneous urban environment" produced constant changes in strategies to cope with a conditional urban existence.[11]

The failure of South Africa's newly elected local government structures to resolve the problem of informal housing would seem to be a symptom of their inability to move beyond a modernist conceptual framework of urbanisation and economic growth, with the case of the East Bank squatters merely one of many similar instances. But while Alexandra is undeniably subject to the same forces that are reshaping the rest of Johannesburg, its situation cannot be understood only in terms of current economic and political developments. People who are

familiar with the history of Alexandra will not be surprised at the situation today, which displays marked continuities with the past. Political tensions around housing, and the perception of Alexandra as a problem for urban planners, have been recurrent themes throughout its history, which is in many ways unique.

When the East Bank squatters were attacked, the press was quick to explain this as an expression of community anger that outsiders were jumping the queue for housing by staking a claim to this land. But the formally-housed residents of East Bank - a middle-class suburb built in the 1980s - are not in the queue for low-cost housing, and it was not competition for scarce housing resources that prompted their anger. And the squatters are no more 'outsiders' than are the bulk of the township's population today, the majority of whom live in zinc shacks. Many of these shacks are clustered around brick houses in the yards of 'old Alexandra', but in some areas they have taken over the landscape completely. Beside the graveyard, along the main roads bordering the township, in stormwater drainage areas and in any other under-utilised spaces, Alexandra today has effectively become a squatter township. Squatters have lived on the bank of the Jukskei river for years, and the only factor preventing the small number of shacks in the bush and scrubland of the far East Bank from turning into large-scale settlement was a lack of water. With the promise of housing and services in this area, informal settlement has now spread across the river. This is not simply a case of opportunistic outsiders usurping the rights of settled urbanites, and thereby provoking the outrage of those with a justified claim to housing, but is rather an example of the inexorable spread of Alexandra's housing problems beyond its boundaries, and encroaching on the previously shack-free suburb of East Bank.

As a 'squatter township' Alexandra is different both from the rest of Johannesburg's northern suburbs and from most other townships or informal settlements. This difference is a legacy of its anomalous history as a 'location' - a formerly freehold area where property rights were granted a year before the introduction of the 1913 Land Act, and which survived the demolitions and removals meted out to other similar areas like Sophiatown and Western Native Township. Although usually described as a township, Alexandra predates the development of these vast, regulated and uniform 'satellite towns', far from white areas, which were designed to house and control the African workforce.[12] For a significant portion of its history, Alexandra fell outside municipal authority and remained free of much apartheid legislation. As an overcrowded and crime-ridden slum, Alexandra was 'Nobody's Baby'[13] - situated in the heart of Johannesburg's northern suburbs, but too much of a liability for white municipalities to take responsibility for. The modernist conceptions of planning that underpinned apartheid thus largely failed to gain purchase in Alexandra. Instead, the state repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, tried to remove its population with a view to eventual demolition. Ironically, it was precisely this abdication of responsibility that underlay Alexandra's history of political resistance. While its population undoubtedly experienced some of the worst poverty and oppression of apartheid South Africa, it was always an uncontrolled and, from the perspective of the state, disordered space, permitting an autonomy of thought and action that undermined the vision of apartheid planners. Through the actions of the ANC, and later civic organisations, Alexandra was constructed as an emancipatory space - most clearly defined during the uprisings of 1986 and the declaration of 'people's power'. In their attempts to create a new social and spatial order, these organisations were, as Mabin suggests, also trying to effect a modernist project. But the manner in which political organisations sought to represent the 'emancipatory space' of Alexandra was

continually contested by alternative orderings of space and social relations; not least in the growing areas of informal housing. Like apartheid modernism, then, the modernist strategies of democratic organisations never completely succeeded in their objectives. This was in part related to an inwardly directed political conflict, focused on housing, which has always characterised Alexandra.

In this paper I look at how contestations over the representation of space in Alexandra have been shaped by the failure of apartheid's racial modernism, and explore the historical roots of current perceptions of informal housing as a problem for planners. Ferguson[14] has argued that current modernist narratives of urbanisation have their roots in a liberal modernism that was developed to counter conservative policies of influx control during the first half of this century. Beginning with a historical overview of apartheid planning and resistance, I show how continuities from the past have indeed informed the post-1990 relationship between the ANC and the Alexandra Civic Organisation (ACO), and their ideas about informal housing. Despite the differences between the two organisations, both base their representations of space in Alexandra on modernist narratives of urbanisation that employ the dichotomies of urban and rural, and modernity and tradition. I argue that this obscures the reality of people's lived experiences, and their own constructions of space and social relations, and conclude by suggesting how we can reconceptualise the place of informal housing in today's 'postmodern' urban environment.

South African Modernisms: from Garden Cities to Verwoerdian Apartheid

Several authors have described the development of townships in the 1950s as a moment of 'high' modernism, emerging from post-war economic reconstruction and fordist mass production, and informed by a modernizing vision of progress through scientific, rational state planning.[15] In practice, of course, the imperatives of control and regulation that underlay this 'modernist project' were harnessed in racial oppression and economic retardation; a process that elsewhere has been termed 'the dark side of modernism'.[16] While apartheid planning has in the past been viewed as a response to the needs of manufacturing capital,[17] Mabin[18] has drawn our attention to tensions and ambiguities in post-war housing policies, centring around this vision of modernisation and progress. This challenges the idea that the development of townships was the result of an apartheid grand plan, and resonates with other recent works on the fragmented nature of apartheid state power.

This apparent paradox of apartheid as both modernist and fragmentary is not, however, unique to South Africa. Globally, there was not one unitary 'modernist project' but many, characterised by dynamic tensions between internationalism and nationalism, and between an Enlightenment-inspired vision of universalism and the efforts of elites to retain power and privilege.[19] The character of modernism was thus influenced by both time and place. We can see this in the way that urban planning - a product of modernism - was exported from colonial centres to the peripheries, where it was shaped and transformed by local conditions. In the case of South Africa, town and regional planning owes its existence largely to the Garden Cities Movement, which was introduced from Britain in 1917.[20] In Britain, this was a response to the 'premodern' slum conditions of nineteenth century cities: an attempt to replace disorder and squalor with order and health. The categories of urban and rural were

central to this essentially anti-urban movement, which sought to reconcile the divide created by industrialisation, and to restore the relationship of city-dwellers to the countryside by replacing the metropolis with smaller and less dense garden cities.[21]

When these ideas and categories were exported to colonies like South Africa, they underwent a significant transformation. Colonial planning was constructed as a response not only to the 'premodern', but also to the 'unmodern' or 'traditional' indigenous society.[22] The resulting tensions are evident in Mabin's[23] sensitive analysis of the fluctuations in post-war housing policies. Initially, the Garden City approach to regional planning, residential zoning and the creation of satellite towns was easily adapted to accommodate racial segregation. Likewise the Garden City objective of creating a healthy environment was harnessed in a racialised slum clearance programme or 'sanitation syndrome'.[24] But the association of the 'unmodern' and 'traditional' African with the countryside was later to become a linchpin of the policy of separate development. This can be seen in the transfer of responsibility for black townships from local government to Verwoerd's Department of Native Affairs, the redirection of funds from urban public housing to homeland development, and internationally unprecedented attempts to enforce restrictions on African urbanisation.

Apartheid planning policy was thus characterised by two conflicting strands of thought regarding the distinction between town and country. The first, drawing from the British experience of industrialisation, was a universal[25] vision of modernisation which sought to dissipate the dangers of the city by breaking down the rural-urban divide. The second, driven by a desire for racial segregation, and drawing on a localised association of the countryside with the 'unmodern' that could not be merged with the modern city, sought to enforce a racialised division between town and country. This second approach understood African modernisation as progressing along a different path from white 'European' society.

It should be clear that the contested nature of the South African 'modernist project' fed into and helped to shape the political debate between liberals and conservatives, specifically over the rights of urban Africans.[26] The distinction Bozzoli[27] makes between a period of liberal paternalism and later 'high racial modernism' can therefore be understood both in terms of political changes and shifting ideas about modernisation. While we may be able to isolate a particular period of 'high' modernism (whether we follow Mabin and Parnell in defining this as the 1950s public housing programmes, or whether we use Bozzoli's marker of intensified removals and influx control in the late 1960s), conflicting visions of the modernist project had been in circulation since the 1920s, and underlay both liberal paternalism and Verwoedian apartheid. The ambiguities and contradictions which these contestations wrought throughout the history of apartheid are particularly well illustrated by the many successive attempts to 'modernize' and control Alexandra.

Alexandra 1912-1958: an 'uncontrolled' township.

Alexandra was established in 1912, 1½ miles from the boundary of Johannesburg, and since this municipality wanted no responsibility over the township it was envisaged that it would eventually become a self-governing municipality in its own right. The 1916 Health Committee, which was appointed to oversee administration, was intended to be the first stage in a process which would culminate in the election of a town council. It never, however, progressed beyond the second stage of its development, in which elected 'native' and

'coloured' officials joined the previously nominated white committee members. In 1932, a report by the Department of Public Health[28] led to the committee being dissolved, amid charges that the elected officials were irresponsible, incompetent and corrupt. Ineffective administration was however inevitable, given the lack of financial resources and growing population of Alexandra. A more likely reason for the committee's dissolution was that the elected members, who represented the politically assertive and vociferous standholding middle class of Alexandra, had the power to overturn decisions made by their nominated white counterparts. This conclusion seems to be borne out by the government's refusal to publish the findings of the 1929 Young Commission of Enquiry, which stated that the problems were caused by inadequate revenue, and recommended that no changes be made to the Health Committee. This position was further supported by the 1936 Feetham Commission, which called for capital loans to be granted to Alexandra, which could then proceed, albeit "cautiously", along the path of self-government. In response to this report, the Johannesburg City Council instead established a committee to discuss the possibility of demolishing the township.[29]

Alexandra's position outside the control of the state was thus already being perceived as a threat, although the proposed solutions to this problem differed. In 1926, before the Department of Public Health wrote its damning report about the Health Committee, it had in fact recommended the incorporation of Alexandra into the Johannesburg municipality; a recommendation that was later repeated by the Johannesburg mayor in 1944. The call for demolition, however, appealed to white residents of the areas surrounding the township, who in 1939 formed the North Eastern Districts Protection League to lobby for this eventuality. Their antagonism towards Alexandra was phrased largely in terms of a fear that its rapidly-growing and uncontrolled population would lead to the spilling over of crime and disease into white areas. This fear of disease and disorder was shared by white officialdom, as can be seen from a 1943 newspaper report citing a statement by the Johannesburg municipality on the conditions of Alexandra:

> This is a serious state when it is considered that the township is badly controlled, has an inadequate health service, the people occupying the rooms are of all ages and sexes, the sanitary service is mostly inadequate, the water drawn from the wells subject to contamination.[30]

That this medicalised conception of disorder acted as a metaphor for moral deviancy is evident in the report of a doctor examining Alexandra squatters in 1947, expressing a fear of contamination from, among other ailments, venereal disease.[31] In the same vein the Native Commissioner of Johannesburg was quoted as saying,

> I do not think anyone can question the growing lawlessness, lack of parental control, prostitution, defiance of authority, and signs of moral degradation, which are becoming features of the life of the Bantu in towns, particularly the younger generation. These conditions are known to exist in controlled locations, and it is not to be wondered at that in a densely populated and uncontrolled area, such as Alexandra, these features should be more marked and undoubtedly receive more scope for development. That the township is the refuge and harbourage of Native criminals and loafers of every type and degree, that liquor is brewed freely, and that vice is rampant, admit, in my opinion, of no argument.[32]

This theme of anxiety over disorder and a lack of control recurs throughout the successive attempts to resolve the problem of Alexandra. The establishment of urban order is of course characteristic of modernism in a very general sense, but the divergent responses to this question illustrate the contested nature of the South African 'modernist project'.

The conditions of Alexandra in the 1930s and 1940s were similar to those found in Johannesburg 'slumyards'. In these areas, the emphasis of the British Garden City Movement on creating a healthy urban environment was accommodated in a racialised slum clearance programme. But while the same ideas were often invoked in attempts to 'clean up' Alexandra, wholescale removal would have been expensive and would have provoked political opposition, not least by Alexandra's Health Committee. By 1942, this body had been reconstituted to once again allow for locally elected officials, and included amongst its white members Hoernlé, a prominent liberal, and the communist Bram Fischer. The state nevertheless viewed the growing political militancy of Alexandra with alarm. The bus boycotts, anti-pass campaigns and resistance to Bantu Education in the 1940s and 1950s were seen as further symptoms of disorder, prompting Verwoerd to announce it was time to bring the township "under very strict control".[33] The solution was provided by the 1952 Mentz Commission, which recommended that Alexandra remain, but that slum clearance and removals reduce the population, and that buffer zones be established to separate the township from surrounding white areas. In 1958, Alexandra was brought under the control of the Peri-Urban Areas Health Board, which was to act on these instructions.[34]

The Mentz Commission was also central in developing the planning guidelines for the establishment of townships in the 1950s. Although this body was acting on the instructions of Verwoerd, the policy that emerged was rooted in earlier British-influenced ideas about planning.[35] In the decade leading up to the Mentz Commission, there was much debate about the applicability of British regional planning in South Africa. The Social and Economic Planning Council (SEPC), established in the 1940s, explicitly called for the implementation of the British approach, which it argued was the route to achieving social equity, an improved standard of living, higher productivity and modernisation. On the question of racial segregation, it proposed that urban communities be separated by 'green belts', but at the same time emphasised the integrated nature of the urban economy.[36] Elements of the SEPC's recommendations were supported by Verwoerd's Department of Native Affairs, but social reconstruction was here reinterpreted to mean the development of new townships in the reserves, with funding for urban development elsewhere to be kept to a minimum. Verwoerd sought to have direct control over township planning, and instructed the Mentz commission on the core principles for planning guidelines, which ignored many of the social objectives of the SEPC.[37] But this highly conflictual and contested process of developing township planning policy was nevertheless informed by a premise that was shared by both liberals and conservatives: essentially that "only by the provision of adequate shelter in properly planned native townships can full control over urban natives be regained".[38] Most of the Mentz Commission's guidelines could not, of course, be applied to Alexandra, where population reduction and the creation of an industrial buffer zone and open 'green belt' by Peri-Urban were the only available mechanisms of control. In many other respects, it remained outside state control, and countered the objective of creating 'properly planned' townships.

The question we need to ask here is what it was about Alexandra that was so 'disordered'. Was the state's conception of disorder in reality a concern at growing levels of political resistance: at the possibility of an alternative order challenging its attempts to impose a hegemony? Did residents of Alexandra in fact perceive the township as an ordered space, or was there also a localised fear of an underlying chaos? Levels of crime were undoubtedly high during this period, with a growing criminal class able to control the lives of both standholders and tenants, thus challenging ideas of order and status. But more significant for this discussion is the manner in which inwardly-directed political protests over housing were also characterised as 'disorder' by the township elite who dominated the ANC.

Resistance or Disorder?

When the Health Committee was again reconstituted to include elected officials in 1942, only registered standholders[39] were eligible to vote or to stand for election. Although the Committee claimed to represent the interests of the whole community, it clearly acted in the interests of property owners, with whom it held monthly meetings.[40] The Health Committee supported landlords' practice of building and renting out additional rooms on their overcrowded properties. Consequently, it was largely standholders who were concerned about threats to demolish the township, since they stood to lose their main source of income. The Alexandra Standholders' Association formed an Anti-Expropriation Committee, and the Health Committee promised to support them in fighting for the survival of the township. Tenants, on the other hand, were subject to exorbitant rents, which were much higher in Alexandra than in other freehold areas, due to the exceptionally high interest rates on township bonds.[41] They thus had little to lose materially from being moved, and many were to leave Alexandra voluntarily in the 1960s. It has been suggested that in other townships at this time, class relations were 'softened' by other social forces such as patronage.[42] In Alexandra, many landlords did indeed strive to construct their relationships with tenants as paternalistic, with the landlord as a benevolent father figure presiding over the semi-domestic space of his stand, or 'yard', which was seen as analogous to a family homestead.[43] While this construction of yards as domestic spaces was often successful, the paternalistic moral authority of the landlord was frequently undercut by far more blatantly exploitative rentals and stark inequalities than elsewhere. The landlord-tenant nexus in Alexandra consequently became the focus of inwardly-directed political conflicts within the township. As Tourikis points out, "The so-called 'housing question' in Alexandra...*was* the question of the class struggle between African petty-bourgeoisie and working class",[44] and it has continued to be so ever since.

Standholders were thus able to use the Health Committee to advance their interests. What made this a threat to the state was that the same grouping also controlled the powerful Alexandra branch of the ANC - one of the largest in the country - thus complementing their access to the Health Committee. In the 1940s, the ANC in Alexandra was split between 'Charterists', who supported the alliance with the working class-oriented South African Communist Party (SACP) and South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and 'Africanists', who were strongly opposed to these organisations. Both groups were, however, comprised of the standholding middle-class; and the Africanists, led by the wealthy bus-owner and sometime national treasurer-general of the ANC, R.G.Baloyi, were largely in control of the branch, including its women's and youth sections.[45]

In the light of this situation, we need to understand that the rising political militancy in Alexandra was multi-faceted. While bus boycotts, anti-pass campaigns and resistance to Bantu Education were perceived by the state as a threat, and as a symptom of disorder, a significant portion of political resistance at this time was directed inward, at the standholding middle class. The first bus boycotts[46], for example, were supported by the Alexandra Workers' Union, and directed partly against black bus-owners such as Baloyi. Standholders had little control over these events, which have been described as spontaneous mass movements with little political leadership.[47] It was not until PUTCO bought out local bus-owners in 1944 that subsequent boycotts were more universally supported, organised and led by the ANC.[48]

While the bus boycotts illustrate some of the political tensions within Alexandra, the issue these tensions arose from and coalesced around was housing. In the mid-1940s, Alexandra tenants started organising themselves in opposition to standholders, forming the Alexandra Tenants' Association. In 1947 thousands of tenants, led by Schreiner Baduza, protested against high rentals and inadequate housing by setting up a squatter camp in the middle of Alexandra: the township's first 'land invasion'. Baduza argued that tenants should leave Alexandra, and persuaded a number to move to Pimville.[49] Not suprisingly, the squatter movement was vigorously opposed by the Health Committee and by standholders, who feared losing their tenants. While the Health Committee cautioned that the situation posed a threat to both Alexandra and Johannesburg, standholders were more forthright in their condemnation. In a telegram to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Native Affairs and the Administrator, they stated that they could "no longer tolerate the behaviour of the squatters...Therefore we demand their removal".[50]

This approach was similar to that of the Johannesburg City Council, which during discussions on the possible demolition of Alexandra highlighted the role of tenants as presenting "gravest difficulties in regard to health, sanitation and law and order".[51] In other words, while there were political actions during this period which were unambiguously directed at the state and universally supported, Alexandra was - and indeed still is - characterised by cross-cutting interests that produced shifting patterns of alliance and conflict. Significantly, both standholders and the state expressed a common interest in establishing order and control, which was threatened by the tenants' squatter movement. We therefore need to view resistance in Alexandra from two perspectives. The activities of the ANC, far from being a symptom of disorder, were attempting to counter the state's efforts to impose a hegemony, and to suggest an alternative non-racial social order. But since the ANC in Alexandra was dominated by standholders, whose vision of social and spatial order was based on property rights and paternalism, there was an internal contestation between organised political 'order' and spontaneous mass 'disorder' within Alexandra itself. While the UDF in the 1980s was to try to harness this dynamic as 'ungovernability', the ANC in the 1940s and 1950s tried to eradicate it.

Returning to the question of divergent forms of modernism in South Africa, it is clear that the ANC in this period espoused a universal vision of modernisation and progress that was close to that of the liberal tendency within (and later outside) the state. The popular perception of tenants among both standholders and the liberally-inclined Health Committee was that they were recent arrivals in Alexandra, and thus not fully urbanised.[52] This assumption needs to be questioned[53], not least because it has continued to be invoked by

property-owners in relation to squatters for the last fifty years. Here, the notion of rural 'tradition' was constructed in contrast to an urban 'modernity', with 'disorder' resulting from incomplete urbanisation and modernisation. In the discourses of both Alexandra standholders and white liberals, the modernity of permanently urbanised Africans was not questioned. With the increasing marginalisation of liberals from state power after 1948, a significant number supported ANC-led acts of protest in Alexandra, including the 1957 bus boycott and the establishment of 'ANC schools'. At this stage, then, the ANC was attempting to effect a 'modernist project' which was in line with the British-influenced liberal modernist tendency within the state; and as we shall see later, these ideas have continued to influence the ANC in Alexandra in the 1990s. In the 1960s, of course, there was a growing eclipse of this vision of liberal modernity by Verwoerd's 'high racial modernism'. Bozzoli[54] asserts that this policy broke down old patronage networks and created a moral vacuum. Alexandra did indeed come under increasing state control in the 1960s and 1970s, but, as the following discussion will show, this did not succeed in destroying either the status and authority of elites, or localised challenges to them.

The Failure of 'High Racial Modernism'

The period from 1958 to 1979 was characterised both by attempts to intensify control over the Alexandra population, and by increasing conflict and uncertainty within the state over the future of the township. In the first few years of its existence, Peri-Urban was relatively successful in its objective of reducing the population. Permits were introduced in 1958 for those who were entitled to live in Alexandra, and by the end of 1960 25000 people had been removed. But despite these measures, people continued to flood into Alexandra. As long as freehold property existed, it was impossible for the state to curb this influx, since it was not in standholders' interests to reduce the numbers of tenants, and they refused police permission to raid their properties. Partly in response to this, Peri-Urban began buying up stands. This was also a necessary first step to being able to demolish Alexandra, and there was a great deal of uncertainty at this time over whether the actions of Peri-Urban were aimed at control, or were in fact a prelude to demolition. In 1960, Peri-Urban established a social welfare section, which funded libraries, schools, sporting activities and care for the aged. Money was spent on infrastructure, and by the early 1960s there was a marked decrease in crime. There was, however, conflict in government over this use of funds, which seemed to be predicated on the continued survival of the township.[55]

Peri-Urban's success prompted the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development to report in 1961 that, "Thanks to the good work performed by the Board order was created out of chaos in this notorious town".[56] Nevertheless, in the same year, an ad hoc committee established by Verwoerd to reassess the situation decided that Alexandra would be demolished to make way for a hostel township. In the meantime, new legislation would be introduced to intensify control over the existing population. The Better Administration of Designated Areas Bill, passed in 1964, served to make the extensive existing legislation on urban African residence applicable to freehold areas such as Alexandra.[57] In Alexandra, extra legislation was introduced which banned meetings, prohibited the carrying of dangerous weapons, legislated conditions of tenure, and allowed for removals and state purchase of properties.[58]

This "vigorous and bureaucratised modernism"[59] was both a response to rising levels of political militancy and an expression of Verwoerd's vision of separate development, which entailed a forced separation of town and country. In the years that followed, the criteria defining people with the right to be urban became increasingly restrictive. By 1961, housing permits were available only to 'qualified' men over the age of 21, who were employed and had dependents legally living with them. All others, including single women with the 'section 10' rights that allowed them urban residence, had either to move to the homelands or live a precarious existence as tenants. Even those men who were eligible for housing could have their permits cancelled at any time, if they were deemed not to be "fit and proper" persons. There is no question that state control intruded into people's lives in a manner which it had previously been unable to do. But there was opposition to these policies - both from within the state and in Alexandra - which were eventually abandoned without having achieved their objectives.

During the debate over the Better Administration of Designated Areas Bill, the UP vigorously contested the NP's method of exerting control over Alexandra. While it was accepted by both parties that the township in 1963 remained overcrowded, unhygienic and uncontrolled, the UP asserted that many residents had become permanent town-dwellers, and that property rights would ensure social and political stability. They argued that the legislation already existed to 'clean up' Alexandra through reducing the population and improving housing and infrastructure.[60] Here we can see the stark opposition between a liberal vision of modernisation which accepts African urban residence as permanent, and seeks to control this through reducing population, and the NP's 'high racial modernism' which, at the same time as it sought to control urban areas, associated Africans with the countryside and thus "issued an ideological onslaught upon the ideas of 'the urban', turning it into an empty, hollow category with negative connotations".[61]

Initially the NP's approach prevailed, and in 1973 the state centralised control over Alexandra. The West Rand Bantu Affairs Administration Board (WRAB), which was directly responsible to the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, took over from Peri-Urban, announced that Alexandra would be transformed into a hostel township by 1984, and began expropriating properties. While the planned hostel township never materialised, a total of over 65000 people were removed and three hostels were built. The multi-storey Alexandra hostels, unlike the bungalow dormitories of other townships, were regarded as a unique experiment. Intended to be structures which would "be divided into controllable units of 150 people, divided by electronically operated steel doors...to prevent unrest from spreading",[62] these were clearly envisaged as 'total institutions': "monuments to a mad form of modernity".[63]

The remaining standholders however resisted, and formed the Alexandra Township Residents' Liaison Committee, led by Rev. Sam Buti. The combination of this resistance and the recommendations of the Riekert Commission, which proposed consolidating the rights of urban 'insiders', led to Alexandra being 'reprieved' in 1979. The plans that followed were similar to those proposed by the UP in the 1960s: Alexandra was to be replanned as a middle-class family township; and while WRAB continued to buy properties so that it could redevelop the area, houses would be made available for purchase under 99 year leasehold. The Liaison Committee was formalised, and at its inauguration, Minister Koornhof promised that Alexandra would now become a "model township".[64]

This was an ambitious plan, since the state's attempts to control and regulate Alexandra had up to that point failed dismally. Despite the state's attempts to restrict urbanisation, and to enforce rigid control over the shrinking number of Africans who were accorded the right to call themselves urban, South African cities accommodated many who were excluded from urban status, such as migrants and unmarried women, and who were "left to shelter in the urban crevices...hidden from the public eye".[65] Alexandra, with its overcrowded and impenetrable yards and alley-ways, was just such a crevice, where the order and control of the state still failed to gain purchase. Unlike the regulated and ethnically-zoned townships originating from the 1950s, Alexandra in the 1970s was a potent 'melting pot' of diversity: a theme which predominates in Serote's description of the area during this time:

> Alexandra is just that - a terrible stew. The stew bubbles, usually on Saturdays and Sundays. Everyone is in Alexandra. The grace of the dances, the variety of both the dances and the traditional garb, the many, many languages of the people of South Africa, all these, are packed and piled into the pot, Alexandra, and they bubble and bubble and bubble.[66]

In this space, characterised by numerous distinctions of class and identity, the dichotomy between rural 'tradition' and urban 'modernity' was confounded. With cattle and Cadillacs, donkeys and Jaguars, fifteen-roomed houses and one-roomed houses existing side by side, Serote asks us with desperation, "What the hell is Alexandra?".[67] The answer is that Alexandra was everything the modernist vision of the city was not: the chaotic, fragmented and disorientating labyrinth that European planners and architects sought to banish with their 'new internationalisms'; their 'Radiant' or 'Garden cities'. Alexandra was the hidden underbelly of modernity; the Dark City to Johannesburg's Golden City: two sides of the same coin.

> From the centre of the Golden City to the centre of the Dark City is a mere nine miles. Where one starts the other ends, and where one ends, the other begins. The difference between the two is like day and night. Everything that says anything about the progress of man, the distance which man has made in terms of technology, efficiency and comfort: the Golden City says it well: the Dark City, by contrast, is dirty and deathly.[68]

So Alexandra continued to confound all facets of the complex and contested vision of South African modernity. In this it challenged both 'high racial modernism' and the liberal modernism of the township elite. While a significant number of standholders still held property rights by 1980, many of those whose properties had been expropriated still inhabited their old yards. But without legal ownership, they struggled to maintain control over the increasing numbers of shack-dwellers who were flooding into the township. The state recognised the tensions this created, and sought to coopt the old elite into its planning strategy: a central component of its 'hearts and minds' campaign to counter political opposition in the 1980s.[69]

In the early 1980s, there was a concerted attempt to turn Alexandra into a middle-class family township, and influx control was tightened to exclude shack-dwelling 'illegals'. This was a clear attempt to coopt the township elite, 300 of whom still resisted being bought out by WRAB. The 1980 redevelopment plan was however prevented from being fully implemented, both by standholders' refusal to sell and thus allow the township to be rebuilt,

and by a lack of funds. Here we see a switch from the state as direct agent of control to the Alexandra Liaison Committee, which exhorted standholders to sell their properties and threatened 'illegals' with removal. Squatters whose shacks were demolished in 1981 were described as "not bona fides of the township. They (were) people who had just streamed to Alexandra from nowhere", and should return to the homelands.[70] The remaining standholders did not oppose this (they continue to express much the same sentiments today), but they objected to Buti's stand on property rights. Antagonism to his Save Alexandra Party mounted, and two parties stood in opposition to Buti in the 1981 Liaison Committee elections. Buti won, but the poll was very low. One of the opposition parties was led by Mike Beea: a disgruntled former associate of Buti who fell out with him over an incident of expropriation. Beea was to become, and still remains, the chairperson of the Alexandra Civic Association (ACA). After the introduction of the Black Local Authorities Act in 1983, ACA joined with other democratic organisations in affiliating to the UDF.[71] Ideological contestations however continued to characterise what has always been, and still remains, inwardly conflictual local politics.

The NP had argued in the 1960s that by removing property rights it would destroy inequalities. This argument has often been repeated by scholars who suggest that classes were compressed under Verwoerdian apartheid.[72] The NP strategy was thus an explicitly modernist attempt to break down an old social order and create a new one, countered by the UP's argument that breaking down the old order would instead result in disorder. Bozzoli similarly refers to the destruction of township elites, and the networks of patronage they had established, as creating a moral vacuum that allowed the 'ungovernability' of the 1980s township revolt to occur, and which continues to undermine current policies of reconstruction and development. In other words, she suggests, the impersonalised bureaucratic order of racial modernism, in breaking down an older paternalistic social order, failed in its objective of creating a new social order, and thus contained the seeds of its own destruction.

In Alexandra, I would challenge these claims on several counts. Firstly, there is a significant degree of continuity in the social order and patronage networks of the elite right up to the present day, as well as the liberal modernist ideas they embodied. Many of the old standholders remain in the same yards, where they still attempt to assert a paternalistic moral authority over their former tenants, albeit with the same ambiguities and contradictions as before. While the voices of the elite were muted during the turmoil of the mid-1980s, they never disappeared, and are now being vigorously reasserted by ANC-aligned standholders. Secondly, the strategies of youth and civic activists in the mid-1980s to create a new moral and social order, informed by socialist rather than liberal ideas, were partially successful, and civic structures created in 1986 continue to exist under the auspices of the Alexandra Civic Organisation (ACO).[73] This means that if we are to understand the current confrontations over housing in Alexandra, we need to look at the ambiguities and contradictions these two sets of ideas have created in the post-1990 alliance between ACO and the ANC.

Contested Representations of Urban Space in Post-1990 Political Discourse

The relationship between ACO and the Alexandra branch of the ANC in the early 1990s was characterised by both alliance and opposition: an ambiguity owing much to the ideological

contestations of the 1980s. ACO was originally launched in 1986 as the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC), under the leadership of trade unionist Moses Mayekiso. Although AAC was aligned to the UDF, it was formed in opposition to the older UDF-aligned Alexandra Civic Association (ACA). While much of the ideological contestation during this period was framed in terms of the distinction between the 'Charterist' and 'workerist' camps of the UDF, there was a high degree of overlap between these categories, which operated as labels rather than as distinct groups, and both AAC and ACA claimed a charterist identity.[74] The social character and ideological standpoints of the two organisations nevertheless diverged. ACA leadership was made up largely of professionals and property-owners: the old standholding middle class created during Alexandra's freehold era. AAC, on the other hand, consisted of youth and union activists who had a more working-class character, and several of its most prominent leaders were relatively recent arrivals in Alexandra who had no connection to the period of freehold tenure.[75] They viewed ACA as bourgeois and populist, and instead sought to prioritise working-class interests. AAC's success in establishing yard, block and street committees effectively marginalised ACA, and at a mass meeting in May 1986 AAC was unanimously chosen to represent the people of Alexandra.[76] The formation of civic structures was a central component in the attempt to replace state control with organs of 'people's power': to construct Alexandra as an emancipatory space that rendered apartheid ungovernable. When AAC was relaunched as ACO in 1989, it built on this legacy, and was widely perceived as the sole legitimate civic in Alexandra. In 1990, however, the newly unbanned ANC entered into fraternal relationships with both ACO and ACA. The tensions that this produced exposed the existence of inwardly-directed political conflict, which had been temporarily overshadowed by a united resistance to apartheid in the 1980s, and which revolved primarily around informal housing. Associated with this conflict were significant contestations in the representation of space in Alexandra.

When an ANC branch was formed in Alexandra after the organisation was unbanned, the newly-elected secretary was Obed Bapela, a former AAC activist who had been imprisoned with Moses Mayekiso when they and other AAC leaders were charged with treason.[77] The election of a prominent civic leader onto the ANC executive illustrated the common perception that the UDF was effectively the internal wing of the ANC while the movement was banned, and highlighted the dominance of AAC and later ACO in UDF politics. Bapela, however, left civic politics when he was elected, thus potentially weakening the alliance between ANC and ACO. From 1990, no ACO office-bearers held office in the ANC, and although ACO leaders were all ANC members, the civic claimed to be representative of all the people of Alexandra, regardless of political affiliation. They represented the township in local government negotiations and played a prominent role in the formation of the national civic body, SANCO, to which ACO affiliated.

In contrast to the growing separation of ACO and ANC, ACA maintained a close relationship with the ANC. Mike Beea of ACA was in 1992 chosen to represent the ANC and its allies on the Alexandra Interim Crisis Committee (ICC), which was formed to deal with the endemic violence in the area. The close relationship between ACA and ANC again illustrates the perceived continuity between the UDF and ANC, but here the ANC's association with an older charterist grouping that rivalled ACO served to undermine the ANC/ACO alliance. In the early 1990s, then, the relationship between ACO and ANC, while overtly one of alliance, was underlaid by serious ideological tensions. These were compounded by socio-economic differences between the two groups of leaders. Many returned ANC exiles, who

were prominent in both the branch executive and as general members, came from the same middle-class social background as the ACA leadership: old Alexandra families who had claims to property in the township and were dismayed at the proliferation of shacks. These social differences served to underscore the diverging ideological standpoints of the two organisations, particularly with reference to housing and the 'squatter' issue. The relationship between ACO and ANC, and their approaches to informal housing, were not however static. The ambiguity of alliance and competition meant that local politics was characterised by fluidity, so that shifts in the ACO/ANC relationship were reflected in changing political discourses. While overtly addressing the issues of urbanisation and informal housing, these discourses embodied initially complementary and later contrasting representations of space in Alexandra. These were social maps through which ACO and ANC sought to make sense of the distribution of space in the township and to lay the basis for their claims to represent the community.

ACO discourse:

ACO's ideological starting point was clear in its adoption of the Freedom Charter slogan "Houses, security and comfort for all". It claimed to represent all the people of Alexandra, but was faced with an extremely diverse constituency, with differing short-term interests. Shack-dwellers, for example, desired access to housing, while potential property owners wanted to evict shack-dwellers from their yards. ACO attempted to overcome these divisions through the creation of inclusive democratic structures that would bring together residents of formal and informal housing. Its basic units of organisation were yard committees, which were organised into block and/or street committees, and these were in turn grouped into fourteen area committees presided over by an executive. ACO organisation thus rested on the concept of a pyramid of interlocking spatially-bounded units. One of its main difficulties was therefore how to organise in areas without yards: in large free-standing shack settlements, where there were no clearly-bounded units other than individual shacks. ACO's response was to make a distinction between shack-dwellers in yards, who participated in formal civic structures, and shack-dwellers in shack settlements. A separate shack-dwellers' coordinating committee was formed to cover the whole of Alexandra, independent of other civic structures within specific areas. This structure was eventually disbanded, due in part to charges that it promoted ethnic conflict (many shack settlements were perceived as being ethnically homogeneous), and individual shack settlements were then supposed to organise shack committees which would function in a similar way to yard committees, and feed into broader area committees. As we will see, this approach proved inappropriate for the social and spatial organisation of shack settlements.

Shack-dwellers were often perceived to form the core of ACO's support-base, but civic structures were in fact very weak in free-standing shack settlements. Richard Mdakane, the then secretary of ACO, recognised the problem, and explained the civic's approach.

> Most people say ACO is based in shack areas, but we are very weak in shack areas. The basic structure of ACO is yard committees - tenants and sub-tenants. In shack areas, people don't come to meetings. Maybe we neglected to organise shack areas...Of course they organise themselves into strong structures, but not necessarily in our structures. We failed to give them political direction.[78]

While making a distinction between shack-dwellers in yards and shack settlements, Mdakane recognised that many township residents lumped them together in one category - squatters - since people in formal housing had permits from the local council and people in shacks did not. Problems arising from the lack of legal access to housing were therefore common to all shack-dwellers.

> Because of the location of Alex near work, this attracts people. It would be difficult to stop the influx. I don't know how we would deal with it without more land. There are some problems in organising these people. Some are very conservative; some are members of other organisations; some are migrants and not interested in participating in structures. But housing is a serious question for them. Ultimately they can be organised by ACO. But short term they are conservative.[79]

Mdakane was thus displaying an ambivalent attitude towards shack-dwellers, saying that while they had the potential for strong civic organisation, ACO was still weak in shack areas. A closer examination of Mdakane's ideas shows how his explanation of this problem rested on a particular understanding of urbanisation, which appeared in ACO discourse as a clearly modernist narrative. This narrative explained that people arriving in Alexandra from the rural areas would become part of the community only if they were organised and transformed by ACO into a radical urban working class and abandoned their previously 'conservative' or 'traditional' ideas and practices, thus breaking with their rural past. Shack-dwellers' need for space could act as the catalyst in such a transformation, but this process would have to be directed to prevent them following alternative strategies of organising their space which would conserve and strengthen their outsiderness.

Ideally, people were supposed to ask permission from local civic structures before erecting shacks. ACO's narrative of urbanisation facilitated and legitimized this process. More fundamentally, it described an ordering of space in which the township was represented as a construction of interlocking units coming together as a unitary whole which was simultaneously ACO, Alexandra and 'the community': an image which represented the civic as a hegemonic power. ACO recognised class as a category of social division, and prioritised working-class interests, but at the same time social divisions based on class, ethnicity and housing type were intended to be overridden by the unity ACO engendered. Any area which was not organised into ACO structures, such as Inkatha-controlled hostels,[80] therefore represented an abberation - a problem and maybe a threat to the whole. In addition to Inkatha hostel-dwellers, shack-dwellers from outside Alexandra were the group Mdakane referred to as the most likely to organise autonomously in this way, facilitating the development of opposition to the hegemony of ACO. ACO's interpretation of the independent organisation of space as opposition which posed a threat to the whole 'community' was thus presented as real and natural. The media at this time often followed this line with an unquestioning acceptance of the violence as taking place between Inkatha-supporting hostel-dwellers and 'township residents'. An examination of ANC discourse however suggests that the unitary category of 'township residents' was open to contestation.

ANC discourse:

The ANC's position on urbanisation was rather more complex, due to the shifting political terrain since February 1990. Immediately after the ANC's unbanning, the Alexandra branch

of the movement allied itself closely with ACO. ACO executive members were all members of the ANC; and ANC structures, or 'sub-branches', coincided with the boundaries of ACO area committees. Potential conflicts of interest that might have been caused by overlapping structures were initially contained by a clear division of labour between the two organisations. Local civic issues such as housing were dealt with by ACO, while the ANC mobilised around national political concerns. The ANC did not play a significant role in local debates on urbanisation, but officially supported ACO's position.

There was, however, a growing sense of disquiet among ANC leaders, which may have been encouraged by strongly vocalised discontent among returned exiles, about the 'squatter problem'. Many returned exiles were absent during the struggles of the 1980s, during which the Freedom Charter's statement of the right to housing acquired a new significance as shack-dwellers were mobilised in opposition to the state. On returning, exiles found their yards full of shacks which they associated with crime and squalor. They blamed ACO for bringing outsiders into Alexandra. "We are the bona fide people of the township...We have permits", exclaimed one returned ANC exile, ironically echoing the words of the Alexandra Liaison Committee - the precursor to the Black Local Authority which generated such antipathy and was the catalyst for anti-state opposition in the 1980s.[81] The problem was particularly acute among those who had come from property-owning families and who planned to buy back the yards which had earlier been expropriated by the state. A returnee in this position complained, "ACO has brought in shack-dwellers and told them not to pay rent...[standholders] are complaining throughout Alex".

This attitude towards shack-dwellers conflicted with ANC policy, and was officially discouraged. It was particularly significant that at a funeral of a member of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, in July 1991, one of the coffin-bearers was the chairperson of a shack committee in a large free-standing shack settlement. At an ANC general meeting in February 1992, however, the tensions between ANC and ACO finally surfaced. In this meeting, ANC activists described their organisation as the historically legitimate representative of the people of Alexandra, and ACO merely as an interest group representing squatters.[82] The ANC saw itself as a mediator between ACO and property owners, who were represented by the Alexandra Land and Property Owners' Association (ALPOA), and challenged ACO's right to represent the people of Alexandra in local government negotiations. This dramatic political shift was tied to changing ideas about the local role of the ANC. During a discussion I had with Obed Bapela, secretary of the ANC branch, around this time, he spoke about the need for the ANC to get involved in local welfare and development. The ANC seemed perilously close to stepping on ACO toes. ACO leaders expressed fears that individuals in the ANC leadership were allying with it rival, ACA, which was anti-squatter and mobilised mainly among residents of formal housing. Personal accusations and personality clashes further contributed towards the deterioration in the relationship between ACO and ANC, and obstructed mutual debate about their respective roles.

By 1992, the ANC's position on urbanisation was still unclear. On the one hand, there was a tendency to view shack-dwellers as outsiders who posed a threat to Alexandrians - this narrative of urbanisation emphasised the temporary nature of migrant shack-dwellers' residence in Alexandra and legitimised the claims of an urbanised middle class to space. These ideas are largely convergent with the 'liberal modernism' espoused by the ANC before

its banning and by liberals within and outside the state. On the other hand, the ANC was still trying to mobilise shack-dwellers. On the same day as its February 1992 general meeting, the chairperson of the ANC branch addressed a meeting in 'S'tshwetla', the biggest shack settlement in the township, and emphasised their unity with all South Africans in the struggle for liberation. He was accompanied by an executive member of ACO. In other words, the ANC appeared to be vacillating between two ideologically conflicting readings of the spatial ordering of Alexandra. The first was of a unitary township which included both shack-dwellers and residents of formal housing. This concurred with ACO's position, and made political sense if ANC and ACO were in alliance rather than competing for power. The second reading described the 'real' Alexandra - ie the Alexandra of the 1950s - as unchanging over time but as being invaded by outsiders who, by moving uninvited into yards and refusing to pay rent, were upsetting the 'natural' spatial order of the township, embodied in the concept of property rights and the paternalistic authority of standholders over their tenants. This emphasis on temporal continuity legitimized the claim of the long-established ANC to represent the people, thereby contesting the hegemony of ACO. It also presented as natural a spatial ordering representing the values and interests of a property-owning middle class, a constituency perhaps neglected by ACO.

This reading clearly demonstrates that there was competition for legitimacy and power between ANC and ACO, which took the form of appealing to, and empowering, different constituencies. ACO's objectives of creating a unitary organised township thus coexisted with the ideas and concerns of a standholding elite that was never destroyed by 'high racial modernism'. In areas like East Bank, where the crowded yards of Alexandra were replaced in the 1980s by individual houses, ACO has been usurped by newer organisations. Elsewhere, many yard committees are still functioning. But where former standholders still inhabit these yards, the continuity in patronage networks has led to ambiguous and sometimes contradictory ideas about social and political relations. The result today is that localised representations of space and social relations in Alexandra yards are highly variable, and are often at variance with those put forward by either ACO or ANC. As we shall see, the attempts by these organisations to impose a hegemony has been even less effective in free-standing shack settlements, where the civic's yard-based model of organisation has proved inappropriate.

Tensions between ANC and ACO continued to characterise Alexandra politics throughout the period leading up to the 1994 national election, and they were heightened during the preparations for local government elections in 1995. While both ANC and ACO candidates were selected to stand on the ANC's electoral lists, there was much disagreement about the respective weighting given to the two organisations, and about the role of ACA, ALPOA and the recently formed East Bank Civic Association (EBCA): all of which were ANC-aligned, had significant property-owning constituencies, and rivalled ACO. ACO's affiliation to SANCO, which was a member of the ANC's national 'three plus one' alliance,[83] however lent weight to its claim for representation on the ANC's list. A solution was reached, and today ANC and ACO activists jointly represent the township in local government. The two organisations have also converged on the issue of informal housing on the far East Bank. After protests by the EBCA and media appearances by ACA's Mike Beea, ACO and ANC councillors concurred that the squatters should be moved.

Does this represent a policy shift on the part of ACO? In part, the influence of the civic has been weakened by the emergence of other organisations close to the ANC, and it would not be surprising if ACO was forced to concede on the issue of informal housing. But we should also remember that during the early 1990s, even as ACO sought to organise informal settlements, it was concerned at the potential for squatters to organise themselves autonomously, and thus to undermine the civic's hegemony. The East Bank squatters have organised themselves independently of ACO, and thus pose a challenge not only to a spatial order based on property rights, but also to one based on a unitary model of community organisation. For both the ANC and ACO, these squatters represent disorder which undermines local government's ability to plan a new and equitable urban social order. Both organisations employ modernist narratives of urbanisation that view 'uncontrolled' informal settlements as less urban and less modern than the broader urban community, and therefore as a threat to the goal of modernising Alexandra, whether this refers to the modernity of a property-owning middle class or of an urban proletariat. For today's councillors who face the challenge of planning a new urban environment, these ideas are reinforced by academic literature which is based on a similarly modernist understanding of urbanisation. Here, informal settlements are depicted as marginalised from the broader urban community and characterised by a 'migrant culture' that legitimises the emergence of a violent form of patronage, thus posing serious problems for democratic community-based development.[84]

As we have seen earlier, to explain the problems of informal settlements in terms of their presumed liminality between rural and urban in a unilinear process of urbanisation is misleading. Elsewhere, I have criticised the literature on informal housing for its assumptions about both marginality and culture, which I have argued overemphasise the separation of informal settlements from the broader urban context[85]. This is especially true for Alexandra, where the social and political dynamics of formal and informal housing are closely intertwined. Consequently, the modernist discourses which ACO and ANC employ, and on which they are basing current policies, do not necessarily reflect people's lived experiences. In order to shed light on this, I look at ANC and civic activists' attempts to organise an informal settlement, known locally as 'Mozambique'.[86]

Informal Housing in a 'Postmodern' Urban Environment: The Case of 'Mozambique'

Mozambique is a densely populated shack settlement named after the large concentration of Mozambicans living there. It first came into being when a construction company working in Alexandra moved its Mozambican workforce onto a piece of empty land in 1990, and later retrenched most of them. Since then, many other people have moved to the settlement: mainly Mozambicans and South Africans from the Giyani and Bushbuckridge areas of the northern Transvaal. While most of the shack-dwellers still have families in the rural areas, many of them are long-term migrants who also have friends and relatives in urban centres like Soweto. Consequently, their previous places of residence include urban hostels as well as formal and informal housing.

Prior to 1991, ACO was unsuccessful in bringing Mozambique into its township-wide shack-dwellers' coordinating committee. But with the outbreak of violence in March of that year

there were several attempts by civic and ANC activists from the local 'Lusaka' area committee to establish a shack committee in the settlement. The two main players here were David Shabangu, who held office in both ACO and the ANC, and Philemon Mthembu, a former FRELIMO guerilla and senior ANC marshal[87] who acted as right-hand man to Shabangu. Shabangu was a skilled organiser who had established a powerful support base in the area through forming patronage relationships with influential youth activists, or 'comrades', who in turn performed a coercive policing role for him. He used this to try to carve out an autonomous territory for himself, and while he used ACO and ANC membership to legitimise his authority, he manipulated differences between the two organisations to enhance his personal power. Shabangu's ideas about political leadership were quite at variance with those of his organisations. As a *sangoma*, and claiming to be a member of the King's council in Swaziland[88], he emphasised the importance of tradition and strong individual leadership rather than democratic participation. Eventually this was to lead to his expulsion from Alexandra, after he established an ethnically-based vigilante group, extorted money for weapons, and was implicated in the murder of a Zulu-speaking couple who were ANC members. Mthembu, on the other hand, adhered to democratic principles, and tried to combine political education with organisation. Since he did not hold office in local structures, he deferred to Shabangu, while at the same time acting independently where possible. Shabangu, meanwhile, was dependent on Mthembu for access to self-defence units which were controlled by the ANC's marshal structure.

Shabangu sought to incorporate Mozambique into his area committee, and was supported by Mthembu, who explained, "If it wasn't organised it would be easy for the enemy to get in and create its own structures". The shack-dwellers were keen to support any organisation which could help alleviate the terrible conditions of the settlement, and in particular which could provide a solution to high levels of police harassment. Shabangu and Mthembu made several successive attempts to establish a shack committee in the settlement. But the yard committee model proved inappropriate for the large amorphous shack settlement. With no clearly-defined boundaries, Mozambique was continually growing and, unlike in the semi-domestic spaces of yards, the shack-dwellers had few social ties. There was therefore little social base to their participation in a shack committee. This factor, combined with the inability of shack leaders to satisfy the material needs of the shack-dwellers, weakened the influence of the committees, which in each case collapsed.

Organisation was initially facilitated by Mthembu, who encouraged a long-time 'comrade' and ANC member resident in the settlement to form a shack committee. When this man moved away and the committee collapsed, Shabangu stepped in and chose another leader, who was influential in migrant networks. While Mthembu was trying to create a democratic structure and Shabangu a more traditional style of leadership, in both cases the chair of the shack committee was dependent on these outside actors for what they hoped would be material assistance and protection. What emerged was therefore patronage-style dependency relationships, which combined ideas about democracy and tradition to differing degrees.

This illustrates that vertical dependency relationships are not just internal to informal settlements. Far from being a causal factor underlying social, cultural and political isolation, these relationships are often precisely the means by which informal settlements are integrated into the broader urban community, albeit through personalistic criteria which render integration uneven and therefore undemocratic.[89] Shack leaders can act as brokers between

shack-dwellers and outside actors or patrons who command resources: developers who need popular legitimacy for their projects or political activists seeking to increase their support base. Informal settlements are, in other words, a resource desired by political actors whose own organisational machinery is inadequate to integrate shack-dwellers without establishing a clientelistic relationship with key individuals in these settlements. In this way, patterns of clientelism originating from outside informal settlements are replicated within such settlements rather than being generated solely by the conditions of informal housing.

This example also challenges the idea of informal settlements as more 'rural' and 'traditional' than a more modern 'urban culture'. While culture in informal settlements is often understood to be a hybrid mixture of rural and urban influences, resulting in "distinctive sub-cultures and political practices": some more 'rural' and others more 'urban' in character, depending on people's experiences,[90] this is usually understood to emanate from a transitional stage in the process of becoming 'urban'. 'Urban culture' however displays many of the same features and ambiguities evident in informal settlements. Many of the shack-dwellers I interviewed had lived in other types of housing, so that their experiences and resources are drawn from a broader environment. The same fluidity also applies to those living in the formal township. The leadership of Shabangu is a case in point. Although he had a rural homestead which he occasionally visited, he lived in formal housing and was not a migrant. He frequently evoked tradition to legitimise his practices, while using urban-based democratic political organisations to legitimise his position. As long as he was able to fulfil people's expectations of him as a leader, he managed to combine democratic and clientelistic practices without overt contradiction. While Mthembu's approach to politics could be characterised as more 'urban', 'modern' or 'democratic', he nevertheless worked closely with Shabangu; and where Mthembu was concerned with bringing the shack-dwellers into the ANC's ideological fold, Shabangu was more instrumental in integrating them into urban political structures.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to demonstrate the continuity between the current stand-off between squatters and ANC-aligned property-owners in Alexandra, and past attempts by the township elite to construct a spatial order based on property rights and paternalism. While this represented opposition to apartheid, and particularly to the policies of 'high racial modernism', it has since the mid-1980s itself been contested by the more socialist-oriented ideas of ACO. All of these political players have however approached the issue of informal housing in terms of a modernist conception of urbanisation. All assume that squatters are recent arrivals from the rural areas, and thus less urban and less modern than the broader township community. The state thus attempted to prevent squatting through restrictions on urbanisation, coinciding with the interests of property-owners who perceived squatters as a threat. For ACO, on the other hand, civic organisation was seen as the tool that could transform squatters into a radical urban proletariat. In many of Alexandra's free-standing shack settlements, however, organisation was weakened by the attempt to apply a yard-based model of organisation to a very different social and spatial arrangement. The resulting 'uncontrolled' settlements are thus perceived by both ACO and ANC as being outside 'the community', and therefore a problem for community-based development. My material,

however, supports Mabin's assertion that informal housing today, far from being a transition between rural and urban, is very much part of the urban environment. While the internal dynamics of these settlements cannot be characterised simply as 'rural' and 'traditional', or as 'urban' and 'modern', they are largely a product of broader political processes which are similarly ambiguous. Alexandra has always confounded these modernist contrasts, and continues to do so.

What does this mean for planning strategies? Firstly, any research intended as a preliminary to addressing the question of land invasion should explore the linkages between informal settlements and their surroundings. The crisis that occurred in Zevenfontein in the early 1990s, for example, can only be understood by looking at the role of a powerful patron in the ANC's regional executive, who provided the opportunity for authoritarian leaders to assert themselves, and encouraged them to dismiss the community's lawyers.[91] Secondly, the recognition that informal housing is a significant feature of the urban environment, and that it cannot be addressed solely through policies attempting to direct urbanisation processes, means that mechanisms of participation need to be developed to involve squatters, and surrounding formally-housed communities, in development initiatives that affect all of them. This will not be easy, but it is more realistic than the mistaken idea that we can just temporarily remove squatters from the urban environment while development is implemented. Informal housing is a product of this environment, and a refusal to recognise and thus take responsibility for this 'Nobody's Baby' will not make the challenge disappear. Stadler's metaphor of 'birds in the cornfield'[92] is particularly apt in the 1990s. If local government carries out its ultimatum to move the East Bank squatters on May 3rd, it is highly likely that others will simply take their place.

1.Alan Mabin, 'On the Problems and Prospects of Overcoming Segregation and Fragmentation in Southern Africa's Cities in the Postmodern Era'. In S Watson and K Gibson (eds), Postmodern Cities and Spaces. Blackwell 1995.

2.Mabin is using the term postmodern as a socio-economic condition, rather than as an aesthetic or as an epistemology.

3.Alan Mabin, 'Struggle for the City: Urbanisation and Political Strategies of the South African State'. Social Dynamics 15(1): 1-21, 1989; P Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-1952'. Radical History Review 46-47:89-113, 1990.

4.Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements' p93.

5.Josette Cole, Crossroads. The Politics of Reform and Repression 1976-1986. Johannesburg. Ravan Press 1987 p19.

6.See Hilary Sapire, 'Politics and Protest in Shack Settlements of the PWV Region, South Africa 1980-1990' Journal of Southern African Studies 18(3), 1992, p677.

7.Alan Mabin, 'The Dynamics of Urbanization Since 1960'. In M Swilling, R Humphries, K Shubane (eds), Apartheid City in Transition. Cape Town. OUP. 1991

8.Ibid p42.

9.Ibid p44.

10.P Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: its Social Character and Political Consequences'. Journal of Southern African Studies. 21(1) 1995 pp115-129.

11.Ibid p125.

12.While the term location is used to describe African urban areas that were built before the public housing programmes of the 1950s, Alexandra's freehold status meant that it was not strictly speaking a location either. It was proclaimed as a 'Native township' in 1912, but although its freehold property rights were protected under the 1913 Land Act, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 prevented any other such areas from being established (M Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township" to "Model Township" - a Political History of Alexandra 1905-1983'. Unpublished Honours Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand 1984, p2). In this paper, I follow popular usage in referring to 'Alexandra township'.

13.T Couzens, 'Nobody's Baby: Modikwe Dikobe and Alexandra 1942-1946'. In B Bozzoli (ed), Labour Townships and Protest. Johannesburg. Ravan Press. 1979.

14.James Ferguson, 'Mobile Workers, Modernist Narratives: A Critique of the Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt'. Journal of Southern African Studies 16(3-4): 385-412, 603-621.

15.Alan Mabin, 'Conflict, Continuity and Change: Locating "Properly Planned Native Townships" in the Forties and Fifties'. Symposium on South African Planning History 1993; Peter Wilkinson, 'A Discourse of Modernity: The Social and Economic Planning Council's Fifth Report on Regional and Town Planning, 1944'. Symposium on South African Planning History 1993; Susan Parnell, 'South African Cities: Perspectives from the Ivory Tower of Urban Studies'. Unpublished paper. University of the Witwatersrand Institute for Advanced Social Research 1995.

16.Oren Yiftachel, 'The Dark Side of Modernism: Planning as Control of an Ethnic Minority'. In Watson and Gibson, Postmodern Cities and Spaces.

17.D Hindson, Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat. Johannesburg. Ravan Press. 1987

18.Mabin, 'Conflict, Continuity and Change'.

19.David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity. 1991

20.Alan Mabin and Dan Smit, 'Restructuring South Africa's Cities 1900-2000: A Prospectus (Or, A Cautionary Tale). Unpublished paper. University of the Witwatersrand African Studies Institute 1992; Parnell, 'South African Cities'.

21.E Wilson, The Sphinx in the City. London. Virago Press. 1991; Parnell, 'South African Cities'.

22.A D King, Urbanism, Colonialism and the World Economy. Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System. London. Routledge. 1990

23.Mabin, 'Conflict, Continuity and Change'.

24.Maynard Swanson, 'The Sanitation syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony 1900-1909'. Journal of African History 18(3) 1977.

25.This existed in tension with ideas about racial segregation.

26.I am using the terms liberal and conservative here as tendencies rather than as two distinct camps. There were of course many intermediate positions, which is not surprising if we consider the ambiguity of underlying ideas about modernisation.

27.Belinda Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability: Race, Class and Authority in South Africa's Black Cities'. Unpublished paper. University of the Witwatersrand Institute for Advanced Social Research 1996.

28.The establishment of this department in 1919, with (poorly defined) planning powers, illustrates the centrality of the 'sanitation syndrome' in early planning policy, and the liberal modernist idea that planning was a solution to social problems and reconstruction (Mabin and Smit, 'Reconstructing South Africa's Cities'; Wilkinson, 'A Discourse of Modernity').

29.P N Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy' of Alexandra Township: 1905-1958' pp7-18. Unpublished Honours Dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand. 1981; Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township" to "Model Township"' p5.

30.The Star 11/1/43, cited in Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p3

31.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p4.

32.The Star 11/1/43, op cit.

33.Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945. Johannesburg. Ravan Press 1983. p164.

34.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' pp5-6.

35.Mabin, Conflict, Continuity and Change'.

36.Wilkinson, 'A Discourse of Modernity'.

37.These were: distance from white towns; adjoining the locations of neighbouring towns; industrial and open buffer zones; hinterland for expansion; easy distance for rail transport; own road connecting with the city; distance from main roads (Mabin, 'Conflict, Continuity and Change').

38.WWM Eislen 1950, cited in Mabin, 'Conflict, Continuity and Change' p331.

39.Men or women over the age of 21.

40.The role of the communist Bram Fischer, who was a member of the 1942 committee, was however rather different, since he supported the formation of the Alexandra Tenants' Association.

41.Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy of Alexandra' p43.

42.Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability' p9.

43.J Lucas, 'Space, Domesticity and People's Power: Civic Organisation in Alexandra in the 1990s'. African Studies 54(1): 89-113 1995; J Lucas, 'Space, Society and Culture: Housing and Local-Level Politics in a Section of Alexandra Township, 1991-1992'. Unpublished MA dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand 1995 pp95-100.

44.Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy' of Alexandra' p116.

45.Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy of Alexandra' pp36,108-112 ; Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p20.

46.These took place in 1940, 1942, 1943 and 1944.

47.E Roux, Time Longer Than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle For Freedom in South Africa. University of Wisconsin Press 1978 p319; Lodge, 'Black Politics' p163.

48.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p15.

49.Alf Stadler, 'Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg 1944-7'. In B Bozzoli (ed), Township, Labour and Protest. Johannesburg. Ravan Press 1979; P Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-1952'. Radical History Review 46-47: 89-113.

50.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p4.

51.Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy' of Alexandra' p58.

52.Tourikis, 'The 'Political Economy' of Alexandra' p34.

53.The impressions of Drum editor Basil Davidson were that many had lived in Alexandra all their lives (Ibid).

54.Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability'.

55.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' pp26-28.

56.C E Carter, 'Comrades and Community: Politics and the Construction of Hegemony in Alexandra Township, South Africa, 1984-1987'. Unpublished Phd thesis. Oxford University 1991. p50.

57.The Native (Urban Areas) Consolidated Act, Native Services Levy Act, Urban Bantu Councils Act, Housing Act, Native Resettlement Act and the Group Areas Act are among the legislation that now applied to Alexandra.

58.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"', p48.

59.Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability' p14.

60.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"', p39.

61.Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability' p19.

62.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p49.

63.Bozzoli, 'From Governability to Ungovernability' p20.

64.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"', p63.

65.Parnell, 'South African Cities' p10.

66.Mongane Wally Serote, To Every Birth Its Blood. Johannesburg. Ravan Press 1981 p22.

67.Ibid p36.

68.Ibid p21.

69.K Jochelson, 'Reform, Repression and Resistance in South Africa. A Case Study of Alexandra Township 1979-1989'. Journal of Southern African Studies 16(1): 1-32.

70.Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"', p72.

71.Jochelson, 'Reform, Repression and Resistance'.

72.Hindson, 'Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat'; on Alexandra, Couzens, 'Nobody's Baby'.

73.This did coexist with the 'disorder' of ungovernability, but I would suggest that this emerged from the destructive aspect of this attempt to overturn the old social order and replace it with a new hegemony.

74.The ideological orientation of the 'charterist' camp of the UDF was guided by the Freedom Charter, while 'workerists' were more concerned to prioritise working-class interests. The charterist camp claimed a more direct relationship with the exiled ANC, although this was not necessarily always the case, and viewed the workerists with some antipathy. In actual political developments, 'charterist' and 'workerist' tended to operate as categories rather than identifiable groups, so that there was often disagreement over who fell into which camp. In Alexandra, Mayekiso viewed ACA's middle-class executive as petty bourgeois, and later accused ACA chairperson Mike Beea of being 'populist'. Mayekiso described himself as a socialist, and was scathing about

workerists. However, his background in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), his interest in the formation of a workers' party, and his stated rejection of the Freedom Charter as a 'capitalist document' meant that many UDF activists doubted his charterist credentials (Carter, 'Comrades and Community' pp201,206,209).

75. For example, Moses Mayekiso, his brother Mzwanele, and Richard Mdakane, all of whom were on the AAC executive.

76. Jochelson, 'Reform, Repression and Resistance' p18.

77. The charges were dropped in 1989.

78. Interview with Richard Mdakane, November 1991.

79. Ibid.

80. Before violence erupted in 1991, ACO claims that Inkatha members were involved in ACO structures, and that ACO had committees in all three hostels.

81. Sarakinsky quotes Leepile Taunyane of Sam Buti's Liaison Committee in 1981 describing shack-dwellers as "not bona fides of the township. They (were) people who had just streamed to Alexandra from nowhere" (Sarakinsky, 'From "Freehold Township"' p72).

82. This highlights the point made by Mdakane: that residents of formal housing perceived shack-dwellers as the back-bone of ACO support, largely because they also believed that ACO had brought shack-dwellers to the township.

83. ANC, SACP, COSATU and SANCO.

84. Caroline White, 'Makhulu Padroni? Patron-Clientelism in Shack Areas and Some Italian Lessons for South Africa'. Unpublished paper. Association for Anthropology in South Africa 1993.

85. Lucas, 'Space, Society and Culture' pp183-226.

86. I use Pseudonyms throughout this case study.

87. The ANC marshal structure exists in parallel with other branch structures. In Alexandra during 1991 and 1992, it played a central role in the formation of self-defence units.

88. This proved to be untrue.

89. See White, 'Makhulu Padroni?'. The integrative properties of clientelism have been noted elsewhere (Eg R Lemarchand, 'Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa'. In S Schmidt, J Scott, C Lande and L Guasti (eds), Friends, Followers and Factions. Berkeley. University of California Press. 1977).

90. Sapire, 'Politics and Protest' p681.

91. See White, 'Makhulu Padroni?'.

92. Stadler, 'Birds in the Cornfield'.