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University of the Witwatersrand

Wits School of Governance

Masters of Management (MM) Degree

Informal practices in settlement buildings in Bekezela Johannesburg

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Abstract

Inner city Johannesburg residents of occupied buildings experience systematic neglect and exclusion, living without access to services including water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management. Targeted for eviction instead of support and labeled as criminal areas, these communities are left to navigate precarious living conditions without formal state support. Still, residents actively resist exclusion and they self-organise to sustain their daily lives using informal governance structures.

This study analyses the lived experiences of Bekezela residents, an occupied building in Johannesburg, to explore how they survive in the absence of formal state support. Using Insurgent Governance as a theoretical framework, this study examines how residents resist exclusion, organise to access resources, and create informal leadership structures. Through qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth interviews, the study uncovers the agency, resistance, informal governance mechanisms and collective self-organisation sustaining life in occupied environments.

Findings show that although these insurgent governance strategies enable survival, residents remain vulnerable to legal precarity, infrastructure problems, and systematic neglect. This study contributes to debates on inclusive urban governance, advocating for policies that recognise informal governance structures rather than criminalising them. Ultimately, the study provides some insights in re-imagining urban governance in ways that are more inclusive, participatory, and responsive to inner city marginalised communities of Johannesburg.

Keywords: Insurgent governance, occupied buildings, resistance, agency, self-organise, inclusive urban governance

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have made many sacrifices for me to get the best education. Thank you for always carrying me throughout my academic career.

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This Masters journey would not have been possible without so many people.

First, to my parents and siblings, thank you for always being there when I needed you. A special shoutout to my dad, who never stopped encouraging me to do my Master's and believing in me to further my education.

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And to my partner, thank you for being my safe space and allowing me to disappear into my books.

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List of figures

Figure 1: 33

Figure 2: 33

Figure 3: 34

Figure 4: 34

Figure 5: 34

Figure 6: 34

Figure 7: 40

Figure 8: 40

Figure 9: 41

Figure 10: 41

Figure 11: 41

Figure 12: 41

Figure 13: 46

Figure 14: 47

Figure 15: 47

Figure 16: 48

Figure 17: 48

Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Dedication 3
Acknowledgements 5
List of figures 7
Chapter 1: Introduction and Background 11
1.1. Introduction 11
1.2. Problem Statement 12
1.3. Purpose statement 14
1.4. Research questions 14
Chapter 2: Literature review 15
2.1. Introduction 15
2.2. State Neglect and Urban Informality 17
2.3. Governance Practices in Occupied and Informal Spaces 19
2.4. Emerging Governance Structures 22
2.5. Transformative Potential 24
2.5. Theoretical Framework: Insurgent Governance 25
2.6. Conclusion 27
Chapter 3: Methodology 29
3.1. Research Design 29
3.2. Research Tools 30
3.3. Sampling Strategy 32
3.4. Ethical Considerations 33
3.5. Positionality 34
3.6. Limitations 35
3.7 Conclusion 36
Chapter 4: Findings 38
4.1. Introduction 38
4.2. Presentation of results 38
4.2.1 Theme 1: Navigating Agency, Resistance, and Marginalisation 38
4.2.2. Theme 2: Collective Adaptation and Self-Organisation 43
4.2.3. Theme 3: Community Governance and Informal Leadership in Occupied Spaces 47

4.2.4 Theme 4: Residents Perspectives on Governance Inclusion 51
Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion 61
5.1. Introduction 61
5.2. Navigating Agency, Resistance, and Marginalisation 61
5.3. Collective Adaptation and Self-Organisation 64
5.4. Community Governance and Informal Leadership in Occupied Spaces 68
5.5. Residents Perspectives on Governance Inclusion 70
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations 74
6.1. Introduction 74
6.2. Recommendations 76
6.3. Implications for further research 77
References 78
Annexure A 83
Annexure B 86
Annexure C 88

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

This chapter will focus on the introduction of the study as well as the background. It will outline the problem statement, the purpose statement as well as the research question and the sub-questions.

1.1. Introduction

It is just after midnight in Johannesburg, and Nomsa gently walks over cracked concrete, leaving her little room. She gently opens the noisy old-rusted door so as not to wake her neighbour who is asleep just a few steps away on the other side of the curtain separating their living spaces. With her toddler child on one hand and a faint glimmer of a cell phone screen as her only source of illumination on the other, she walks to the communal toilets at the outskirts of Bekezela, an occupied building she has called home for more than ten years. Quickly relieving themselves, they move silently and nervously to escape both real and imagined dangers lurking in the darkness. She knows of residents, especially women, who have been attacked on this same journey. For Nomsa and hundreds of others in Bekezela, this is their reality; a daily struggle to exist in a city intent on forgetting them.

Johannesburg, the economic hub of South Africa, is a city of paradoxes. It offers shining skyscrapers and bustling commercial districts, though just blocks away from this apparent success, thousands of people in occupied buildings like Bekezela live without even the most basic services. Often termed "bad buildings," these spaces have become home to underprivileged populations left behind by the City's exclusionary patterns of urban governance.

For many inner city residents, formal housing options are out of reach. Thus, occupied buildings have become alternative shelter for thousands of most vulnerable Johannesburg citizens (Tissington, 2013). Many of these people are at constant risk of eviction, often denied their basic human right to adequate shelter as redevelopment efforts are directed towards clearing "bad buildings" for investment-driven development (Huchzermeyer, 2011). The state ignores these areas. This reality begs questions on the nature of urban governance and the right to the city of those who live outside the margins of formal property ownership.

Many debates surround the discussions around the governance of informal urban spaces in Urban studies and policymaking. One of the main arguments centers on the legitimacy of informal governance structures

developed in reaction to state neglect. Scholars such as Holston (2009) and Miraftab (2009) have discussed 'Insurgent Governance', a framework that challenges conventional governance models by highlighting how marginalised communities assert agency and create alternative systems of order. From this perspective, rather than being a mere means of survival, informal practices are indeed active forms of resistance against exclusionary urban governance. Nonetheless, rather than seeing such practices as permanent elements of the urban space, mainstream urban governance approaches frame occupied buildings and informal settlements as temporary crises. This perspective leads to governance approaches aimed more on displacement and eviction than on inclusion and integration.

This research argues that the lived experiences of Bekezela's residents provide vital insights into the re-imagination of urban governance, particularly Johannesburg's urban governance. This study questions established narratives about occupied buildings and provides alternative models for inclusive urban governance by analysing how residents resist exclusion, organise to secure water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management, and build informal governance systems in the absence of formal state support. The study posits that understanding the governance structures that emerge inside occupied buildings can inform more just and equitable governance interventions that ensures that every resident, regardless of tenure status, has a legitimate voice in determining the future of the city.

Using Bekezela as a case study, this research explores the idea of insurgent governance in greater depth, examining how marginalised communities resist exclusion, organise themselves, and build alternative governance systems. Ultimately, the study aims to question the idea that occupied buildings exist outside the limits of legitimate urban government.to the study therefore contributes to more broader discussions on inclusive urban governance.

1.2. Problem Statement

Inner city residents of occupied buildings in Johannesburg often experience systematic state neglect. Despite living in the heart of Johannesburg, they navigate urban life as though they are invisible inhabitants without basic services and in deteriorating structures and precarious housing conditions (Wafer et al., 2008). According to Huchzermeyer (2011), occupied buildings in Johannesburg and other metropolitan regions are often marked as criminal zones; areas to be removed from the city. This negative framing explains their systematic state neglect as well as their exclusion from conventional urban planning procedures and processes. One could argue that the

government purposely overlooks their existence and fails them. These groups, however, do not simply accept this failure or exclusion; rather, they continue occupying and managing these spaces in the absence of state support. Despite continuous occupation as a housing strategy, with households occupying abandoned or state-owned buildings for decades, there remains a significant gap on how occupier residents manage to survive without state intervention specifically in relation to their resistance of state neglect. It largely remains to be known how they organise collectively to access fundamental basic services. Most importantly, it is crucial to ascertain the kinds of informal leadership and community rules that are and have been developed to help these occupied buildings remain liveable. Although many studies have looked at urban informality, few have explored the lived realities of residents in occupation, especially in relation to the implications for urban governance.

The Usindiso fire disaster, which took almost seventy lives in the early hours of one morning, highlighted the significance of answering these concerns. This event revealed not just the harsh reality of a building ignored by the government, but also the unstable living conditions produced by makeshift construction methods (Duma, 2024). Occupied buildings like Usindiso highlight the need to know how people resist exclusion, manage limited resources, and create self- organised governing structures to maintain a semblance of normalcy in their everyday life. It is therefore important to examine whether these adaptation strategies are just survival tactics or are reflective of broader collective self-organisation that can provide transforming insights regarding inclusive urban governance.

Thus, this study seeks to explore how Bekezela residents manage to survive in the face of state neglect and exclusion. Harnessing Insurgent Governance as a theoretical framework, the study aims to explore the dynamics of agency, resistance, self-organisation and informal governance that characterise insurgent governance in an occupied context. The study is with the hope to produce important insights and lessons that can guide more inclusive and responsive urban governance systems and processes that can potentially improve the city for everyone who lives in it despite the type of tenure. Understanding the insurgent governance strategies in such occupied spaces might reveal new pathways for urban governance to integrate marginalised communities, therefore ensuring that every citizen has a legitimate voice in shaping a city they call home.

1.3. Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to examine how Bekezela residents manage to survive in the face of state neglect and exclusion. Using the theoretical framework of Insurgent Governance, this study will explore how the occupiers resist exclusion, organise themselves to guarantee basic services like water, power, sanitation, and waste management, and create informal leadership and governance systems. The study ultimately seeks to examine their lived experiences to reveal the transforming power of these grassroots practices which enables the development of important and insightful analysis on how urban governance might be reimagined to become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalised populations, especially those residing in occupied buildings.

1.4. Research questions

Main Research Question:

How do residents of Bekezela navigate and manage to survive in an occupied building in the face of state neglect and exclusion and what are the implications of this for urban governance?

Sub-questions:

1. How do the residents resist systemic neglect and exclusion by the state?
2. How do the residents organise to access and manage basic services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management in the absence of formal state provision?
3. What grassroots governance systems and practices have emerged within Bekezela to navigate state neglect and exclusion?
4. How do the lived experiences of Bekezela residents challenge or inform more inclusive models of urban governance?

This chapter presented the background of the study, the problem statement, its purpose, and the research questions.

1.5. Structure of the Report

This report is structured into six chapters, each building on the preceding to explore how residents of Bekezela, an occupied building in Johannesburg, survive state neglect and practice informal governance.

Chapter One introduces the research context and outlines the central problem: that inner-city occupiers are excluded from formal urban systems but potentially continue to organise and resist.

It presents the study's purpose, research questions, and situates the inquiry within debates on urban governance and informality.

Chapter Two develops the conceptual and theoretical framework through a review of literature on state neglect, informal urban practices, and insurgent governance. It identifies a gap in the literature on occupied buildings and frames the study's contribution to these debates.

Chapter Three outlines the research design shaping this study. It discusses the qualitative methodology, particularly case selection, sampling strategy, data collection, and thematic analysis used in the study. It reflects on ethical considerations, the researcher's positionality, and limitations of both the research design and the study as a whole.

Chapter Four presents the empirical findings which are structured around four themes: agency and resistance; collective self-organisation; informal leadership; and residents' perspectives on governance inclusion. It draws on interview excerpts and visual data to illustrate how governance emerges from below.

Chapter Five analyses these findings through the lens of Insurgent Governance, arguing that residents' everyday practices constitute a form of grassroots governance that challenges formal exclusion. It also reflects on the limits and tensions within these informal systems.

Chapter Six concludes the report by summarising the main insights and proposing recommendations for inclusive urban policy. It calls for greater recognition of informal governance in occupied buildings and outlines directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews scholarly work to frame and contextualise the focus on Insurgent Governance and its role in shaping governance practices in informal urban spaces, particularly occupied buildings. Relying on and interacting with scholarly contributions from urban studies, governance theory, and literature on informal living contexts, this review develops a conceptual framework to examine how residents in occupied buildings resist systematic neglect, organise, and informally govern themselves in contexts of precarious tenure..

2.1. Introduction

In the Global South, while state neglect sometimes calls for alternative governance practices, the study of informal urban environments has grown to be a crucial focus in urban studies. Occupied buildings and informal settlements are areas of exclusion where people navigate systematic neglect by means of self-organising, collective resistance, and alternative service delivery systems. The literature (Holston, 2009; Roy, 2005) on insurgent governance offers a useful lens through which one may grasp these processes, emphasising how marginalised communities assert agency in the absence of formal governance structures.

Starting with an analysis of state neglect and urban informality, this review will show how systematic marginalisation and poor state interventions contribute to the emergence of insurgent governance. The analysis will go on to look at how people self-organise to manage basic services including water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management in informal living spaces. After that, the study will go over legal mobilisation and collective resistance, focusing on movements like like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (Miraftab & Wills, 2005) and Abahlali baseMjondolo. The last section will engage with Insurgent Governance as a conceptual framework, analysing key ideas with the framework that counter hegemonic planning (Miraftab, 2009). The review will finally address the challenges and governance consequences of these governance structures.

Insurgent governance challenges conventional urban governance models by foregrounding grassroots practices born in response to state failures. Asef Bayat (2010) presents the idea of "quiet encroachment," in which marginalised communities gradually secure access to basic needs by informal means. This approach emphasises how resistance, such as illegal power connections (Scelo, 2016) or informal water distribution systems (Ramirez & Sañudo-Fontaneda, 2018) become a form of governance that sustains urban life in neglected spaces.

Miraftab (2009) similarly characterises insurgent planning as a counter-hegemonic practice that subverts exclusionary urban policies and reorders city power relations.

Another factor acknowledged as an essential component of Insurgent Governance is legal mobilisation. Legal frameworks and advocacy are used by marginalised communities to resist evictions and demand recognition. In South Africa, notable examples of this are the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) and South Africa's Abahlali baseMjondolo (Miraftab & Wills, 2005). These movements show how Insurgent Governance functions on several levels by stressing the interaction between formal legal mechanisms and informal governance practices. Community-led initiatives in service provision add another important aspect of Insurgency Governance. In the absence of formal infrastructure, residents create self-organised methods to control waste management, electricity, sanitation, and water. For instance, people in South Africa's Freetown Kroo Bay have used creative heat-reflective roofing to fight high temperatures, therefore demonstrating how informal settlements adapt to environmental constraints (Egbejule, 2024). Such initiatives highlight the agency of informal communities in addressing urban service deficits, therefore placing them as active participants in urban governance rather than passive recipients of state neglect.

However, Insurgent Governance has some challenges. State responses to informal governance methods vary from co-optation to repression, frequently reinforcing cycles of marginalisation. Examples of how the government aggressively destroys grassroots governance systems are forced evictions, demolitions, and criminalisation of informal service provision (Egbejule, 2024). Furthermore, internal power dynamics in informal settlements can lead to exclusions, especially for women who usually suffer more vulnerability in these environments (Frediani, 2023).

Notwithstanding these obstacles, Insurgent Governance provides important new perspectives on how marginalised communities impact urban governance. This study adds to the ongoing discussions on urban informality, service delivery, and inclusive governance by examining the governance practices in occupied buildings in Johannesburg. Developing urban policies that acknowledge and integrate the agency of informal settlement residents requires an understanding of the complexities of Insurgent Governance, therefore fostering more just and equitable cities.

2.2. State Neglect and Urban Informality

Residents living in informal areas often oppose state neglect through forms of agency and resistance, sometimes known as Insurgent Governance. Scholarly perspectives on how residents of these areas exercise their rights and confront systematic marginalisation are examined in this section of the review.

Agency and Daily Resistance

Bayat (2010) presents the idea of "quiet encroachment," outlining how marginalised urban communities gradually acquire essential resources and services by informal means. This kind of daily resistance helps people navigate and mitigate the effects of state neglect. For example, the phenomena of illicit electricity connections, *izinyoka*, as described by Scelo (2016) showcase how communities self-organise to get fundamental services in the absence of formal state provision in South Africa.

James Holston (2011) addresses "insurgent urban citizenship" in which people living in informal housing become active citizens by organising demands via community-based organisations that confront inequality. This kind of agency challenges the neoliberal ideas of citizenship that usually exclude these communities by involving both overt and covert actions to claim rights and services (Scelo, 2016) in dissident ways and from the margins of and parallel to established frameworks of statecraft.

Legal Mobilisation and Advocacy

Residents also use legal frameworks to assert their rights, therefore engaging in official resistance. Established in 2001, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) forms an umbrella structure for several community groups resisting service cuts and evictions in Cape Town. To uphold people' rights to shelter and basic services, the AEC uses the law and public lobbying, therefore demonstrating how legal mobilisation may be a tool for insurgent governance (Miraftab & Wills, 2005).

Self-organising under community-led initiatives

Many times, in response to inadequate state services, people create self-organised solutions to meet their needs. To fight excessive heat, for instance, residents in Freetown's Kroo Bay have installed heat-reflective roofing sheets composed of recycled plastics, therefore lowering inside temperatures by up to 6°C. This project shows how residents cooperate amongst themselves to solve environmental problems brought on by state neglect (Egbejule, 2024).

Similarly, In Cape Town's Sweet Home Farm, informal businesses such as shebeen (informal tavern) operators navigate restrictive regulations by inventing spaces that act as social hubs, therefore claiming their access to the city and resisting formal economy exclusion and hegemony (Kotzen, 2014).

Social Movements and Collective Resistance

One significant aspect of Insurgent Government is collective action. Participatory planning processes in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, have been shaped by grassroots movements challenging traditional power systems. These movements generate "invented" spaces of participation where people directly participate in decision-making, therefore challenging and redefining formal governance paradigms (Silvestre, 2015). Silvestre (2015) and Miraftab (2004) collectively shed light on the significance of both "invited" and "invented" spaces in participatory governance, illustrating how grassroots initiatives can navigate and transform existing power dynamics.

Movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers Movement) represent collective resistance against inadequate housing policies and forced evictions in South Africa. By organising protests, litigation, and community dialogues, these movements demand recognition and inclusion in urban planning processes, highlighting the role of collective agency in Insurgent Governance (Miraftab & Wills, 2005).

Gender-Based Agency and Resistance

Recent studies have also explored how gendered vulnerability interacts with Insurgent Government. While informal government structures can empower residents, especially for women, they often reproduce and perpetuate existing inequalities. Women suffer most from inadequate infrastructure in many informal communities. These dangers are increased by insecure housing and unsanitary facilities. Dealing with these gendered aspects calls for more intersectional approaches to understanding Insurgent Governance (Frediani, 2023).

Limitations and Challenges

The evolving body of literature on agency and resistance in informal communities emphasises the need to view residents as active agents in shaping their urban environments. Although these groups of people use different approaches to navigate and challenge discriminatory urban policies, it is

important to be cognizant of the constraints and internal complexities inherent in informal governance structures. As observed in Kabul's informal communities, where redevelopment efforts have resulted in extensive displacement and destruction, state responses to informal resistance can be harsh, including forced evictions and demolitions (Egbejule, 2024). Furthermore, internal dynamics in informal spaces can create obstacles. Inequalities in competing forms of power and authority could impede collective efforts and fair allocation of resources. Understanding these complexities is crucial for developing interventions that support genuine community empowerment (Ouma et al., 2024)

The body of research on Insurgent Governance in informal communities emphasises several strategies residents employ to counter state neglect. Through daily resistance, legal mobilisation, self-organising, and collective action, these communities claim their rights and challenge exclusionary urban governance. Nevertheless, other elements determine the success and sustainability of these strategies, including internal community dynamics and state responses. A nuanced understanding of these elements is essential for formulating inclusive urban policies that recognise and integrate the agency of informal settlement residents.

2.3. Governance Practices in Occupied and Informal Spaces

Resource Management in Informal Communities

Within informal communities, the idea of self-organisation is intricately linked to the framework of Insurgent Governance in which people actively participate in building autonomous systems to manage resources, establish community norms, and sustain livelihoods in the absence of or neglect by official state mechanisms. This section explores scholarly debates on self-organisation, emphasising its function as a kind of Insurgent Governance that challenges traditional power structures and redefines urban citizenship.

Self-organising as Insurgent Government

Holston (2009) introduces the concept of Insurgent Citizenship in which marginalised urban communities assert their rights by means of self-organised practices, therefore challenging exclusionary urban policies. In this context, self-organisation is not only a survival tactic but a deliberate act of resistance against systematic marginalisation. Miraftab (2009) also explores how informal settlements reflect insurgent planning where people's self- organised initiatives challenge and redefine formal planning paradigms in ways that are reflective of insurgent

planning. These perspectives view self-organisation as a transformative tool that rearranges urban governance from the grassroots.

Collective and Resource Management

In informal settlements, collective action usually manifests as community-led initiatives for resource management. According to Atkinson (2024), informal settlements provide unique challenges for public administration that call for a re-evaluation of governance structures to accommodate self-organised resource management systems. This point of view emphasises the necessity of adaptive governance models that acknowledge and integrate informal collective actions. Using the Policy Arrangement Approach, for example, community self-governance in São Paulo's informal settlements has been examined to demonstrate how residents collectively manage resources and negotiate with external actors to secure basic services (Basile, 2024). These studies illustrate the capacity of informal communities to self-organise, often compensating for the shortcomings of informal governance.

Informal Practices and Spatial Organisation

Although informal settlements are often viewed as unplanned, scholarship refutes this by stressing the natural spatial logic and self-organised assembly of these communities. Roy (2005) contends that informality is an organisational logic guiding the urbanisation process and implies that informal communities function under a different but logical spatial arrangement. Studies (for example Dovey & King, 2012) show that informal communities reflect a sort of insurgent urbanism challenging conventional planning standards by embodying a spatial logic with a self- organised assemblage of buildings, blocks, streets, and lanes. These creative spatial techniques not only help survival but also assert an alternative type of urbanisation free from formal planning constraints.

Survival Economies and informal Livelihoods

A key component of Insurgency Governance is the development of survival economies inside informal settlements. Described as the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary," Bayat (2000) shows how underprivileged groups gradually obtain the necessities of life through informal means, therefore challenging state power. The informal markets that thrive in communities like Cairo's informal districts, where people participate in illegal economic activity to maintain their living, clearly show this kind of daily resistance (Ismail, 2006).

These methods of survival challenge formal economic systems and represent a kind of insurgent economic governance, therefore securing a form of survival that dents and interrogates the reach of mainstream economic governance.

The management of essential resources such as water, electricity, sanitation, and waste in informal settlements is a critical area of study, particularly within the framework of Insurgent Governance. Residents often engage in self-organised practices to compensate for the lack of formal infrastructure and services, thereby asserting their agency and challenging existing power structures.

Water Management

In informal settlements, access to clean water is a great challenge due to inadequate infrastructure. Too often, residents rely on informal distribution systems such as water trucks organised through collective community efforts. For example, in Doornkop, , an informal settlement in Soweto, South Africa, the community has actively fought for its rights to access clean water and adequate sanitation systems, thereby demonstrating self-organisation in the face of systemic neglect by their municipality (Ramirez & Sañudo-Fontaneda, 2018). These are the kinds of initiatives that reflect the residents' agency in managing water resources and highlight the importance of community involvement in water governance.

Electricity Access

Residents of informal settlements tend to develop informal solutions, including unauthorised connections to the main power grid or community-managed micro-grids in response to the absence of formal electricity services. While these kinds of practices provide many services, they also come with fire hazards and legal challenges. The lack of formal recognition and support for these initiatives highlights the need for policies that integrate informal practices into formal systems, ensuring safety and sustainability. A study on the governance of infrastructure provision in informal settlements found contradictions in the basic infrastructure provision processes, highlighting the complexities involved in integrating informal electricity practices into formal governance structures (Chikomwe, 2022).

Sanitation Practices

Residents in informal settlements employ various practices to manage waste in the absence of formal infrastructure as sanitation continues to be a pressing issue. Some of these practices include the use of buckets, portable toilets, plastic bags, and other existing facilities within their

settlements. Similar to the practices used to access electricity, these practices raise safety concerns as poor conditions of available facilities and lack of privacy are the order of the day. The different kinds of practices employed reflect the adaptive strategies of residents to maintain hygiene and health standards despite infrastructural deficiencies (Muanda et al., 2020).

Waste Management

To manage waste, residents of informal settlements often rely on community-led initiatives due to the absence of formal services. They may organise collective waste collection and disposal systems, sometimes partnering with non-governmental organisations to improve efficiency. A good example of this is in Lebanon where the influx of refugees has strained existing waste management systems, leading to increased waste generation. In response, community-based approaches have been implemented to address waste management challenges in informal settlements (UNICEF, 2021). Such initiatives are indicative of the capacity of informal communities to self-organise and manage waste effectively, contributing to environmental sustainability, notwithstanding the challenges involved.

This section has shown that self-organised resource management in informal communities demonstrates acts of resilience and agency by residents who take matters into their own hands. However, as the section has simultaneously shown, this presents challenges. The lack of formal recognition can lead to vulnerabilities including but not limited to exploitation and health risks. Yet, these self-organised systems also offer opportunities for innovation and community empowerment. A study (Kain et al., 2022) on waste picker organisations highlights how grassroots initiatives contribute significantly to the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the societies they serve, emphasising the importance of supporting and formalising these self-organised practices.

2.4. Emerging Governance Structures

In informal spaces, governance extends beyond resource management to encompass systems of leadership, decision-making, and conflict resolution. These governance structures are often shaped by collective and localised efforts, reflecting the principles of Insurgent Governance.

Leadership in informal communities tends to be context specific. For example, In Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement, community elders and youth leaders play pivotal roles in mediating disputes, organising public meetings, and advocating for residents' various rights (Elfversson & Höglund, 2018). Similarly, in Cape Town's informal settlements,

leadership manifests through committees who are responsible for allocating land, resolving conflicts, and liaising with external actors such as NGOs and municipal authorities (Huchzermeyer, 2011).

These kinds of systems of leadership are often informal but highly functional and effective as they rely on local legitimacy rather than formal authority.

Decision-making in informal settings often prioritises the well-being of all community members. According to Miraftab (2009), Insurgent Governance is rooted in practices of mutual aid and collective action where communities prioritise shared interests over individual gain. This is evident in practices such as community savings schemes, rotational leadership, and collective negotiations with service providers.

Conflict resolution is another crucial aspect of governance in informal spaces. Pieterse and Simone (2017) observe this. They argue that informal governance systems often incorporate customary practices such as mediation and restorative justice to address disputes. These practices are particularly important in densely populated environments where conflicts over resources and space are common. A good example of this is in Mumbai's slums in India. In these slums, community leaders often resolve disputes through informal courts or neighbourhood meetings, avoiding costly and time-consuming formal legal processes (Appadurai, 2001).

However, literature also highlights the limitations of these governance structures. Roy (2009b) warns against romanticising informal governance. They note that it can reinforce existing power hierarchies and exclusionary practices. For instance, informal leaders may exploit their positions for personal gain, or community-based systems may exclude marginalised groups such as women and migrants. This points to the need for a nuanced understanding of how informal governance operates and how it can be made more inclusive and equitable.

The governance practices in informal spaces illustrate the resilience and agency of marginalised communities in the face of systemic neglect. Not only do the residents innovate resource management systems, but they also develop leadership and decision-making structures that embody the principles of Insurgent Governance by challenging exclusionary urban policies and asserting alternative models of governance. However, they also reveal significant gaps and tensions, particularly regarding sustainability, inclusivity, and scalability. This research anticipates to fill these gaps by examining the governance practices in an

occupied context as literature tends to focus on informal settlements and slums that are largely outside the inner city.

2.5. Transformative Potential

Thus far, literature demonstrates the various ways in which Insurgent Governance manifests in informal spaces, mainly in informal settlements and slums. However Insurgent Governance extends to offer transformative insights into how urban governance can evolve to become more inclusive and responsive to marginalised communities. Insurgent Governance challenges the dominant models of top-down exclusionary urban governance, therefore, it foregrounds grassroots practices and emphasises the agency of marginalised groups in shaping urban life. Holston (2009) argues this, noting that Insurgent Governance disrupts the normative frameworks of governance by reclaiming spaces and redefining the relationship between the state and citizens. Through practices of self-organisation, agency, collective action, and informal resource management, Insurgent Governance demonstrates something significant; that alternative systems of governance can emerge in spaces of state neglect.

A good example is the case of Porto Alegre, Brazil, where participatory budgeting, a practice rooted in grassroots advocacy, has been institutionalised as part of the city's governance system. This reform has allowed marginalised communities in slums to have a say in resource allocation, which has improved transparency and addressing local priorities (GoldFrank, 2011). In Medellín, Colombia, community-driven urban renewal projects have transformed informal settlements into thriving neighbourhoods. This has been possible through partnerships between residents, local authorities, and private entities (Maclean, 2015). These examples illustrate how the principles of Insurgent Governance, such as participation, local knowledge, and collective decision-making, can inform and transform formal governance systems.

The Case for Inclusion

In order for inclusive urban governance to occur, it requires a shift from imposing formal systems that are not responsive to marginalised community needs to recognising and integrating the lived experiences and practices of marginalised communities. This is vital, as Miraftab (2009) contends, because understanding these lived realities is crucial for developing governance systems that are not only inclusive but also relevant and sustainable to specific contexts. Thus, informal and insurgent practices, while emerging from state neglect and out of necessity, reveal the gaps in formal governance and offer pathways for addressing them.

When discussing inclusive urban governance, the focus extends beyond service delivery to broader questions of citizenship and urban belonging. When employing informal and insurgent governance practices within their spaces, marginalised communities also assert their right to the city, a concept by (Lefebvre, 1996). They claim their right to the city by challenging exclusionary policies and demanding recognition and participation in urban life. This demonstrates that marginalised communities are not just passive recipients of state neglect but active actors in shaping their urban environments. As Huchzermeyer (2011) emphasises, inclusive urban governance must prioritise these voices, moving away from domineering models to approaches that empower communities as partners in governance.

As is observed in the foregoing literature, there are often barriers that need to be addressed. Regarding inclusive governance, there is a need to address structural barriers such as entrenched power dynamics and institutional resistance to change. While insurgent practices can inform governance reforms, Roy (2009b) warns that they are often co-opted when incorporated into formal systems, thus emphasising the importance of maintaining the original purpose of grassroots practices and ensuring that reforms are driven by the needs and priorities of marginalised communities.

This research will build on these insights by scholars on governance and urban life. Examining the governance practices in Bekezela will contribute to a deeper understanding of how informal and insurgent systems can inform urban governance that prioritise inclusion, particularly in occupied building contexts.

2.5. **Theoretical Framework: Insurgent Governance**

Definition and Origins

Insurgent Governance has been defined by various scholars. According to Arjona et al (2015), it refers to grassroots practices of marginalised communities as they navigate, resist, and re-organise power in spaces of exclusion. It was first conceptualised in relation to urban informality. Arjona (2015) observes that Insurgent Governance focuses on how communities excluded from formal governance systems create alternative mechanisms that address their needs and assert their rights from within their territories. Holston (2009) defines Insurgent Governance as civic practice that challenges dominant governance structures by mobilising collective resistance and self-determination. Similarly, Miraftab (2009) characterises Insurgent Governance as a form of "counter-hegemonic practice" where

marginalised populations engage in acts of resistance to disrupt and reshape exclusionary urban policies and urban life.

The origins of Insurgent Governance are rooted in broader discussions on urban informality and power. Scholars, especially Roy (2005), often defend the idea of informality, arguing that it is not an anomaly but rather a core feature of urban governance in the Global South. AlSayyad (2004) adds to this, highlighting how, when informality emerges, it manifests as a product of systemic exclusion and a site of agency where communities negotiate their survival. This situates Insurgent Governance within the context of informality, underlining its dual role as a response to structural neglect and as a critique of dominant governance paradigms.

While insurgent governance has been studied in informal settlements and slums, the literature often overlooks its manifestation in occupied urban buildings. This gap highlights the need for further research on how Insurgent Governance operates in contexts of occupation where the spatial and political dynamics differ from open-air informal settlements and slums. This study aims to address this gap by examining Insurgent Governance practices as occupiers resist, organise, and create informal governance system.. This is significant in discussions of inclusive urban governance.

In this study, Insurgent Governance means the grassroots practices used to resist, self-organise, and informally self-govern in occupied buildings when formal governance systems exclude marginalised groups. It manifests both as practical solutions, for example, providing water, electricity, and sanitation through informal means and political acts of resistance, asserting the residents' right to resources and recognition.

Hitherto, the most notable elements of Insurgent Governance discussed in the few preceding sections involve the following:

1. At its core, Insurgent Governance relies on the capacity of marginalised communities **to self- organise and mobilise collective action**. These practices are defined as "quiet encroachments of the ordinary" where individuals and groups reclaim urban space and resources through everyday acts of resistance (Bayat, 2010). Miraftab (2009) also highlights how these collective efforts often emerge in response to immediate needs such as accessing water, electricity, or housing, and these practices evolve into sustained governance systems over time.

2. Insurgent Governance is inherently **resistant to the exclusionary practices of formal governance systems**. Holston (2008) argues that these practices challenge the unequal distribution of resources and rights, thereby asserting alternative claims to citizenship. This resistance often takes the form of 'disruptive' practices that rearrange the use of urban space (A. M. Simone, 2004).

3. Insurgent Governance **redefines the relationship between the state and its citizens** by asserting governance practices in spaces of exclusion. Roy (2009b) explains this, noting how Insurgent Governance practices destabilise the dichotomy between the formal and informal, thus exposing the fluidity of governance structures.

Relevance of Insurgent Governance to Occupied Spaces

In occupied buildings, residents don't just occupy space. Rather, they take control of neglected urban spaces, creating environments that will address their needs. Insurgent Governance is particularly relevant in spaces of occupation. Occupied spaces, such as abandoned buildings, are often seen as contested territories where residents resist state neglect by asserting their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996). Huchzermeyer (2011) argues that these spaces are not merely sites of survival as they represent sites of political and social struggle where residents create alternative governance systems that challenge the state's monopoly or authority. Therefore, Insurgent Governance is relevant to occupation.

Many studies, for example Wafer et al (2008), have documented how residents of occupied buildings in Johannesburg organise to access basic services in the absence of formal support, emphasising the role of community leadership and shared norms. However, this research intends to go beyond this by probing what this means for urban governance, specifically the meaning of this emerging Insurgent Governance in occupied buildings for urban governance especially for inclusive urban governance.

2.6. **Conclusion**

This chapter has covered the complexity and significance of Insurgent Governance in informal spaces, particularly within the context of informal settlements and slums. Key takeaways indicate that marginalised communities develop self-organised governance practices to access basic services, assert their right, and negotiate their place in the city. This occurs in response to systemic neglect and exclusionary urban governance models.

In addition to this, the analysis of global and local scholarship revealed that Insurgent Governance is not only a reactive phenomenon but a process that challenges dominant governance paradigms. Legal mobilisation, collective resistance, and community-led service delivery emerge as critical strategies that residents employ to assert their agency.

However, the preceding discussions also highlight that Insurgent Governance is not without challenges. There are key limitations and challenges, including the precariousness of informal governance structures, internal power struggles, and the state's often repressive responses to insurgent practices. While these governance mechanisms provide essential services and foster resilience and survival, their sustainability and inclusivity remain contested.

In conclusion, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of how Insurgent Governance operates within informal living spaces and it's transformative powers for urban governance. This research builds upon these discussions to further analyse the informal governance practices emerging in occupied buildings in Johannesburg, offering new perspectives on the role of informal governance in shaping the city's future.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection tools, sampling strategy, ethical considerations, and positionality for this study.

3.1. Research Design

The research employed a qualitative methodology to examine how residents of Bekezela, navigate and survive without formal state support. This approach was chosen over others because it enables an in-depth exploration of complex human behaviour in their natural settings. This approach allows for a rich, contextual understanding of marginalised experiences. While the qualitative method is useful for identifying general patterns through numerical data, it often overlooks the depth and nuance required to understand the informal, everyday practices of marginalised residents. As Creswell (2014, p. 24) notes, qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". Thus, this approach is ideal for studying the Insurgent Governance practices employed by Bekezela residents.

Furthermore, the qualitative design supports the study's theoretical framework of Insurgent Governance by foregrounding the voices and experiences of community members. In this context, the methodology not only provides insights into how residents navigate state neglect and develop alternative governance structures, but also informs the broader debate on inclusive urban governance.

The choice of Bekezela and background

The choice of Bekezela, an occupied building in Johannesburg's inner city, as the case study was deliberate. Occupied buildings, defined as structures informally inhabited without official tenancy agreements or ownership rights, are often neglected by the state and owners. Consequently, they lack essential services and infrastructure and are often deteriorating spaces (Koali, 2017). Bekezela provides a unique context because it exemplifies the struggles of inner-city residents who have to survive in the face of neglect and exclusion.

Prior to the early 2000s, Bekezela, was an institution called 'Bekezela College', located in the heart of Johannesburg, Region F, in Newtown. The college offered education and sports training opportunities. It attracted Black youth with aspiring football careers such as Respondent A in this study. For reasons unclear to this study and respondents, the college shut down, leaving the building

to deteriorate due to lack of maintenance. However, it offered students at the college a place of shelter, students such as Respondent A who had nowhere else to go after the shutting down of the institution. The students and some security guards continued to live in Bekezela, occupying the empty classrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms. Today, over 500 men, women, and children of all ages from predominately Black low- income households, call Bekezela home. They have faced adversity through several eviction attempts and they encounter numerous adversities on a daily basis. However, they are determined to stay in the only home they have ever known.

This research was undertaken with the understanding that some residents of Bekezela have lived there for a long time, with some having stayed there from as far back as 1998. This meant that they would be able to provide in-depth knowledge about their lived experiences in navigating life without state assistance. They would be able to provide knowledge that can fulfil the purpose of this study. While there are many occupied buildings in inner city of Johannesburg, focusing on a singular case like Bekezela allowed for an in-depth analysis of the specific informal living dynamics found within occupied buildings, providing valuable insights for this study.

3.2. Research Tools

This research used in-depth interviews as the primary data collection tool. The interviews were conducted with six respondents who live in Bekezela. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research tool that enables the collection of detailed, personal responses of participants' experiences. It allows one to capture their thoughts and feelings (Patton, 2002). Given that the purpose of the study is to understand how residents of Bekezela navigate and survive state neglect, in-depth interviews were particularly appropriate.

This method allowed for an open-ended interview of complex issues such as the ways in which residents exercise agency, engage in resistance, and develop alternative governance practices. The study centers the voices of those who are typically excluded from formal urban planning and policy-making, aligning with the theoretical framework of Insurgent Governance (Creswell, 2014; Holston, 2009).

The interviews were semi-structured. The reason behind this format was to create a balance between consistency and flexibility. For instance, I used a set of fixed questions to ensure that key topics such as the residents' strategies for accessing water, electricity, sanitation, waste management, and the collective actions, were covered. At the same time, it was important to

ensure during the interviews that respondents are able to expand on their experiences and provide nuanced insights that might not have emerged in a structured interview. This flexibility was essential for engaging with the complex and context-specific experiences of Bekezela residents as it enabled me to probe deeper into emerging themes.

Each in-depth interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using my cell phone. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim from isiZulu to English. Once transcription was complete the data was subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. This process not only ensured that detailed personal narratives are captured. It also facilitated a deeper understanding of how Insurgent Governance operates on the ground. By prioritising the subjective experiences of residents, the methodology provided insights into how marginalised communities actively negotiate their survival and assert their rights in the absence of formal state support.

Thematic Analysis

This study employed a deductive thematic analysis, using the literature review as a conceptual framework to analyse interview data. Key themes, namely agency and resistance, self-organisation and practices, informal governance, and transformative implications, were identified from the literature and used to guide data analysis and interpretation.

The analysis involved coding interview data based on these key themes. I used colour coding to highlight patterns from responses and grouping the patterns into broader categories. These categories became the thematic clusters informing the organisation of the findings section, offering a structured analysis of governance practices, resistance, service access and urban governance implications in marginalised urban spaces.

Access to participants and challenges

Initially, a verbal agreement with Inner City Federation (ICF) leaders, Siya Mahlangu and Sfiso Zuma, was reached to get their assistance in accessing participants. However, they were unsuccessful in reaching Bekezela's chairman and chairlady. I continued on my own to get hold of the chairman through his cell phone number and WhatsApp given by the ICF. After a few unsuccessful weeks, I eventually reached the chairman. The chairlady does not have a phone.

The significance of acquainting with the leadership of Bekezela before recruiting the participants was two fold. Firstly, it allowed me to respectfully introduce myself to the

people that have been chosen by the community to represent them and state the purpose of the study, and especially why Bekezela was chosen for this study. Secondly, the leadership would become essential in assisting to recruit members of the community who were willing to participate in this research. The chairman availed himself to recruit people that not only fit the criteria, but that were also willing to participate.

The interviews were all conducted in person as initially planned. The interviews were conducted in Newtown at my home. The distance between my home and respondents was only about five minutes' walk. This was an advantage as there were no transport costs or any other barriers to conducting the interviews besides the initial hurdle to contact the community leaders.

In addition to interviews, secondary data analysis was employed to complement and validate the findings. Secondary data sources included reports SERI and contextual evidence of other similar informal living contexts which provided context and enabled the triangulation of interview findings. The use of secondary data helped with enhancing the sophistication and comprehensiveness of the analysis, ensuring that the findings were well-rounded and grounded in empirical evidence.

I visited Bekezela on one occasion on a Saturday a few weeks after conducting the interviews. During the visit, photography of Bekezela was conducted. It was necessary to see the findings in person before writing a report about a community one has not seen with the naked eye. I was able to conduct photography on my cell phone, which can be found in Chapter 4.

There were security concerns regarding the visit to Bekezela. These concerns were raised by both ICF and the chairman. One the day of the visit, the Chairman and Chairlady functioned as 'tour' guides around Bekezela taking me around the entire building. This allowed for photography, though observation was not possible. Although observation was initially planned, it was not conducted due to the safety concerns. On the day of the visit, I was rushed through the guide around Bekezela due to safety concerns.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

This study used a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific characteristics and relevance to the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Snowballing is a non-probability sampling method where new units are recruited by other units to form part of the sample. It begins with one or more study participants and continues on the basis of referrals from those participants (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). This study used both of these sampling tools because the participants were selected based on a specific criterion. However Bekezela's chairman helped to recruit residents that fit this criterion because he is familiar with his community members.

The selected participants fit the criteria; three males, three females, over the age of 18, have lived in Bekezela for over two years, and can communicate in one of these languages - English, isiZulu, seSotho, seTswana, isiNdebele, and isiXhosa. Occupation or socio-economic status was not a factor in choosing the participants. All participants chose to conduct the interview in isiZulu. It was not intended initially to include community leaders in the sample. However, two community leaders, the chairman and chairlady, participated, which proved to be valuable because they were knowledgeable about the history of Bekezela, the challenges they face, how the community work together or what they have achieved. It was also crucial to engage with these leaders because they engage with the City officials on challenges in the community on behalf of Bekezela. Moreover, they had knowledge about the informal living conditions as they have been part of establishing the informal economy and various other informal practices in Bekezela such as the cushions, recycling and creche economic initiatives.

The sample size, though not large, was sufficient for qualitative research, where the focus is on depth rather than breadth of understanding. The selection of six participants ensured a diversity of perspectives while maintaining the feasibility of conducting in-depth interviews and analysing the data thoroughly.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this research, given the vulnerability of the study population and the sensitive nature of the topics discussed. I adhered to ethical guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand code of ethics. To do this I ensured that participant information sheets were given to each participant, informing them of the purpose of this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants whom I provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, their role, and the potential risks involved.

Both documents were in English language, but since the respondents were comfortable conducting the interviews in isiZulu, I ensured that I explained the ontents of the participant informal sheet and

consent form to them in isiZulu to ensure they understood. I also ensured to remind the respondents to ask any questions they have regarding the information written on the documents. Verbal consent was also obtained to proceed with the interview before commencing.

Respondents were made aware that their information would be kept safe and confidential, and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Given that participants shared personal and potentially distressing experiences, I made efforts to maintain a respectful and empathetic approach during interviews by ensuring that respondents speak and finish thoughts without interruption. They were informed that they were not obligated to elaborate further on information that was too sensitive and personal. To protect participants' identities, all names and identifying details were anonymised in the report, referring to them as 'Respondent A, B, C, D, E and F. They were assured that all information was only to be used for the purpose of this study and that the report could be published on the University's repository.

The audio recordings were stored securely in a password protected phone. The transcription was stored securely in a password protected laptop in a Word file document. The transcripts were printed to assist me with analysis on paper rather than on the computer. These documents were kept in a file in my home. They will be destroyed once the research report is complete. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of the Witwatersrand, and ethical approval was obtained before commencing data collection.

Initially, I had expected that due to the probing of lived experiences which can be personal and sensitive, participants would become emotional or triggered by the questions. Fortunately, this was not the case. All six respondents appeared comfortable with me and open to the questions. They were calm, patient and did not show any physical signs of distress. However, before commencing with the interviews, I informed respondents that they could stop if they needed a break or were no longer comfortable to participate in the study.

3.5. Positionality

As a researcher studying a marginalised community, it was essential to reflect on my own positionality and potential biases. I approached this research as an outsider to the Bekezela community, yet with an understanding of the broader issues facing people in occupied buildings in Johannesburg. With my background as a SERI employee, an organisation that works to litigate against evictions and publishes research on the inner city, I was mindful of not imposing

preconceived notions onto the data. I am aware that Bekezela is a client group that SERI has litigated for in the past. However, this litigation had occurred before I became an employee at SERI. I made the participants aware of my employment at SERI. This was necessary to ensure that they understood that this research was not a part of official SERI work, but independent academic work. I did not take advantage of my position at SERI to obtain their consent or solicit information during the interview process. In fact, SERI was not brought up during the interviews. Respondents understood that I was conducting a research project as a student and someone with great interest in how urban governance can be made inclusive for all.

As the researcher, I had no prior relationship or conflict of interest with the community except for acquainting myself with the chairman of Bekezela. However, this was not an attempt to establish a personal relationship. Rather, it was an attempt to formally introduce myself and the research project to the leadership. Respondents had no personal relationship with me and did not know me prior to conducting the study. I did not personally benefit from the study as all work was towards my academic advancement.

3.6. Limitations

The only limitation faced during the process of recruiting respondents was getting hold of the participants. Initially, the ICF had agreed to assist with contacting the community leader so that he could help with recruiting participants. However, the ICF was unsuccessful for about a week in reaching the chairman. They had his contacts, but were unable to reach him through WhatsApp and phone call. After an unsuccessful week, I took it upon myself to reach the chairman through WhatsApp. It took about a week for the chairman to respond to the WhatsApp message. They were also not available via phone call. Eventually the chairman picked up my call. We had planned to meet on Saturday at Newtown Mall, but his phone was off, and we therefore could not meet. The chairman had gone silent for about a week. Eventually, he answered his phone and agreed to formally meet in person. The brief meeting happened on a Saturday at Newtown Mall where I formally introduced myself and the research project. There were no further challenges after that.

Due to the lack of electricity in Bekezela, the chairman had to pay a local Spaza Shop to charge his phone daily. Whenever he did not have R5 for the phone charging fee, his phone was off. This limitation caused a delay in the interview periods. Initially, I had planned to conduct the interviews early August. However, due to these challenges, the interviews had to be conducted in late August.

There was also a limitation on conducting observation. I was advised by ICF to not go to Bekezela alone and they were not readily available to accompany me due to other pressing commitments, which was understandable. While I was able to go to Bekezela on one occasion to do photography, I was accompanied by the chairman and chairlady. However, due to them being difficult to reach due to the pursuit of their own livelihood strategies and the security concerns raised by the ICF, I was not able to return for better observation. The observation was limited to day time where I was able to take photos. I was not able to take notes during the visit, only photography.

The participants share similar characteristics and experiences, hence the maximum of six participants sufficed. Even though the data captured and the depth of the engagement from the respondents was sufficient, I acknowledge that the number of respondents influence the generalisability of the findings. The research is limited with regards to the generalisability of the findings to other occupied buildings in the inner city.

Further on the generalisability of the findings, although Bekezela qualifies as an occupied building, is a unique kind of occupied building. While one may find that the majority of the occupied buildings in the inner city of Johannesburg are high rise buildings, Bekezela is a low rise building with more surface area around the building. The larger surface area enables the establishment of garden and creche initiatives. They have more surface area to develop Insurgent Governance practices. Compared to other inner-city buildings, the research has a shortcoming when it comes to generalising the findings to other buildings. The research's conclusion falls short of concluding that other buildings would be able to achieve this level of self-organisation, although other factors such as resistance and informal governance systems are observed in high rise occupied buildings (WAfer et al., 2008).

3.7 Conclusion

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study to capture the dynamics of urban informality and governance in Johannesburg's inner city. Employing a qualitative approach that combined in-depth interviews with comprehensive secondary data analysis enabled the research to uncover the insurgent governance practices in occupied buildings like Bekezela. The use of purposive and snowball sampling ensured that participants with rich, firsthand knowledge of the community's experiences were selected, while a commitment to ethics and reflective positionality boosted the credibility and integrity of the findings. This methodological approach not only facilitated a nuanced understanding of how residents

navigate state neglect, but it also aligns seamlessly with the study's overarching objective: to get fundamental insights regarding the re-imagining of urban governance in ways that effectively respond to marginalised communities.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the six in-depth interviews conducted in this study. It outlines the responses from respondents through direct quotations. The results are thematically organised along with secondary data to triangulate the primary data. Finally, photographs to visualise the findings are also presented.

4.2. Presentation of results

A total number of six respondents were interviewed. As earlier mentioned, all respondents fit the criteria to participate. They were all interviewed and contributed to answering the research questions. Their identities have been concealed to protect their identities. Instead, they are identified as Respondent A, B, C, D, E and F.

All respondents were community members, over the ages of eighteen, living in Bekezela. Respondents A and C hold unique positions as chairman and chairlady of Bekezela. Respondents A, B, F were males while Respondents C, D and E were females.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Navigating Agency, Resistance, and Marginalisation

This theme explores how the residents of Bekezela navigate systemic neglect and structural marginalization by the state. It also explores their efforts to resist this marginalization and how they assert agency. What was observed is that their lived experiences demonstrate resilience and creativity in the face of neglect and exclusion. However, while their lived experiences portray resilience, they also expose the limits imposed by systemic inequities, resource scarcity, and power dynamics. Agency and resistance not only emerges openly through actions like organising legal challenges or community initiatives, but also in quieter yet persistent efforts to sustain their livelihoods, care for children, and making collective meaning amidst adversity. The community is fighting back against neglect and exclusion, asserting agency and their rights to the city.

Agency in Community Building

Residents have taken proactive steps to address the lack of services and create opportunities for their community.

Respondent A described their leadership role in establishing a creche and a garden to combat child hunger and ensure education:

> *We ended up thinking of opening a crèche and start a garden so that parents can take food from the garden to feed the children and ensure that the children can go to school at the right time like every other child.*

This act of self-organisation reflects collective agency and the prioritisation of children's welfare in the absence of state support. Respondent C echoed the response by Respondent A, detailing how they collaborated with churches to secure structures for the crèche:

> *We went to Real Life Church; they built shacks for us so that children can learn. They learn for free;, they don't pay.*

Respondent C emphasised how women are being empowered through community-driven initiatives like crafting cushions:

> *For me, right now, I work with women to make cushions so that the women can progress.*

Respondent C also emphasised women's agency in community building as a form of survival and protection. Women face heightened risks of violence, including rape and murder, in Bekezela. Efforts to raise awareness and demand support have been ignored. Respondent C emphasised that she tries to support women in Bekezela:

> *Okay, we have tried, we have tried. I work with Black Women Empowerment, but I am not heard. We are being raped, we are being killed, people do whatever they want to us. We raised our voice.? But they don't hear us.*

Respondent C has started women support group networks to help women overcome challenges they face in Bekezela.

> *I have a support group called Umfazi Omnyama. I am able to speak to women to say let's rise.*

These examples illustrate that community members collectively take charge of their futures and collectively support each other through structural difficulties.

Resistance Against Systemic Neglect

Residents actively resist systemic neglect and advocate for their rights, often leveraging legal frameworks and community solidarity.

Respondent A recalls their legal challenge against eviction by PRASA, highlighting their insistence on alternative accommodation as mandated by law:

> *In 2012 we went to High Court against PRASA. The court decided that PRASA cannot evict us without alternative accommodation.*

Respondent A insisted:

> *There is no one that can come to Bekezela to claim a space unless the court is involved.*

Respondent F reflected on how legal protection emboldens resistance:

> *Then it became noticed that this was such a place where the law allows them to live; there were court orders and stuff.*

These actions demonstrate that residents use legal frameworks as tools of resistance, challenging their marginalisation through formal mechanisms.

Structural Constraints on Agency

While acts of agency and resistance are prevalent, systemic neglect often limits their effectiveness. Respondent E described the precariousness of securing basic needs:

> *There are vouchers they give us... Not every month. Sometimes they don't call you, and if they don't call you that month, we get food from people that bring food like bread.*

This precarious reliance on inconsistent aid underscores the limitations placed on residents' self-sufficiency by systemic neglect.

Respondent D highlighted how economic opportunities are constrained, even as they try to sustain themselves through informal means:

> *Remember, I opened the Spaza Shop. I used the sell to make a living. But now it's hard because there are too many people selling in Bekezela.*

Innovative Solutions Amidst Adversity

Residents are innovative despite resource constraints, but their solutions remain tied to external dependence and systemic inequities.

Respondent A reflected on how partnerships with external organisations enable their initiatives:

I asked donations from Real Life Church... They responded and gave me three shacks.

Respondent F detailed how recycling, which is informal work, has become a key survival strategy:

I survived by taking the waste from recyclers to scale it for them; they would pay me about R20 or R30.

Triangulation with Secondary Sources:

Bekezela residents' experiences with how they navigate agency, resistance and marginalisation find support in literature. In their study on "bad buildings" in the inner city, Ngwenya (2017) emphasises how residents are forced into informal work due to systemic exclusion from the formal economy. These informal activities, ranging from Spaza shops to childcare services, serve as key survival tactics, much like the crèches, gardens, and crafting initiatives in Bekezela. In Ngwenya's (2017) study, however, informal childcare generates incomes of up to R3,400 per month, showing the potential of such initiatives, unlike in Bekezela where residents such as the Spaza shop owner struggle to earn an income.

These findings also resonate with Wafer et. al, (2008), who discuss the dual role of such community-driven solutions in fostering economic survival and collective agency while being constrained by precarious conditions. The cushion-making projects and collaborations with external organisations, as highlighted by Respondent B and C, further demonstrate how these acts of agency reflect shared acts of resilience and innovation across marginalised inner-city communities.

Ngwenya (2017) discusses the role of collective action in countering exclusion, which is the case of Bekezela residents who use legal strategies and organised resistance as tools for challenging systemic inequities. The resilience of Bekezela residents, as seen in their legal challenges and community-driven initiatives, illustrates the broader struggle for recognition and their right to exist within constrained urban contexts.

Wafer et. al, (2008) discusses the systemic constraints that limit the effectiveness of agency and resistance, highlighting the precariousness of informal economies and the inconsistency of external aid, which leaves communities vulnerable. Wafer et al (2008) finds that informal businesses, while essential for survival, fail to provide long-term stability. Even creative solutions like recycling and informal labour, as described by Respondent F, remain tied to systemic inequities and dependency on external support. Together, the findings from Bekezela and the supporting literature illustrate a dual reality: while residents exhibit

remarkable innovation and agency, these efforts to resist remain constrained by broader systems of neglect and marginalisation, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and resistance.



Figure 1: Area where waste sorting occurs



Figure 2: Sorted waste



Figure 3: Community creche



Figure 4: Community garden



Figure 5: Cushions produced by Respondent C



Figure 6: Spaza Shop

4.2.2. Theme 2: Collective Adaptation and Self-Organisation

This theme explores how, in the absence of formal service delivery and exclusion from the formal economy, residents of Bekezela have developed self-organised strategies to access water, sanitation, energy, waste management, and income. These solutions reflect resilience, collective problem-solving and an attempt to survive although they remain constrained by financial hardship, systemic neglect, and gendered vulnerabilities.

Water Access: Shared Burdens and Gendered Struggles

Residents rely on 12 community taps for water. They have to carry heavy containers using trolleys or buckets to and from their homes. The physical burden disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as people that are sick and those with disabilities.

Respondent A described how residents access water through communal taps:

> *Yes, it's 12 [community] taps. We fill containers with water and bring them back home.*

Respondent B highlighted the challenges faced by vulnerable residents:

> *We are not happy with it. Some people are sick, others are disabled. If the water was closer, it would be better.*

Respondent B explained the difficulty of transporting water:

> *We use trolleys to collect water. Water is heavy. If you don't have a trolley, you have to use your hands. It's hard getting water.*

Sanitation and Health Risks: Unsafe Toilets and Gendered Vulnerabilities

There are 13 portable community toilets. Due to the limited sanitation infrastructure, residents are exposed, especially women, to infections and gender-based violence. Overcrowded and poorly maintained toilets increase exposure to infections, while the lack of security makes women vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Respondent A expresses concerns about the safety of chemical used in the toilets:

> *There are chemicals in the toilets that they use to clean that are risks for women to use.*

Respondent F underscored the dangers of using toilets at night:

> *There is no security at the toilet. A woman can leave her home to use the toilet and end up being raped.*

Respondent B described the need for women to seek protection when using sanitation facilities:

> *Women can't go to the toilet alone at night. You have to accompany them.*

Energy Access and Fire Hazards: Unsafe and Costly Alternatives

Without access to electricity, residents rely on fire, gas, paraffin, and battery-powered lighting, increasing financial strain and fire risks.

Respondent A explained an improvised method for cooking:

> *We use a 25-liter paint container to make a firecracker and put wood inside to start a fire to cook.*

Respondent B described alternative lighting sources:

> *Sometimes we buy globes that use batteries so that there can be light. But formal electricity we don't have.*

Respondent C raised concerns about fire hazards:

> *If a firecracker falls, the place burns. People can end up dying.*

Respondent D highlighted the cost and burden of alternative energy:

> *Paraffin is about R40. If we had electricity, we would spend less money.*

Waste Management: Collective Action and Challenges

Residents use a combination of individual and collective approaches to managing waste. In some cases, they pool resources to hire cleaners or work together to maintain sanitation, but in other instances, waste accumulation remains unchecked due to financial constraints and a growing population.

Respondent A discussed community-driven cleaning efforts:

> *We try to speak to the community to wake up and clean every Saturday and Sunday.*

Respondent C emphasised the importance of collective responsibility:

If the area becomes too dirty, we come together and clean.

Respondent B noted ongoing waste management challenges:

Pikitup collects the waste, but Bekezela is still dirty. You would mistake it for a dumping site.

Respondent D described how financial limitations and lack of accountability owing to the growing population affect waste management efforts:

We used to contribute money to pay someone to clean, but now there are too many people.

Livelihood Strategies: Hustling, Informal Businesses, and Community Enterprises

Residents engage in various forms of economic activities ranging from running small businesses to informal work, recycling, and collective production to sustain livelihoods. However, earnings remain unstable and often insufficient to meet basic needs.

Respondent A shared their experience with informal work:

I do car wash about two times a week. They give me R100 per wash so that I can eat. But this money does nothing.

Respondent D described how waste collection provides a source of survival:

Most people eat from what they get from recycling waste from the dustbin.

Respondent A highlighted local organising efforts:

We are trying to start organisations. We have opened an organisation called the Service Delivery Task Team.

Efforts to establish cooperative structures, such as community gardens and collective savings groups, indicate a desire for sustainable solutions, although economic precarity and trust issues remain big challenges.

Respondent D explained the challenges with establishing a stokvel and a garden business:

We tried [starting stokvel], but because there's no money, it's hard. Also, here people are not trustworthy. It's better to do it with people that you know live there permanently. But in Bekezela, people are only here temporarily. If you do the stokvel with them, they might take the money and run away.

The thing is the garden is not… someone just comes and harvests for themselves, you can't say anything. If they build it properly and put a fence then it would be fine so that the vegetables grow properly. Before it's time to harvest people just take and take. You see, it's like your work is for nothing, You don't see the fruits of your labour and see you plants growing.

Triangulation with Secondary Sources:

The systemic neglect in basic service provision is not an isolated issue to Bekezela. In Ngwenya's (2017) study, for example, the author explains that many of these buildings are excluded from formal service networks, leaving residents to rely on dangerous and unreliable informal methods.

Furthermore, Wafer et al (2008) addresses the issue of sanitation failures in occupied buildings, detailing how issues of overcrowding and poor maintenance of shared sanitation facilities can lead to significant health risks. This echoes the respondents' accounts of infections caused by shared unsanitary portable toilets, pointing out that these conditions are common in occupied buildings (Wafer et al., 2008). Wafer et al., (2008) further reveals the use of paraffin and fires to manage the lack of electricity provision, highlighting the health and fire hazards from these practices. The community is also encouraged by the informal leadership to manage waste by pooling money together to buy refuse bags and clean the waste together. However, they have similar issues with the area becoming too dirty despite efforts to clean.

This discussion crosses borders to find resonance in the global context. A mixed-method study on informal settlements in Kenya stressed the health concerns for women due to unsanitary practices. In Nairobi's Mathare Valley, due to inadequate sanitation facilities, women are compelled to engage in unsafe behaviours, thus elevating their risk of infections and other health issues (Winter et al., 2019). While these cases cited here focus on informal settlements, they are still relevant as both occupied and settlement contexts have similarities in terms of being embedded in informality and existing outside the limits of state governance.



Figure 7: Taps shared amongst residents



Figure 8: Mobile toilets shared amongst residents



Figure 9: Firecracker in Bekezela



Figure 10: Partitioning using fire hazardous materials



Figure 11: Community waste bin



Figure 12: Waste laying around Bekezela

4.2.3. Theme 3: Community Governance and Informal Leadership in Occupied Spaces

This theme explores emerging community governance and informal leadership. Community governance and informal leadership refers to the ways in which residents in occupied buildings develop alternative structures of authority, resource distribution, and collective decision-

making in the absence of formal state governance. These governance structures emerge to maintain order, resolve conflicts, secure basic services, and negotiate with external actors.

Informal Leadership and the Role of Community Representatives

In Bekezela, the governance structures are shaped by individuals who take on leadership roles, often without formal recognition from the state. These are elected by the community. Leaders such as Respondent A and Respondent C act as intermediaries. Their responsibilities include mediating between the residents and external actors, organising initiatives, mediating conflicts, and addressing needs of the community.

Respondent A, the chairman of the community, described how leadership responsibilities include advocating for employment opportunities for Bekezela community members:

> *I go to malls asking for 30% for the community. There is this thing where the community has 30% so that they can work.*

This role however extends beyond advocacy for work opportunities to broader social responsibilities such as ensuring that there is food for children:

> *That's why we ended up thinking of opening a creche and start a garden so that parents can take food from the garden to feed children and ensure that children can go to school at the right time like every other child.*

Similarly, Respondent C, the chairlady, emphasised a leadership role centered on supporting women and ensuring access to resources:

> *I help women with their needs. We have a creche at Bekezela, we have teachers at Bekezela. We have helped the teachers earn a living.*

Community-Based Decision-Making and Enforcement of Local Norms

Bekezela residents have created community decision-making processes to maintain order and manage shared spaces. The committee plays an active role in this. They set up and enforce rules, particularly around community cleanliness and the use of shared spaces.

Respondent A described efforts to organise community cleaning initiatives:

> *We try to speak to the community to wake up and clean every Saturday and Sunday to clean where they live and around the area since the yard is big.*

Beyond these efforts, the committee also acts as an informal law enforcement body, reprimanding those who violate communal expectations.

Respondent C explained:

> *If I see that this person doesn't want to clean, we go to them and the committee to reprimand them. We ask them to fix here. They say sorry and clean.*

The committee also takes an active role in improving security. For instance, Respondent A described how they collaborated with police to remove drug users from spaces within Bekezela:

> *There used to be people that would smoke drugs in these shacks [within Bekezela]. The committee collaborated with the police to destroy these shacks. So, there is an open space remaining. We want to use this open space to create a ground for the children and use it for netball.*

Grassroots Advocacy and Negotiation with External Stakeholders

One of the key features of governance in Bekezela is the way leaders and residents engage in advocacy to secure resources and services. Despite limited recognition from formal authorities, the community actively negotiates with external actors including businesses, NGOs, and local government.

However, there is a strong sentiment among the residents that formal government structures are absent or unresponsive to them. Respondent A highlighted the community's need to self-advocate because official representatives do not prioritise their interests:

> *There is nowhere where the counsellors are speaking on behalf of the community. We are the ones that have to stand up for ourselves and remind them of the 30% that the community should benefit from.*

Similarly, Respondent D reinforced Respondent A's narrative that there is little direct engagement from state officials:

> *The committee does reach them (government), but I have not seen any government person come to Bekezela.*

The committee has managed to secure resources from other actors despite government officials' absence. Respondent E described how the committee has helped in obtaining food and clothing donations:

> *They have tried to make sure we get food parcels… even the people that give us clothes. They bring us food, bread, soups and cooked rice. They dish up for us. These are the efforts of the committee.*

Additionally, Respondent C described efforts to bring attention to gender-based violence (GBV) within the community:

> *We have taken our complaints to the station commander regarding the gender- based violence we experience. We want to talk to the media as well.*

Triangulation with secondary sources:

The governance structures that are emerging in Bekezela are not isolated events as they reflect broader trends in informal living contexts, particularly in cases where residents develop leadership and advocacy mechanisms to compensate for state neglect. In Mumbai, India, for example, there are grassroots organisations affiliated with Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) that have played a crucial role in community governance, particularly in securing essential services and advocating for recognition (Schermbrucker et al., 2016). Similar to Bekezela's leaders such as Respondent A who describes advocating for employment, community leaders in Mumbai have negotiated with local businesses and government authorities to secure rights to land and infrastructure development for informal settlement residents (Appadurai, 2001; Schermbrucker et al., 2016).

Moreover, a defining characteristic of these governance structures is their ability to organise resources and implement local development projects on behalf of their communities. In Mumbai, for example, community-led federations initiated sanitation programs and negotiated for in-situ upgrades (Schermbrucker et al., 2016), mirroring Bekezela's self-organised governance mechanisms such as establishing creches and gardens.

Another key similarity is the enforcement of local norms and collective decision-making. The SDI-affiliated groups in Mumbai use self-regulatory systems to maintain hygiene, prevent evictions, and resolve disputes (Patel et al., 2012). The SDI model, like Bekezela's, demonstrates that informal leadership structures are not just replacements for state functions, but critical governance mechanisms that help communities organise, survive, and challenge urban exclusion (Patel et al., 2012).

The Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST) in Brazil: Grassroots Advocacy and Political Negotiation

Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto (MTST), or the Movement of Homeless Workers, which organises urban occupations and negotiates with the state for land and housing rights are also similar to Bekezela's committee. MTST leaders also act as intermediaries between residents and external actors, advocating for formalisation and improved living conditions (Cohen, 2018). MTST grassroots leadership also emerges in response to state neglect, with leaders taking on roles.

Another similarity is the emphasis on self-representation in political negotiations. Much like Bekezela residents who state instances of having to stand up for themselves, MTST activists also push for direct engagement with state officials rather than relying on intermediaries (Cohen, 2018). This signifies similarities with Bekezela residents' demands for formal recognition and inclusion in governance structures. Respondent D, for example, notes the absence of direct government engagement.

It is also worth noting that both Bekezela and MTST focus on amplifying marginalised voices through advocacy campaigns. MTST leaders have mobilised mass protests to highlight urban inequalities, forcing the government to respond to their demands.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Residents Perspectives on Governance Inclusion

This theme captures residents' perspectives on governance inclusion, highlighting their proposals for the upgrading of Bekezela over relocation, critiques of existing urban governance, and the broader implications of their self-organised governance efforts. This theme is significant because it directly places the voices of the residents in response to particular proposals for inclusive governance.

Demand for Participation and Inclusion in Governance

One of the major emerging demands from Bekezela residents is their need for active participation with the state. They believe that their contributions to the city should be acknowledged in urban governance decisions rather than being treated as an invisible population, which reveals an understanding of themselves as active agents in shaping the city.

Respondent A described how the state only engages with them for political gain or eviction but fails to address their needs:

> *It's not that they don't know, they know. I say they know properly because when it comes time to vote, they know the informal settlements. They come and make promises they don't keep.*

Respondent F added:

> *They don't come, they don't see us. The only ones that come are the ones with the intention to evict us; they don't come with good intentions, only to shift us.*

Respondent D echoed this:

> *They only come to us when they want to evict us. We have been evicted twice.*

Residents argue that the government should not merely acknowledge their existence during elections, but should actively include them in decision-making processes.

Respondent A proposed a solution within which City officials should consult directly with informal communities to understand their challenges:

> *For us to get basic services, if I was the City, I would ensure that I work with the community first so that I know what their challenges are. I would visit the various informal settlements and set up meetings to speak to them so that they could make me understand what their issues are.*

Respondent A further expanded:

> *They could see what we have lacking, what we need. Stuff like that. And then they should take action, not just come and then not action. Like, for example, we need toilets, we need services. We don't have proper toilets. They have chemicals; they should bring toilets that flush. They must do what we need. They must not take our complaints and then not do what we need.*

Respondent B added:

> *Okay, what we are saying is that they should come and see how we are living and take our complaints and then make a difference. They don't integrate our voices. They don't care about us, simple.*
> *They should care about us and come see what our needs are. We will show them practically that this is what we need practically. They should come in front*

> *of us. They must take action. If they are far, they won't be able to see what our challenges are.*
> *Government should build a relationship with the community and show them that these are our needs that could help us.*

Respondent C proposed participation that is gendered:

> *They must come out and hear the women cries. There are many women who are crying.*

Respondent F admonished the state to come up with solutions for participatory governance:

> *Government should come up with a way to get in touch with people and hear from them what they want.*

This desire for inclusion extends beyond consultations to demands for tangible policy interventions. Respondent E emphasised that providing services inside homes would demonstrate that the government recognises their capacity for self-management:

> *If they were to give us toilets in our houses, electricity, cleaning… they could see that these are people that can take care of their things because we can survive without them anyway.*

Respondent F made similar remarks:

> *But if the government came, they could see that we are trying. The creche we have is due to our efforts; it's not from government. They could see that we are trying on our own without the government. Then they should question where we could assist them so that they can improve*.

Critique of State Neglect and Failed Urban Governance

A strong sentiment among residents is that the government does not prioritise their needs or consider them part of the city. Many believe that the state's inaction is on purpose, rather than being a result of oversight.

Respondent B stated:

> *We are not recognised by government, simple. All the informal settlements, like Bekezela, Ice Cream, Tshepo House, Dumela, we are not recognised by government at all.*

This perceived neglect has led to mistrust in state institutions.

Respondent F expressed frustration at the government's lack of urgency in improving their living conditions:

> *In South Africa, everyone has a right to have a place to stay, but the people in places like Bekezela are not paid attention to. Why are they not considered? Should they burn tires to show that they are also human?*

Residents expressed concerns over inadequate service delivery, noting that other informal communities close to them have received infrastructure upgrades while Bekezela remains neglected.

Respondent A questioned the decision-making behind service provision:

> *There are other places, like shacks, that have gotten electricity from City Power. We are confused why informal settlements that are near City Power in Johannesburg don't have electricity.*

Beyond essential services, residents also critiqued the government's failure to invest in social infrastructure.

Respondent D called for the state to prioritise children's development by improving play spaces:

> *If they could make a playground for the children to play together in the same place. If they could donate balls and t-shirts to play, you see? Things like that.*

Similarly, Respondent F pointed out the disparity in recreational opportunities between formal and informal communities:

> *We are complaining that we don't have sporting activities. There at Heritage View and Phumulani, there are sports activities that are organised where the children come together to play sports, but they would never include us there.*

Proposals for Upgrading over Relocation and Support for Economic initiatives

While residents critiqued the government's failures, one recurring demand is the renovation of Bekezela rather than relocation. They argue that upgrading their current place is a more sustainable solution than displacement. Respondent C asserted:

> *Bekezela needs renovation and it will be fine. We have a place that has toilets inside the house that can be fixed. We have taps that can be fixed. We have a place to install the electricity for them to renovate, and we will be fine.*

Respondent D noted:

> *I would ask them to give us sanitary and flushable toilets. I would recommend that our dustbins be collected. Then each house should have electricity meter boxes.*

Respondent A also stated:

> *We would want them to renovate our place and give us electricity formally and give us adequate basics.*

Respondent E added:

> *With the taps, they can improve them by ensuring that everyone has a tap inside their house, and each household should have their own toilets inside their own houses. With electricity, we should pay for it individually in your own home.*

Respondent C emphasised that government should leverage on the existing infrastructure for upgrading:

> *Bekezela needs renovation and it will be fine. We have a place that has toilets inside the house that can be fixed. We have taps that can be fixed. We have a place to install the electricity for them to renovate and we will be fine. Bekezela used to be a college, so, it can be fixed and renovated.*

Respondent B made similar remarks:

> *So there are some things the City could help us with, for example, we won't be able to provide electricity for ourselves, they could do that. Okay, with taps, they could connect households with taps inside the house. These things we can't do for ourselves. The toilets, they should renew the pipes inside.*

Several respondents emphasised that moving to distant areas would disrupt their livelihoods. Respondent A warned:

> *They will take us and put us in a place outside Johannesburg. We would struggle to pay for transport because we don't work. We are fine here living within Johannesburg.*

Others echoed this, insisting that Bekezela should be made habitable instead of residents being relocated. Respondent C stated:

> *We won't get help from moving. We want to stay there. We are asking for help so that they can fix for us to stay.*

Respondent D emphasized the need for formalisation by suggesting a structured approach to housing:

> *If they could fix the place so that we can live a quality life. Maybe they should place security at the gate and for us to have rules so that it's not just anyone that enters.*

Respondent E highlighted the importance of security and structural improvements:

> *Bekezela is a good place; it needs touch-ups. They should install windows, a gate, establish rules, you see? Otherwise, it's a good place. If all these things are provided, it will be a good place.*

Similarly, Respondent F proposed an alternative housing solution that integrates Bekezela into the city:

> *If I was Minister of Human Settlements, I would build houses similar to RDP houses in Bekezela so that everyone can access these basic services like toilets, [and] water inside their houses.*

Residents also suggested that the government should invest in economic initiatives such as small businesses and cooperative ventures. Respondent D proposed:

> *If the government could help us get a scale for our recycled materials and create a space for recycling that will be a recycling business.*

Respondent E called for greater government support in community-based economic activities:

They could help us with sewing material and the…clothes to make the cushions and sponges, threads, and needles.

Triangulation with Secondary Sources:

In the Joe Slovo informal settlement in Cape Town, residents' rejection of forced relocation and insistence on in-situ upgrading strikes similar parallels to Bekezela proposals. Much like the Bekezela residents, Joe Slovo residents faced the threat of removal when the government sought to relocate them to the outskirts of the city under the N2 Gateway Housing Project. Residents resisted displacement, arguing that moving to distant areas would disconnect them from job opportunities, social networks, and urban resources (Chiguvare, 2018).

The Joe Slovo community has organised legal action and public demonstrations, thereby successfully delaying mass relocations and pressuring the government to consider upgrading as an alternative (Chiguvare, 2018). This is similar to demands made by Bekezela residents who insisted on renovation. Joe Slovo residents have advocated for upgrading their settlement. tThey don't want to be displaced to Temporary Relocation Areas (TRAs) that lack infrastructure and economic opportunities. Their struggle highlights the broader issue of urban governance failing to recognise informal residents as legitimate city dwellers, a sentiment echoed in Respondent B's statement: *"*We are not recognised by government, simple*."* The Joe Slovo case reinforces the idea that informal settlement residents should not be viewed as passive recipients of housing policies but as active participants in shaping their communities.

The occupation of Prestes Maia further substantiates Bekezela residents' demands for formal recognition of their informal spaces. Prestes Maia is an abandoned high-rise building in downtown São Paulo, Brazil. It was home to hundreds of low-income residents who organised themselves to self-manage the building, provide basic services, and advocate for inclusion in city planning. However, instead of working with the residents to formalise their housing, the São Paulo government attempted mass evictions, reinforcing exclusionary urban governance patterns that prioritise elite interests over the urban poor (Friendly, 2017) .

Much like Bekezela, the residents of Prestes Maia actively resisted displacement and demanded in-situ upgrades rather than relocation to areas on the outskirts of the city with little access to employment (Friendly, 2017). The movement at Prestes Maia also highlighted the need for integrating self-organised governance structures into formal city planning, a demand echoed by Bekezela residents such as Respondent A, who proposed that the government should

consult directly with communities: *"*The City should visit the community and know what the ward 60 community needs.*"*



Figure 13: Old college classrooms occupied turned into residential units



Figure 14: Resident builds garage attached to his room



Figure 15: Residents are extending their rooms showing intentions of long term stay in Bekezela

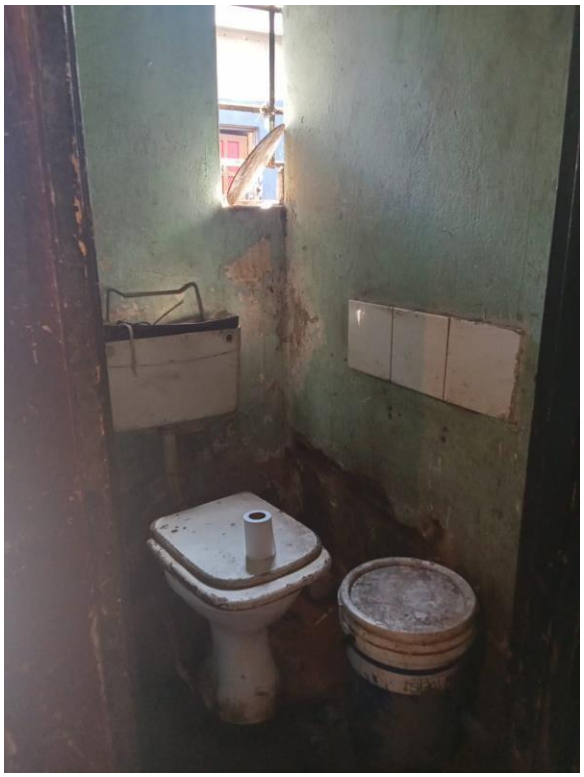

Figure 16: Toilet that was used during the college



Figure 17: Toilet (left) and shower (right)

This chapter presented on the findings. The findings were in relation to the research questions. They are presented in relation to the key themes that emerged in the data. In the next chapter the findings will be discussed extensively to be fully understood, especially on their implications for the study.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter follows from the previous chapter on the findings from the interview respondents. It will examine what the evidence implies, especially on how residents navigate state neglect and what the implications for urban governance are. The analysis will focus on the main themes that emerged from the findings in connection with the relevant literature from Chapter 2 to provide a foundation for rethinking urban governance to be more inclusive.

5.2. Navigating Agency, Resistance, and Marginalisation

In Chapter 2, we explored literature that argued that Insurgent Governance will emerge when marginalised communities are faced with systemic state neglect and exclusionary urban policies. These communities develop autonomous modes of self-organisation that ensure their survival and also challenge existing power structures (Holston, 2009; Miraftab, 2009). This dynamic is demonstrated by residents' multi-faceted responses which include legal mobilisation, community-driven resource initiatives, and the creation of support networks. These practices which we identify as insurgent resistance practices range from overt legal challenges to quieter acts of everyday resistance, and they affirm that residents are not just mere victims of neglect, but active agents in shaping their futures and that of the urban destiny.

Bekezela residents exercise agency through community building initiatives that address immediate needs and foster social cohesion. For example, Respondent A's account of establishing a crèche and a garden illustrates a deliberate act of a person taking matters into their own hands and organising to fill education gaps that children in Bekezela face. This initiative does various things, First, it exposes the deficiency of formal services, and second, it serves as an act of insurgent citizenship, echoing Holston's (2009) argument that marginalised residents "reclaim the right to the city" through everyday practices.

Similarly, Respondent C reinforces this narrative by noting: "We went to Real Life Church, they built shacks for us so that children can learn. They learn for free, they don't pay." This demonstrates that alliances with external actors can empower residents to create alternative service provision mechanisms. These initiatives resonate with Ngwenya's (2017) observations that informal communities often generate innovative solutions to address resource gaps that are

context-specific. These are solutions that have helped sustain their livelihoods and they also serve as a basis for broader claims to urban citizenship.

In addition to community-building efforts, legal mobilisation stands out as a critical strategy of resistance against state neglect. For example, Respondent A's recollection of a high-court challenge against PRASA: "In 2012 we went to high court against Prasa. The court decided that Prasa cannot evict us without alternative accommodation. There is no one that can come to Bekezela to claim a space unless the court is involved." highlights how residents use formal legal mechanisms to challenge exclusionary practices. This form of resistance demonstrates to us the dual nature of Insurgent Governance, that is, while residents operate outside formal systems, they are also good at using these systems to defend their rights, thereby revealing the interaction between the formal and informal in occupied spaces. Ngwenya (2017) and Kotzen (2014) document similar instances where legal strategies play a role in countering state neglect. Again, such legal mobilisation is an important act of citizenship, affirming residents' entitlement to urban space despite systemic marginalisation.

As good as their acts of agency sound, the struggle for agency is not without its challenges. These are most evident in their insurgent economic practices. Efforts to assert their right to the city extend beyond what was expected to include a significant emphasis of informal economic activities. These activities emerged as vital lifelines for everyday resistance against exclusion from the formal economic system as demonstrated by informal shebeens in (Kotzen, 2014).

Respondent E explained, "There are vouchers they give us... Not every month. Sometimes they don't call you, and if they don't call you that month, we get food from people that bring food like bread." This illustrates the precarious nature of informal resource management. This inconsistent external aid reflects a broader structural failure where state neglect enables the continuity of vulnerability. Similarly, Respondent D's frustration, "Remember, I opened the Spaza Shop. I used the sell to make a living. But now it's hard because there are too many people selling in Bekezela," points to the fact that informal economic activities are saturated. As opposed to being a sign of collective resilience, they may also indicate a market flooded by unregulated competition. There is a duality here: while self-organised initiatives empower residents, they also expose them to heightened precarity, making one question the notion of Insurgent Governance as an unmitigated positive force (Bayat, 2010).

The gendered dimensions of agency and resistance add further unexpected nuances to the analysis. In Bekezela, a kind of insurgent gendered practice emerges where women organise

in oppressive contexts to address their needs as women. Respondent B's testimony, "Okay, we have tried, we have tried. I work with Black Women Empowerment, but I am not heard. We are being raped, we are being killed, people do whatever they want to us. We raised our voice. But they don't hear us." underscores that woman in Bekezela face vulnerabilities specific to their gender as women. Research by Frediani (2023) supports these findings, indicating that women in informal communities often experience heightened risks due to unsafe sanitation facilities and insecure housing conditions.

Moreover, Respondent C's establishment of women's support groups demonstrates how gendered solidarity can serve as both a form of resistance and a vital mechanism for community care. This effort highlights a significant finding that women are resisting in their own ways, meaning there is a gendered dynamic to Insurgent Governance. These efforts further highlight the need for an intersectional approach to Insurgent Governance, one that accounts for how gender, poverty, and systemic neglect intersect to shape the lived experiences of marginalised residents.

Furthermore, the notion of negotiated urbanism further enriches our understanding of how Bekezela residents resist state neglect. Negotiated urbanism, as described by McFarlane (2011), is the process by which informal residents interact with both formal and informal governance actors to secure services and assert their rights. Respondent F's reflections: "Then it became noticed that this was such a place where the law allows them to live; there were court orders and stuff" and "If I was Minister of Human Settlements, I would build houses similar to RDP houses in Bekezela so that everyone can access these basic services like toilets, water, inside their houses", demonstrate how legal frameworks and formal policy mechanisms can be reappropriated by residents to negotiate better living conditions. This dynamic interplay between resistance and negotiation emphasises that Insurgent Governance is not solely oppositional. Rather, it is a complex, iterative process in which informal communities challenge and cooperate with formal structures to achieve their goals (Ouma et al., 2024).

Despite these impressive examples of agency and resistance, the analysis must also acknowledge the structural constraints that limit the transformative potential of Insurgent Governance. Systemic neglect by the state as well as persistent resource scarcity continues to be a barrier to the full realisation of residents' efforts. For instance, the irregular distribution of food vouchers and external aid, as described by Respondent E, highlights that the reliance on inconsistent support often perpetuates vulnerability rather than fostering long-term resilience.

Similarly, the saturation of informal economic activities as mentioned by Respondent D reveals how market constraints and lack of regulation can stifle sustainable growth. Such findings echo the critique by Bayat (2010) who warns that while everyday acts of resistance can provide immediate relief, they often fall short of addressing the underlying structural inequities that sustain marginalisation.

These findings from Bekezela illustrate a two-pronged reality. On one hand, residents demonstrate remarkable practices of innovation and agency, playing active roles in resisting state neglect by organising legal challenges, establishing community-based initiatives, and forming support networks that embody the principles of Insurgent Governance, thereby actively reshaping the urban future of governance by demonstrating that alternative governance exists in occupied spaces. On the other hand, their efforts are constrained by systemic neglect, resource scarcity, and internal power dynamics that limit the long-term sustainability and equity of their self- organised practices.

This analysis reinforces the argument that Insurgent Governance is a vital, albeit overlooked mechanism through which marginalised communities navigate the failures of formal state systems. Yet, it is constrained, meaning residents can only do so much on their own to survive. This suggests that these grassroots practices need support. Some of the insurgent practices such as legal mobilisation have already demonstrated the power of integrating the formal and informal to address the needs of the residents. Therefore, it should be considered that integrating these grassroots practices into formal urban governance frameworks could strengthen them and foster more inclusive, resilient, and responsive cities, a proposition that resonates with the calls of scholars like Holston (2009) and Miraftab (2009).

While scholars such as Frediani (2023) highlight the need for gendered approaches in Insurgent Governance, this research delved deeper, revealing exactly how women are asserting agency and resisting as demonstrated through support groups and economic initiatives specific to women.

5.3. Collective Adaptation and Self-Organisation

The framework of Insurgent Governance alerts us that marginalised communities actively create alternative governance systems to navigate the failures of formal state structures. The findings in Bekezela demonstrate this. Residents collectively organise to manage essential resources such as water, sanitation, electricity, and waste, actions that not only reflect survival

strategies but also assert their right to urban citizenship. This analysis explores how these practices exemplify collective adaptation and self-governance.

One of the most striking findings is the way residents in Bekezela mobilise around water access. As Respondent A notes, “Yes, it’s 12 [community] taps. We fill containers with water and bring them back home,” and as Respondent B emphasises the physical burden on vulnerable residents, “We are not happy with it, some people are sick, others are disabled. If the water was closer, it would be better”, this reality reveals that there is intense labour involved in water collection and vulnerable individuals are disproportionately affected by this circumstance. Scholars have documented such challenges. For example, Ramirez & Sañudo-Fontaneda (2018) illustrate that in informal settlements, inadequate water infrastructure forces residents to rely on collective systems, often organised through community taps or water trucks, as a response to state neglect. This self-organised water management system not only demonstrates community resilience, but also the challenges of accessing water through informal means. This highlights a two-way-explanation of Insurgent Governance: the capacity to transform resource scarcity into an opportunity for collective action and local problem-solving and the dangers of relying on these informal methods. However, it is still worth arguing that by engaging in such practices, Bekezela residents contest the exclusionary logic of formal service delivery and assert their right to water, even if the solutions come with their own challenges.

The way that Bekezela residents access electricity further underscores the tension between informal survival strategies and systemic neglect. As Respondent B explains, “Sometimes we buy globes that use batteries so that there can be light. But formal electricity we don’t have,” and as Respondent C warns, “If a firecracker falls, the place burns. People can end up dying”, it is clear that residents improvise to access electricity in the settlement. These excerpts also highlight the inherent risks associated with informal practices. The study on infrastructure provision in informal settlements by Chikomwe (2022) highlights similar contradictions, noting that while residents’ self-organise solutions provide essential services, they simultaneously expose communities to hazards such as fire and electrocution. Again, this highlights seemingly conflicting explanations, a central tenet of Insurgent Governance: informal solutions are both a testament to grassroots innovation and a stark reminder of the limitations imposed by state failure. In this context, the informal practices of Bekezela residents serve as both a temporary measure and a political statement against the formal sector’s inability, or unwillingness, to extend services to marginalised communities.

Sanitation and waste management practices in Bekezela reveal yet another dimension of collective adaptation. Respondent A expresses a concern that “There are chemicals in the toilets that are risks for women to use,” and Respondent F adds that “There is no security at the toilet. A woman can leave her home to use the toilet and end up being raped.” Other studies have made similar findings about sanitation, albeit in informal settlements. They have documented how overcrowded and poorly maintained facilities contribute to heightened health risks and gender- based violence (Muanda et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Respondent B’s account of having to accompany women when going to the toilet highlights the gendered vulnerabilities that persist despite residents’ efforts to self-manage. Waste management, too, is organised collectively. As Respondent A notes, “We try to speak to the community to wake up and clean every Saturday and Sunday,” and as Respondent B laments, “Pikitup collects the waste, but Bekezela is still dirty. You would mistake it for a dumping site,” it is clear that such sentiments find resonance in research by WAfer et al. (2008) and (UNICEF, 2021) where community-led waste management initiatives emerge in response to formal neglect, although they are not enough as residents often struggle due to limited resources and rapid population growth. These accounts by residents and scholars point to the oxymoron of self-organisation, an element of Insurgent Governace, that while it enables residents to mitigate the impacts of state neglect, it also exposes them to ongoing vulnerabilities that formal policies have yet to address.

Th multifaceted nature of Insurgent Governance is further illustrated in the livelihood strategies in Bekezela. Respondent A’s comment, “I do car wash about two times a week. They give me R100 per wash so that I can eat. But this money does nothing”, reveals the precarious economic conditions that residents face. Similarly, Respondent D’s observation that “Most people eat from what they get from recycling, waste from the dustbin” underscores the reliance on informal economies for survival. Such accounts align with Bayat (2000) concept of the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” where everyday economic activities, though often unregulated and undervalued, form the backbone of survival in informal settlements. Ngwenya’s (2017) observation on Johannesburg’s inner-city struggles also highlights how informal livelihoods, including Spaza shops and creches, are critical yet are not sufficient mechanisms for ensuring economic stability.

Respondent D’s account of attempting to establish a stokvel reveals that trust issues and temporary residency patterns in informal living contexts often undermine the potential for sustainable collective enterprises. These findings contribute to the literature by highlighting

that while self- organised economic practices are vital for immediate survival, they are embedded within broader structural inequities that limit long-term resilience.

An ongoing and consistent pattern is revealed here. While self-governance and collective adaptation practices empower marginalised communities to access basic services and livelihoods, the substantial impact of these strategies are circumscribed by health and safety hazards, persistent systemic neglect, and structural barriers. The experiences of Bekezela residents, therefore, contribute to an emerging body of literature that challenges the dominant narratives of urban deprivation by highlighting the dynamic, albeit constrained, agency of informal communities. However, it also contributes to literature that warns against romanticising these informal practices.

The residents' collective strategies for managing water, sanitation, electricity, waste, and livelihoods reveal a nuanced interplay between self-organisation and structural constraint. On one hand, these practices demonstrate remarkable resilience and innovation, as residents develop innovative pathways to survival in the absence of formal support. On the other hand, the limitations imposed by systemic neglect, gender-based violence and health and safety hazards as a result of the informal practices used to access basic services highlight the need for a more integrated approach to urban governance. This two-way reality suggests that while Insurgent Governance is a powerful mechanism for community empowerment, its full potential can only be realised when informal practices are recognised and supported by formal institutions so that practices used are safe and adequately satisfy the residents' needs.

The case of Bekezela teaches us that it is essential to bridge the gap between Insurgent Governance and formal urban governance. Self-organised strategies need state intervention and support. Integrating the self-organised strategies of marginalised communities into formal frameworks could pave the way for more inclusive, resilient, and responsive urban governance. By recognising and incorporating the contributions of informal residents, policy makers can design interventions that not only address immediate service gaps, but also promote long-term urban equity and sustainability. This study, therefore, contributes to the broader discourse on urban governance by highlighting the transformative potential of Insurgent Governance and its relevance in creating cities that truly serve all their inhabitants.

This study also contributes a nuanced dynamic: in the process of bridging the gap between Insurgent Governance and formal urban governance, there needs to be gender responsiveness

when it comes to issues such as gender-based violence that limit women's access to basic service and a sustained way to support informal economies.

5.1. Community Governance and Informal Leadership in Occupied Spaces

Insurgent Governance posits that marginalised communities actively develop alternative systems of governance to navigate state neglect. The emergence of informal leadership and community-based decision-making in Bekezela is a striking example of how residents, in the absence of formal governance, create structures that maintain order, mediate conflicts, and secure essential services. These emergent governance structures not only challenge state neglect, but they also offer valuable lessons for developing inclusive urban governance.

Informal leadership plays a pivotal role in Bekezela. Respondent A, the community chairman, explains, "I go to malls asking for 30% for the community, there is this thing where the community has 30% so that they can work". This statement illustrates the role that local leaders play as intermediaries between residents and external actors. Holston's (2009) concept of insurgent citizenship argues that such leadership is not granted through formal channels but earned through visible acts of resistance and community mobilisation. In this way, leaders like Respondent A and Respondent C, who notes, "I help women with their needs. We have a creche at Bekezela, we have teachers at Bekezela, we have helped the teachers earn a living", demonstrate that emergent governance is both a response to resource deficits and an assertion of the community's claim to urban space.

Similarly, Miraftab (2009) argues that insurgent planning emerges when marginalised groups, through self-organised initiatives, confront and redefine formal planning paradigms. Bekezela's leaders, therefore, exemplify this dynamic by directly advocating for the community's needs.

Decision-making is central to Insurgent Governance. In Bekezela, local committees actively enforce norms and regulate behaviour. Respondent A's accounts of organising community cleaning initiatives illustrate a collective effort to impose order in the absence of state intervention. Respondent C further describes the committee's role in enforcing compliance: "If I see that this person doesn't want to clean, we go to them and the committee to reprimand them. We ask them to fix here, they say sorry and clean." Such practices align with Miraftab (2009) discussion on community decision-making processes

wherein collective rules and accountability mechanisms are established through mutual agreement for the collective well-being of the community. McFarlane (2011) argues that this form of self-governance is not a deviation from urban governance, but a vital complement to formal governance systems as it fills critical gaps left by the state.

Despite the absence of formal government structures, community leaders and residents actively negotiate with external stakeholders, demonstrating grassroot advocacy. Respondent A's remark, "There is nowhere where the counsellors are speaking on behalf of the community, we are the ones that have to stand up for ourselves and remind them of the 30% that the community should benefit" captures the importance of self-advocacy. Similarly, Respondent D spoke about the lack of direct engagement from government officials: "The committee does reach them, but I have not seen any government person come to Bekezela." These observations are echoed in the work of Patel et al (2012) who argue that negotiated urbanism is an essential feature of Insurgent Governance because it involves the strategic use of both formal and informal channels to secure rights and resources. In Mumbai, for instance, grassroots organisations affiliated with SDI have successfully leveraged negotiated urbanism to gain recognition and access to services (Patel et al., 2012; Schermbrucker et al., 2016). Thus, the advocacy efforts in Bekezela serve to bridge the gap left by state neglect as they challenge the exclusionary practices that have historically marginalised occupier residents. However, their efforts face shortcomings as their accounts reveal that they are yet to successfully negotiate with the state thereby demonstrating once again the limitations of insurgent governance.

A particularly nuanced dimension of the data relates to how community governance in Bekezela addresses gendered vulnerabilities. Respondent B's claim, "Okay, we have tried, we have tried. I work with Black Women Empowerment but I am not heard. We are being raped, we are being killed, people do whatever they want to us. We raised our voice? But they don't hear us" reveals the severe risks faced by women. This resonates with findings by Frediani (2023) who highlights that while informal governance can empower residents, it often reproduces gendered inequities when women's voices are marginalised. In response to this, Respondent C has taken steps to create support networks, stating, "I have a support group called Umfazi Omnyama, I am able to speak to women to say let's rise." Such grassroots initiatives illustrate an emergent form of insurgent gender-sensitive governance within occupied spaces.

These findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that Insurgent Governance, through informal leadership, community decision-making, and negotiated urbanism, offers valuable insights for rethinking urban governance. This is because there are alternative systems of governance emerging in spaces of state neglect. These spaces exist outside the formal ownership structures recognised by the state. In particular, they destabilise the binary between the formal and informal, exposing the fluidity of governance structures. This shows that governance exist in other contexts too.

Nevertheless, the analysis also points to significant challenges. The inherent limitations of informal governance, such as the potential for internal power imbalances, difficulty in directly engaging with the state and the risk of exclusion of marginalised voices, such as women, remain persistent concerns. The experiences of Bekezela residents thus highlight a dual reality once again. On the one hand, their emergent governance structures demonstrate a high degree of ability to self-govern and resilience, highlighting that governance does exist outside formal structures. On the other hand, these systems are constrained by potential power imbalances, the lack of engagement with the state, and risks of exclusion for certain groups.

In conclusion, the analysis of community governance and informal leadership in Bekezela illustrates that Insurgent Governance is not merely a reaction to state neglect, but an active, dynamic process through which residents negotiate, contest, and reshape urban governance. The findings indicate that while informal leadership and collective decision-making empower residents to address immediate needs, their long-term effectiveness is limited on the scales of gender, power imbalances and the lack of access to direct engagement. However, these practices also demonstrate that they assert their right to the city by forming alternative governance.

5.2. Residents Perspectives on Governance Inclusion

In Bekezela, residents' demands for participation in governance, rather than mere recognition during elections, highlight a profound call for inclusion in decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. This analysis examines how the voices of Respondents A to F demonstrate a transformative potential for urban governance and what implications these findings have for initiatives such as the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP).

At the heart of the residents' response regarding urban inclusion is a demand for genuine participation in decision-making. Respondent A claims, "It's not that they don't know, they

know. I say they know properly because when it comes time to vote, they know the informal settlements, they come and make promises they don't keep." Similarly, Respondent F laments, "They don't come, they don't see us. The only ones that come are the ones with the intention to evict us; they don't come with good intentions only to shift us." These statements indicate that for Bekezela residents, the state will only engage with them during elections and eviction threats. Such findings echo Holston's (2009) concept of insurgent citizenship which proffers that marginalised communities develop autonomous practices to reclaim their right to the city when formal structures fail to represent their interests.

In the same breath, Lefebvre (2009) notion of the "right to the city" entails not only access to urban resources, but also participation in the processes that determine urban life. Thus, the occupiers demands for consultation and participatory governance evidenced when Respondent A suggests that city officials should "visit the various informal settlements and set up meetings" to understand local challenges, points to a broader desire from residents to shift from tokenistic recognition to meaningful inclusion in urban governance decision making. As Holston argues, this practice disrupts governance by redefining the relationship between state and citizens as they would need to officially collaborate in governing the city. This shift is not impossible as GoldFrank (2011) demonstrates the successful participation of informal communities in budgeting.

One of the key findings is the negative attitude towards state neglect. Respondent D's assertion that "They only come to us when they want to evict us. We have been evicted twice" and Respondent B's remark "We are not recognised by government, simple. All the informal settlements, like Bekezela, Ice Cream, Tshepo House, Dumela, we are not recognised by government at all," reveal mistrust in formal institutions. This mistrust is a reaction to constantly feeling systemic exclusion and invisibility in the eyes of the state.

Despite residents' visible struggle for basic services, the persistent lack of state support reveals the limitations of conventional governance models. Consequently, Bekezela residents' lived realities illustrate the gap between how the state governs the urban, their approach and the lived realities of occupiers, contributing to the ongoing debate about the need for a more inclusive, bottom-up approach to urban governance.

Moreover, Bekezela residents desire upgrading as a sustainable alternative to relocation. Respondent C's assertion that "Bekezela needs renovation and it will be fine. We have a place that has toilets inside the house that can be fixed… we will be fine," captures the belief that in-situ upgrading is a viable path to improved living conditions. This perspective is reinforced

by Respondent A's concern that relocating residents would disconnect them from essential urban resources and livelihood opportunities. These findings are consistent with studies in other contexts such as the Joe Slovo informal settlement in Cape Town where residents were not willing to relocate and therefore successfully resisted relocation by demanding upgrades that would allow them to remain in the urban (Chiguvare, 2018).

This insistence on upgrading reflects the transformative implications of Insurgent Governance: by asserting their right to remain and reclaiming space, residents are not only resisting eviction, but they are also advocating for governance changes that recognise and formalise their self-organised practices. As argued by Holston (2008), these grassroots initiatives provide critical insights that can inform more inclusive urban governance frameworks that emphasize the integration of informal settlements and occupied spaces like Bekezela into the broader urban system.

The residents' perspectives also extend to the need for tangible policy interventions. Respondent E's call for in-home services ("If they were to give us toilets in our houses, electricity, cleaning… they could see that these are people that can take care of their things…") highlights a demand for government action that goes beyond symbolic efforts. This resonates with the literature on negotiated urbanism which suggests that effective urban governance requires direct engagement between state institutions and informal communities (Patel et al., 2012). Moreover, the chairlady's observation that government representatives should "come out and hear the women cries" highlights the critical importance of including marginalised voices in policy dialogues, an argument advanced by Frediani (2023).

The preference for upgrading in Bekezela shows a critical gap. Formal upgrading programs such as the UISP currently exclude occupied buildings like Bekezela, focusing solely on traditional informal settlements. Consequently, the residents' demand for upgrading rather than relocation signals the need for a reimagined UISP that accommodates occupied buildings or the establishment of an upgrading programme focused on occupied buildings in the inner city.

The analysis of Bekezela residents' perspectives on governance inclusion provides compelling proof that Insurgent Governance is not only a practical response to state neglect, but also a source of transformative governance insights. These findings contribute to the academic discourse by challenging the conventional top-down urban governance paradigm and highlighting the potential for integrating informal, community-driven practices and participatory mechanisms into formal urban governance frameworks.

While bottom-up urban governance is framed in this report as a progressive step toward inclusive governance, it is important to recognise that rehabilitation of buildings like Bekezela carries the potential to displace the very residents that are intended to be supported. Upgrading processes often enforce norms around density, lease agreements and utility payments that are incompatible with the socio-economic status of residents. Moreover, many residents of Bekezela, including undocumented migrants, informal traders and sex workers are vulnerable to exposure and criminalization under formal governance structures. Simone (2004) notes that life in cities like Johannesburg is often sustained through what they term 'people as infrastructure' – informal networks that survive outside the state's gaze. Formalised systems risk breaking these networks, especially as the systems are often too sensitive to the complex ways in which residents secure livelihoods and safety. As Huchzermeyer (2011) cautions, interventions that do not include socio-economic support mechanism may lead to "financial displacement" as residents are priced out through unaffordable rents or utility costs. Therefore, any upgrading or formalization processes should be grounded in a rights-based and pro-poor urban planning framework that acknowledges the socio-economic dimensions of inclusion.

By demanding upgrading and improvement of infrastructure where they currently live, residents claim their space and the right to exist in the city, calling for a reconsideration of upgrading programmes in relation to occupied buildings. Through these insurgent practices, urban governance can become more inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of marginalised populations. Future policy interventions should therefore seek to bridge this gap, recognising and formalising the valuable contributions of Insurgent Governance in the pursuit of equitable urban development.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This research has examined how residents of Bekezela navigate and survive in an occupied building despite facing systemic state neglect and exclusion. Using the framework of Insurgent Governance, the study explored how these residents resist exclusion, how they organise to access and manage basic services, and how they create informal leadership structures to sustain their community. This research did an analysis of residents' lived experiences in occupied buildings, through in-depth interviews, supported by contextual evidence. This research has illuminated the transformative power of grassroots governance and the potential for reimagining urban governance to be more inclusive and responsive to marginalised populations. The focus on occupied buildings was intentional as this context is often under studied.

The findings reveal that Bekezela residents are not passive victims of state neglect, but active agents who creatively respond to their challenges. By organising community resource management, forming social support networks, and engaging in legal mobilisation, they assert their right to the city and demonstrate the resilience of informal urban governance (Holston, 2009; Miraftab, 2009). Through their efforts to secure water, sanitation, electricity, and waste management services, though often constrained by precarious conditions, they demonstrate the capacity of marginalised communities to self-organise in ways that challenge conventional governance structures (Ngwenya, 2017). They govern themselves, managing conflict, decision making and establish local norms and rules on their own. One could conclude that they are managing to survive without state assistance, however to a contestable extent.

During the analysis, a central theme emerged from this research, which is the dual nature of Insurgent Governance. While grassroots strategies empower residents and provide immediate solutions to the lack of formal service provision, livelihoods and evictions, they are also marked by vulnerabilities, including resource scarcity, exposure to health and safety risks, and gendered violence (Frediani, 2023). This research has highlighted the critical role that gender plays in Insurgent Governance, showing that women face heightened risks, although spearhead resistance efforts through support networks and economic initiatives of their own (Miraftab & Wills, 2005). Another nuanced finding was the significance of the insurgent economic governance, which are informal economies that emerge when residents are excluded from the formal economy, especially Spaza Shops and recycling. However, like

other grassroots strategies, these strategies are fraught with constraints like over saturation, material deprivation and financial

constraints. These findings undrescore the need for urban governance models that incorporate gender-responsive and informal economy responsive approaches to ensure that women's voices are recognised and that their specific needs are addressed. There is also the need to ensure that their informal economies are sustained.

Another significant finding relates to the informal governance structures that have emerged in Bekezela. The study demonstrates how residents establish leadership structures to mediate conflicts, mobilise resources, and negotiate with external actors, often filling the vacuum left by state institutions. This challenges the binary distinction between formal and informal governance, revealing the fluid and adaptive nature of governance in occupied buildings. However, the research also cautions against romanticising these informal governance systems as they are often constrained by power imbalances and internal exclusions that can undermine their effectiveness (Bayat, 2010).

The implications of these findings for urban governance are profound. Bekezela residents lived experiences challenge the dominant top-down approach to urban planning and policymaking by advocating for the inclusion of informal governance practices in formal decision-making processes. Their demands for recognition, participation, and in-situ upgrading highlight the limitations of conventional urban upgrading programs which often fail to account for the realities of occupied buildings in inner-city contexts. Instead of displacement and relocation, the research suggests that integrating Insurgent Governance practices into formal urban governance frameworks could foster more inclusive, resilient, and equitable cities (Patel et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the lived experiences challenge dominant urban governance paradigms. The emergence of Insurgent Governance in their everyday lived experiences is a powerful reminder that governance does not belong exclusively to the state and bottom-up governance models. Urban governance can and should be co-created by those who are directly impacted by its failures as findings reveal how residents insurgent practices are helping to redefine urban governance from within the very spaces where they are excluded from.

While at first glance it seems that residents are surviving on their own through Insurgent Governance practices, they face challenges in their resistance, in their organising and in their self- governance. These insurgent practices need support and recognition from the state to

alleviate them from the exposure to health and safety hazards and gendered vulnerabilities, hence the argument that these practices need to be integrated and recognised by the state.

Ultimately, as was the overarching objective of this study, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that calls for a rethinking of urban governance to be more participatory and responsive to the needs of marginalised communities. It underscores the importance of recognising informal governance, not as a temporary occurance, but as a critical component of urban governance that deserves institutional support (Schermbrucker et al., 2016). Future policy interventions should aim to bridge the gap between informal and formal governance, ensuring that the innovative survival strategies of marginalised communities are not only recognized, but also strengthened through meaningful state engagement and resource allocation (GoldFrank, 2011). How exactly this should be done requires further study.

To conclude this research, the case of Bekezela highlights the transformative potential of Insurgent Governance while also exposing its limitations. The findings affirm that while grassroots governance can provide immediate relief and serve as a form of resistance and survival against exclusion, it requires institutional recognition and structural support to achieve long-term sustainability. By embracing a more inclusive approach to urban governance, one that integrates the voices and practices of informal communities, policymakers can contribute to the realisation of truly inclusive and better governed cities where all residents, regardless of where they live, have their needs addressed.

6.2. Recommendations

This section proposes recommendations that address critical gaps in current urban governance.

Policy and Institutional Recommendations

1. **Recognition of Occupied Buildings in Upgrading Programs**: The UISP should be expanded to include occupied buildings like Bekezela. This would ensure that residents benefit from in-situ upgrading rather than facing displacement.
2. **Formalising Informal Governance Practices**: The state should recognise and support community-led governance structures, ensuring they have resources to manage basic services more effectively.
3. **Gender-Sensitive Urban Interventions**: Policymakers should incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in urban planning to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women in informal settlements.

4. **Legal Protections for Occupied Spaces**: Legal frameworks should be strengthened to protect the tenure rights of residents in occupied buildings, preventing arbitrary evictions.

5. **Participatory governance mechanisms**: The state should develop mechanisms to foster participatory governance. The state should engage residents in policy-making and decision-making around urban governance.

Community-Based Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Internal Governance Mechanisms**: Residents should develop clearer accountability structures within their leadership to ensure inclusivity and prevent power imbalances, especially gender imbalances.

2. **Expanding Livelihood Opportunities**: Community-led initiatives, such as cooperatives and microfinance programs, should be supported to create sustainable economic opportunities.

6.3. Implications for further research

This study has demonstrated that occupied buildings like Bekezela are not merely spaces of deprivation, but vibrant sites of resistance, self-governance, and urban innovation. The findings emphasise that informal governance practices can offer valuable lessons for creating more inclusive urban policies. However, the continued marginalisation of such communities threatens their sustainability and reinforces systemic inequalities. By recognising and integrating Insurgent Governance into formal urban planning, policymakers can pave the way for a more just and equal city, one where all residents, regardless of legal tenure, have a right to belong and thrive.

Future research should further explore how the principles of Insurgent Governance can be institutionalised within formal governance structures as the conclusions here are merely foundational. Additionally, comparative studies across other occupied buildings in Johannesburg and beyond would provide deeper insights into the broader applicability of these findings. A study on gendered insurgent governance strategies exploring how women survive in the face of state neglect and exclusion should be conducted to expand on the depth of the findings in this study. Ultimately, creating an inclusive urban future requires a paradigm shift, one that values and incorporates the innovation, resilience, and agency of marginalised communities like those in Bekezela.

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Annexure A

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam,

Introduction

My name is Nolwazi Mahlangu. I am a Master of Management student at the Wits School of Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Caryn Abrahams. I am conducting a research study about the informal practices employed by residents of Bekezela settlement building in Johannesburg's inner city to access basic services, and how effective and resourceful these practices are. The study title is "Informal practices in settlement buildings in Bekezela in Johannesburg".

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the informal practices used by residents of settlement buildings in Johannesburg's inner city to access basic services and evaluate their effectiveness and resourcefulness. Additionally, the study aims to identify strategies the state can adopt to integrate and support these informal practices for better service delivery and policy development.

Invitation to Participate

I am inviting you to take part in an in-depth interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 40 minutes to an hour. The interview will take place at 121 Carr Street Newtown, Heritage View.

Data Recording and Storage

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored securely for two years in a password protected computer belonging to the researcher and will be deleted after that period. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

Personal Information

During the interview, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your age, gender, duration of residency in Bekezela, and your experiences in accessing basic services.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

Voluntary Participation

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part, and you can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study, but as a token of appreciation I am offering to give you a Pick n Pay grocery voucher.

Risks and Benefits

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, they are low risk. However, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Humanities. The contact details for the free counselling service are info@humanitas.co.za.

Study Results and Reporting

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

Contact Information

If you have any questions during or after the research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at +27(0) 11 717 1408 or email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Researcher:

Nolwazi Mahlangu

Email: 2096924@students.wits.ac.za

Phone: 081 720 0715

Supervisor:

Dr Caryn Abrahams

Email: caryn.abrahams@wits.ac.za

Phone: 011 717 3918

Yours sincerely,

Nolwazi Mahlangu

Annexure B

Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Project: Informal practices in settlement buildings in Bekezela in Johannesburg

Name of Researcher: Nolwazi Mahlangu

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following (please circle the relevant options below):

1. The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.

- YES/ NO

2. I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.

- YES/ NO

3. I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.

- YES/ NO

4. I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group/other activity may be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter.

- YES/ NO

5. I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report).

- YES NO

6. I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

- YES NO

_____(signature)

_____(name of participant)

_____(date)

_____(signature)

_____(name of researcher/person seeking consent)

_____(date)

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Nolwazi Mahlangu at 2096924@students.wits.ac.za or 081 720 0715.

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your contribution is greatly appreciated and will help to inform better urban policy and governance.

Annexure C

Interview Schedule for Residents of Bekezela

Introduction

1. Introduction and Consent

- Greet the participant and introduce myself.
- Explain the purpose of the study.
- Explain the confidentiality of their responses and how the data will be used.
- Explain that they can respond in any local South African language or English
- Obtain verbal consent to proceed with the interview.

Background Information

2. Participant Background

- Could you please tell me a bit about yourself? (e.g., age, occupation, family composition, employment status, dependents)
- How long have you been living in Bekezela?
- What brought you to live in Bekezela?
- What does living in Bekezela mean for you, how significant is this place to yourself and your family?
- Can you briefly describe what living in Bekezela has been like on a daily basis?

Informal Practices for Accessing Basic Services

3. Water Access

- How do you and other residents access water in this building?
- Can you describe any challenges or difficulties you face in accessing water?
- How effective are these methods in ensuring you have a reliable water supply?

4. Sanitation Solutions
- What sanitation facilities are available to you and other residents in Bekezela?
- How do you manage waste and sanitation on a daily basis?
- What are the health and safety implications of these practices?

5. Electricity Procurement
- How do you and other residents obtain electricity for your daily needs?
- Have there been any issues or risks associated with these methods?
- How cost-effective are these solutions for you?

6. Waste Management
- How is waste managed in Bekezela?
- Are there any community efforts or initiatives to address waste management?
- How effective are these efforts in maintaining cleanliness and hygiene?

7. Housing Arrangements
- How are housing arrangements managed in Bekezela? (e.g., subletting, informal landlords)
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of these arrangements for you?

Effectiveness and Resourcefulness of Informal Practices

8. Evaluation of Practices
- In your opinion, how effective are these informal practices in meeting your basic needs?
- Can you share any examples of particularly resourceful or innovative practices you have seen or participated in?
- How do you and your neighbors collaborate to overcome challenges?

9. Community Support and Resilience
- How does the community support each other in accessing basic services?
- Can you describe any instances where the community came together to address a problem or challenge?

State Integration and Support

10. State Support and Integration

- What support, if any, do you receive from the state or local authorities?
- How do you think the state could better support or integrate the informal practices you and your neighbors use?
- What kind of formal recognition or support would be most beneficial for you?

Informing Formal Urban Policies

11. Policy Recommendations

- Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you make to policymakers to improve access to basic services in settlement buildings?
- How can the strengths of the informal practices you use be leveraged to enhance formal urban policies?

Conclusion

12. Closing Remarks

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences living in Bekezela and accessing basic services?
- Do you have any questions for me about the research or the interview process?

Follow-Up and Thank You

13. Follow-Up

- Inform the participant that they may be contacted for follow-up questions or clarifications.
- Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.

This guide ensures a comprehensive understanding of the informal practices in Bekezela and their potential implications for urban policy, while also allowing for flexibility and follow-up question for questions that need further elaboration, probing and clarification during the interviews to explore unique perspectives and experiences.