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# Power, identity and agency at work in the popular economies of Soweto and Black Johannesburg.

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# Power, identity and agency at work in the popular economies of Soweto and Black Johannesburg

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Faculty of Humanities
School of Social Sciences
Department of Anthropology
University of the Witwatersrand

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Supervisor: Prof. André P. Czeglédy

# ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Power, identity and agency at work in the popular economies of Soweto and Black Johannesburg

Supervisor: Prof. André P. Czeglédy

Department: Anthropology

Degree For Which This Thesis Is Submitted: Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract: This thesis investigates a number of economic and financial practices, processes, relationships, actors and institutions prevalent in the residential areas that form part of Johannesburg that is known as Soweto, all of which have in common the exchange, hoarding, spending and risking of cash money. It describes actual flows of monies between actors and through popular economic institutions which are embedded in social relations of friendship and kinship, neighbourhood life and socially constructed identities. Building on the anthropological literature that seeks to show how money flows carry meaning as well as having function, it inquires into the meanings such flows of money - between popular institutions and social groups and across social classes - have for a range of differently situated participants in the popular economies. It explores the ways in which institutions and practices within the popular economies are deployed by actors and groups so as to direct flows of monies into certain social networks and relationships while redirecting it away from others, highlighting the agency of actors and groups in relation to their position in the local and larger political economy. Employing elements of practice theory, as well as perspectives from both political economy and cultural economy approaches to everyday life, the thesis offers arguments about power, identity, agency and state sovereignty in the context of the history of Black Johannesburg under apartheid and makes a contribution to our understanding of the material and symbolic structures of everyday life in contemporary Soweto and Johannesburg.

Key Words: Popular economies, finance, saving, money lending, gambling, consumption, everyday life, Soweto, Black Johannesburg, South Africa, power, identity, agency, urban anthropology.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university.

_____ _____

Detlev Krige Date

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I am, of course, solely responsible for the arguments and conclusions presented here.

# DEDICATION

**In Memory Of**

**~ The Late Bra Ben ~**

**~ The Late Oom Bey ~**

**~ The Late Temba ~**

**~The Late Nathi Majozi ~**

**And Specially For**

*** Nesta Amani ***

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AA | Affirmative Action |
| ABSA | Amalgamated Banks South Africa |
| AFP | Agence France-Presse |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| ATM | Automatic Teller Machine |
| APF | Anti-Privatisation Forum |
| BAD | Bantu Affairs Department |
| BCM | Black Consciouness Movement |
| BEE | Black Economic Empowerment |
| BER | Bureau For Economic Research (University of Stellenbosch) |
| BMF | Black Management Forum |
| COSATU | Congress of South African Trade Unions |
| DTI | Department Of Trade And Industry |
| FSCC | Financial Sector Campaign Coalition |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GEAR | Growth, Employment And Redistribution Programme |
| ID | Identity Documents |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| JCC | Johannesburg City Council |
| LPM | Landless People's Movement |
| LSM | Living Standards Measure |
| MFRC | Micro Finance Regulatory Council |
| NAB | Native Advisory Board |
| NAD | Native Affairs Department |
| NCA | National Credit Act |
| NCF | National Consumer Forum |
| NEAD | Non-European Affairs Department (City Of Johannesburg) |
| NEPAD | New Partnership For Africa's Development |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organisation |
| NP | National Party |
| NRB | Native Resettlement Board |
| RDP | Reconstruction And Development Programme |
| ROSCA | Rotating Savings And Credit Association |
| SAARF | South African Advertising Research Foundation |
| SACP | South African Communist Party |
| SAIRR | South African Institute for Race Relations |
| SAPA | South African Press Association |
| SAPS | South African Police Services |
| SCC | Soweto Community Council |
| SECC | Soweto Electricty Crisis Committee |
| SMME | Small Medium And Micro Enterprise |
| TAC | Treatment Action Campaign |
| UBC | Urban Bantu Council |
| WB | World Bank |

# LIST OF APPENDIXES

**Appendix A**
A photograph of the South Western Townships published in 1974 in the journal *Sechaba* Volume 8(4), p. 2.

**Appendix B**
A poem by Sipho Sepamla entitled 'Soweto', published in *Voices from within: Black poetry from southern Africa* (Introduced and edited by Michael Chapman and Achmat Dangor. Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1986, pp. 127-8).

**Appendix C**
A list of the number symbolism in the daily Chinese numbers lottery *fahfee*.

**Appendix D**
Two images of 'betting slips' and 'receipts' that form part of the paraphanalia encountered in *fahfee*.

**Appendix E**
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**Appendix F**
Six photographs documenting scenes of everyday life.