

# Competing rationalities and informal settlement upgrading in Cape Town, South Africa: a recipe for failure

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**Abstract** The South African National Department of Housing's 'Breaking New Ground: A Comprehensive Plan for the Creation of Sustainable Human Settlements' was released in 2004. This policy directive acknowledged that informal settlements had grown significantly since 1994. It resulted in the development and implementation of the informal settlement upgrading programme across the country. The principle objective of the study discussed in this paper was to investigate the City of Cape Town's (the City) rationale in the technique of upgrading the informal settlements of Makhaza and New Rest in Cape Town and explore the implications of this rationale for women's social networks in these two settlements. The research has found that the rationale used by the City to plan and implement the upgrading of informal settlements is contradictory to the needs of the residents within these settlements. The settlements therefore do not meet the needs of the residents (particularly women) and do not enable or ensure the maintenance of strong social relationships which are crucial for the survival of livelihoods in these areas.

**Keywords** Governmentality · Rationality · Informal settlement upgrading · Social networks · Women

## 1 Introduction

Since the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new government system in 1994 South Africa has had to deal with the legacy of unequal distribution and land tenure as well as the race based control of infrastructure. This has given South Africa a prominent place in the literature on state housing provision and strategies to address widespread informal settlements (Huchzermeyer 1999). The Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950) saw that infrastructure and resources as well as social and economic opportunities were concentrated on prime land reserved for those categorized as racially 'white'. Those excluded from this category were forced onto un-serviced marginal land. At the same time significant

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urbanization was taking place as people sought the economic and social benefits of an urban setting and fled the unproductive and often vulnerable rural landscape. This influx mushroomed into peripheral townships that developed into vast informal settlements burdened with significant problems of poverty and vulnerability (Saff 1994; Yose 1999).

The National Department of Housing's 'Breaking New Ground' (BNG): A Comprehensive Plan for the Creation of Sustainable Human Settlements' was released in 2004. This policy directive acknowledges that informal settlements have grown since 1994 (Angignu and Huchzermeyer 2009) and resulted in the informal settlement upgrading programme formed under the Thabo Mbeki led government of the time. This program favored in situ upgrading as opposed to relocation to avoid the uprooting of social networks (Yose 1999; Huchzermeyer 2006). Funds were made available for rehabilitation and land acquisition where existing land was deemed unsuitable in order to prevent sustained marginalization through relocation to peripheries (Department of Housing 2004).

Informal settlements are found in almost all developing country cities, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Informal settlements are spaces where informal housing has been constructed illegally on land which residents have no claim to and which do not comply with planning and building regulations (UNSTAT 2005). Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is often accompanied with the widespread development of informal settlements (Sliuzas 2004). The principle aim of the research discussed in this paper is to investigate the City of Cape Town's ('the City') rationalities in the in situ upgrading process of informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa using the case studies of Makhaza and New Rest (see map in Newton and Schuermans 2013). It also explores the implications of these rationalities for women's social networks in these two settlements.

## 2 Rationalities, governmentality and Foucault

Governmentality is seen to be the structured mentalities, practices, rationalities, and techniques through which people or a system are governed (Mayhew 2004). It was a concept developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault in the late 1970s and has been used since the early 1990s as a useful research perspective in a number of different disciplines. His lectures of 1978 and 1979 focused on the "genealogy of the modern state" and led to the concept of "governmentality" i.e. the linking of governing ("governor") and modes of thought ("mentalité"). Governmentality aims to unite questions of government, politics, organization and administration to the space of bodies, lives and selves (Dean 2010) and brings together interests in micro- and macrophysics of power (Lemke 2000).

One of the distinctive characteristics of governmentality is "its specificity in identifying how government is formulated, how it problematises, what techniques it uses, and so on" (Rose et al. 2006, p. 97). In other words it seeks to understand how government works (and is not based on ideas of how it *should* work). The study of governmentality encompasses the analysis of practices and programmes that aim to form, lead and govern behavior as well as the design, capacity and technologies used managing and directing the populace (Crampton and Elden 2007). Such studies also focus on both the 'aims and aspirations, the mentalities and rationalities' employed to steer practices of conduct. These mentalities or rationalities of government are framed within 'regimes of truth' that inform the 'thought' secreted in projects of rule (Crampton and Elden 2007, p. 187). This paper will focus only on the rationalities within the governmentality of informal settlement upgrading but the relationship between rationalities and practices cannot be seen as separate. They are closely interrelated and dependent on each other (Gribat 2010).

### 3 This study: The case of Makhaza and New Rest, Cape Town

Makhaza is situated in the township area of Khayelitsha. The City of Cape Town started upgrading parts of the informal settlement in the early 2000s. New Rest is located in Gugulethu. The area was a buffer zone during the apartheid era and was used to dump municipal waste and building rubble (Adlard 2006). It too has been upgraded in part and the City of Cape Town is continuing the building process. For this research particular focus was placed on women's social networks. This is of particular interest as many informal settlement households are headed up by women with men making up much of the migrant labor force. More women are also beneficiaries of formal housing through their status as heads of some households and are often the more 'permanent' residents of settlements. Women also tend to be the catalysts for self organization and networking in communities as their roles are varied in society. Women are often already operating within social networks in informal settlements. These women sustain their livelihoods through their social networks which allow them gateway access to economic activities such as informal trading.

Data was collected in the upgraded settlements of Makhaza and New Rest within Cape Town (South Africa) during 2011. Stakeholders and key informants were identified through engagement with the community and institutions in the geographical area. Semi-structured interviews were held with women in Makhaza and New Rest using open ended questions to assist in the conversations. 20 women in New Rest and 23 women in Makhaza were interviewed (43 interviews in total). Intensive interviews were also held with directors and programme managers at the City of Cape Town (Informal Settlements Department; Housing, Land and Planning Department and the New Settlements Department). Interviews were also held with members of the Western Cape anti-eviction campaign, Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Social Justice Coalition, the Isandla Institute, Slum Dwellers International, COURC, EMG and the Anti-Land Invasion Unit. Others included researchers at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand.

### 4 The rationality of the City of Cape Town

In order to understand the constructs, rationalities (govern) mentalities of the City of Cape Town it is necessary to review both the structure and the history of its governance arrangements. During the time of apartheid rule in South Africa, Cape Town consisted of 69 municipal groupings. These were later separated in 25 racially segregated municipalities which were made up of 18 white local authorities (including colored and Asian residents) and 7 black local authorities (Africans only) (McDonald 2008). Large scale changes have since occurred within the governance structure of Cape Town. December 2000 saw an incorporation of these racialised authorities into a single Unicity of the City of Cape Town (the City). This was in line the national structures and policies of the post-apartheid government. Cape Town is now governed by a 221 member city council. This council in turn chooses the executive mayor, who chooses an 11 member Mayoral Committee. The city is divided into 111 electoral wards. Subcouncils are made up of geographically clustered wards each assigned a councilor and led by a subcouncil chairman elected by a majority vote of the individual subcouncil (Fieuw 2011).

Through the Unicity process the City of Cape Town's budget became self-financed, its revenue flow to come from water and electricity payments, property rates and taxes, levies and intergovernmental grants or transfers (Wilkinson 2004). The 2000 local government

elections also saw the African National Congress (ANC) lose its majority position to the Democratic Alliance (DA). This halted any ANC plans for the new Unicity government and brought a new (govern) mentality to the City, one that was reactionary, neoliberal in its administration, and above all, monetarily conservative. In 2002 the ANC regained power through the national floor-crossing process. The party brought about radical political and strategic restructuring in the Unicity (Jolobe 2006). This change in structure and governance, however, did not bring about a redistribution of resources to the poor which was previously promised by the party. Instead, based on the premise that Cape Town needed to remain internationally competitive economically, the neoliberal construct of the ANC perpetuated development that did not meet the needs of the poor, rather it promoted municipal operations as a private business (McDonald and Smith 2004).

The 2000–2006 crisis of governance and institutional instability (Jolobe 2006) meant the shift of “planning aimed at urban integration and redistribution ... to a view of planning as integral to ‘global positioning’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ government” (Watson 2002, p. 1). Spatial planning was also isolated as a component of planning making integrated development planning (IDP), which is financially ascetic, the sole guiding focus of planning in the City. The IDP process is coordinated through a budget that promotes neoliberal ends (Fieuw 2011). “Given the absence of adequate transferable funds for their expanded responsibilities, local governments are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and improve local revenues by private sector participation and using market-based strategies” (Miraftab 2007, p. 604). This has meant that the City of Cape Town has had to strategically position itself and think and act like a private sector body (Fieuw 2011). This has included contracting out basic services to private entities and the shedding of responsibilities and the recovery of costs through user fees (Miraftab 2007).

In short, one of the overriding rationalities of the City of Cape Town’s Housing Department in the technique of upgrading informal settlements is to gather income from services rendered to citizens. This is undertaken in order to remain competitive and viable. The Department aims to get as many people into houses and provide them with basic services as financially possible in order to meet its financial needs on top of its mandate to ensure that national housing targets are met. Making people part of the economic system through spatial means also facilitates monitoring and control through the automated billing of citizens for services rendered. This rationality means that the approach of the Department is technocratic, reactive and based on budgetary numbers.

## 5 The social networks of the women in Makhaza and New Rest

In order to explore the implications of the City Department’s rationalities for women’s social networks in these two settlements it is also important to understand these systems. Makhaza and New Rest are both areas with strong community ties and networks that stem from days when the settlements were informal units operating through reciprocity systems and firm representative networks. The women’s network in Makhaza and New Rest consist of formal groupings such as the sewing groups, environmental committees, ‘Stokvels’ (savings groups), burial societies and community policing forums. More informally their networks consist of friends, relatives and neighbours who help with more than just monetary assistance. These networks provide for child care, food contributions, the sharing of resources and care for the sick and elderly. During the informal settlement days these networks were crucial to the survival of the residents and people placed themselves, spatially, in very strategic ways in order to make the most of their networks.

Women's social networks in these settlements are organic by nature and are traditionally informal and based on exchange and kinship. As opposed to the City of Cape Town's structures which are largely independent of each other and governed mostly by economic discourses with a top down approach, the women have a more interactive system based on a number of different livelihood assets that are not always financially focused or economically driven. This is not to say that these networks are informal or lack structure, their structure is, rather, arranged in a way that allows for more interaction and is based on a largely social and organic govern (mentality). This is, more often than not, based on social interaction, communication and reciprocity.

## 6 Implications and consequences

The rationality of the City (the designer) in the technique of upgrading the informal settlements is not complimentary to the structure and nature of the women's social networks. The economic and technocratic focus in the upgrading of the settlements has meant that the social needs and networks of the women have been largely ignored and the settlements have not met their needs.

96 % of the women interviewed in Makhaza and 90 % of the women in New Rest reported that the settlement did not meet their needs.

Many mentioned that there was, most notably, a lack of spaces for women to gather and meet

When we want to meet we go to someone's house or we use the shack in the back.  
We have to make our own spaces to meet and undertake our cultural activities

There are no spaces for us to meet. We struggle to even meet for our burial society. It is worse now that it is formal

We are using a lot of money to meet people and to meet friends (travelling).  
Whoever built it wanted to destroy our relationships

(Women interviewed in Makhaza and New Rest)

This has a direct impact on women's social networks. Places for women to meet are crucial to sustaining and creating networks. During the time that the settlement was informal women would meet in open spaces and under large trees. These open spaces or meeting spaces have not been designed into the new settlements (both within Makhaza and within New Rest). This lack of space has had a direct impact on the social networks with many groups now only meeting once every two months or having to meet in shacks and in each other's houses (which have limited space). This has meant that many social groups have reduced in size or have dissolved completely (such as the bible groups in New Rest).

This lack of open space has also had an impact on cultural activities which formed an important part of the community system (especially for women). A particular cultural system that has been adversely affected by the upgrade has been the male initiation ceremonies of the women's sons.

We used to do our cultural activities here in our community, now there is no space for that. We have to go to the Eastern Cape which is expensive, sometimes we cannot go and then the boys do not go through initiation

There is no space for cultural activities that help our children to learn respect and become men. I think the City of Cape Town makes our plots small so that we can't do our cultural activities

We often spend lots of money to return to the Eastern Cape to undertake cultural activities. I do everything in the Eastern Cape and it's so expensive going back and forth. I sometimes have to make do with the space because I can't afford to travel up and down. It is very difficult and our lives are bad for us as our culture is slowly fading and it affects us badly

(Women interviewed in Makhaza and New Rest)

This difficulty in undertaking cultural activities has been seen by both communities as the root of many of the crime, drug, alcohol and teenage pregnancy problems in the area.

The division on the settlement into political wards by the City of Cape Town has also meant that social networking activities which used to take place in the informal settlements either no longer take place in the upgraded settlements or have become fragmented [such as stokvels (savings groups)]. The ward system has created divisions with each ward run by a separate ward councilor. These ward councilors have various instructions from the City and are protective of their "territory" and reluctant to work together and share across wards. The informal settlements of Makhaza and New Rest did not fall into a ward system so sharing of resources and co-operation within the community was fluid and organic.

Some women also made mention of the fact that the settlements layout and infrastructure had made the settlement unsafe. Lack of adequate lighting and the positioning of transport routes have meant the women feel threatened in their space and have restricted their movements after dark. This has meant that the women no longer socialize or meet in the evening which is sometimes the only time they have available to meet. Some of the women's comments are shown below:

There are problems with the way the area has been designed. From the bus stop you have to cross the park which is dangerous especially at night

There's no space for our children to play. The plan was totally wrong. They put the park next to the dam where it is dangerous and there is a lot of crime

(Women interviewed in Makhaza)

We do not go to (social and religious) gatherings at night anymore. Now there is too much crime. It is dangerous

Roads are too narrow and it is difficult to move freely in the community but the roads have also meant that anyone can come into the community without us knowing. There are a lot of 'outsiders'

(Women interviewed in New Rest)

Women were also asked directly what had changed in their social networks since the upgrading. A woman in Makhaza responded with the following comment:

There is lots we don't do anymore. We don't meet as much as we used to. We spend more money now on our houses because they are not of a good quality. Before (the upgrading) businesses went well but now things are expensive and we have to pay for transport to get to shops outside (the area). We used to run spaza shops but now we don't have spaces for that. We used to have food gardens and we used to sell fish and chips. Now there is too much crime

Another, in New Rest, commented that:

We used to meet frequently as women in open spaces and walk at whatever time of the night but now it does not happen because of the crime. There is not even a safe small park. We used to have cooking stokvels in open spaces and socials but not anymore because even the houses are too small. We used to meet under the big tree. We can't do that anymore either

This evidence of the settlements not meeting the needs of the women residents was discussed with the City of Cape Town. It goes beyond a lack of participation and consultation with the community during the planning process. The City explained that each settlement upgrade has a particular budget that needs to be distributed equally to ensure that as many houses as possible are built on a particular site. The houses and settlement infrastructure must meet the engineering standards of the City. The need to ensure that as many houses as legally possible are constructed on the site leaves little opportunities to ensure design that include open space, comfortable yard space and other design elements that sustain women's social networks. The City of Cape Town has admitted that very little effort is put into design that has women and their social networks in mind.

We are not putting a lot of effort into innovative design for women at this moment. Our settlements are engineering driven. It's about creating the grids, designing the services and installing the services. The more innovative urban design approach is not where we are at the moment. It is a shift we still need to make in Cape Town and the country as a whole. It is only the partnership approach "special projects" the ISN PHP projects where there is involvement of women in layout and typology. On a larger scale it is more based on engineering not based on women or youth or HIV (Housing Department, City of Cape Town)

## 7 Discussion and concluding comments

As part of their mandate the City also needs to ensure that as many people as possible are brought into the rate paying system so that they can ensure revenue from services. This is done through formalizing settlements and providing houses with services and an address. By providing as many houses as possible the City can get as many people as possible onto their system and paying for services such as water and electricity. Providing electricity, water and a house; however, does not provide for the other needs of women in these settlements (particularly the needs of social networks). A number of women in both Makhaza and New Rest spoke of wanting a "home and not just a house", a place that meets their other needs such as access to economic opportunities, social services, meeting spaces etc.

The new settlements have not been conducive to the maintenance or establishment of women's social networks. They have not made room for informal economic activities to take place and do not provide public meeting spaces or structured social and cultural spaces. It is important to note that just because a person is given a house it does not mean that they are able to financially afford to pay the rates, taxes, and maintenance on the properties or for the water and electricity provided to the house. Having removed the social reciprocity opportunities as well as the informal income generation prospects through the spatial restructuring the settlement women have begun engaging in 'counter conduct', using the various informal mechanisms and techniques to ensure that the settlements meet their needs and constructs/rationalities.

In short, the change that the City brought, spatially, affected women's social networks negatively even though the settlement was upgraded in situ. The limited size of the houses and the plots of land on which they were placed have meant that many of the cultural, financial and social practices that kept the women's network together are now not possible due to the spatial constraints of the settlement. In Makhaza particularly the women speak of a large tree where they used to meet. This area is no longer available for meetings and they have struggled to find a new place to meet.

The City has a largely economic rationale for its upgrading process based on the assimilation of residents into its formal rate paying system whilst the women's governmentality is based on societal connections, reciprocity and more informal systems within its social networks. These two constructs have clashed in the past and continue to do so today with the women's networks not understanding the uncommunicative nature of the City and the City not understanding the organic, discursive nature of the women in the settlements insisting that they follow specific protocols when engaging with the City (usually through the ward councillors). The urban planning of the new settlements undertaken by the City has been based not on the needs of the women (or indeed, any of the residents) but has been a numbers game of providing services and attempting to make the residents of the previously informal settlements into rate paying citizens in order to meet their neoliberal and financially based mandates. While the City is focused on the technocratic process of providing houses, services and infrastructure the women are focused on how they are going to support a livelihood and maintain their connections in the upgraded settlements. These issues of conflicting rationalities are also discussed in Watson (2003).

The research has found that the rationality used by the City to plan and implement the upgrading of informal settlements is different from that of the residents within these settlements. The settlements therefore do not meet the needs of the residents (particularly women) and do not enable or ensure the maintenance of strong social relationships which are crucial for the survival of livelihoods in these areas. If the City is going to continue the process of upgrading informal settlements and ensure the sustainability of these new settlements it is essential that they do so with a better understanding of the rationalities of those who live within these areas, especially women.

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