Review Article

Contested Landscape of Fragmented Communities

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The totality of urban life and experience unfolds in a specific geographical place by which it is conditioned and modified. Yet, geographical division of the urban space on the basis of race is a universal phenomenon of colonial urbanization. The division of urban space on the basis of race and the methodical application of apartheid to transform the geographic and political landscape in order to control the **presence** and regulate the **existence** of black people has been the main feature of South Africa under white minority rule. Apartheid as a fulcrum of racial domination was consolidated with the ascendancy of the National Party to political power in a narrow election in 1948. Since then, existing residential segregation has been used to systematically uproot black people and dismantle their communities - a scheme described by many commentators as social engineering of biblical proportions.

The number of people and communities forcibly uprooted has been a subject of numerous studies. However, the most recent study by the Surplus People Project (SPP) estimated that 3,5 million people had been forcibly moved between 1960 and 1983, and that nearly 2 million were still under the threat of removal (Platzky and Walker 1985: 11). Although these numbers give us some idea of the magnitude and scope of forced removals under various South African laws, the estimates do not include a large number of people forced to move under pass law from one area to the next , nor does it include the number of people in the numerous squatter settlements such as Crossroads located around white cities who are forced to move not once, but many times, when their homes are demolished by the government. In addition, the SPP figures do not include all the people and communities within

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the Bantustans who are forced to move through spatial planning in order to consolidate the "Bantustans" as an archipelago of cheap labor reserves.

No other aspect of urban life and experience symbolize the fragmentation of communities and destitution of black people under apartheid than the numerous shanties and squatters that have engulfed the white cities in South Africa. Josette Cole's book captures the tapestry and complex history of the squatter settlement at Crossroads between 1976-1986 by focusing upon the internal structures of the squatter communities, the diverse strategies of the state and capital to diffuse and control the social conflict, and the changing internal conflict among and between community organizations. The author framed the unfolding political and social conflict in Crossroads within the broader political economy of South Africa.

Two main themes thread their way throughout the book. One is the shifting politics within Crossroads and the emergence of local community leaders whose economic and political interests overtime came into conflict with the majority of the squatters. Clearly, these developments entailed a transformation in class relations within the squatter community itself as well as within the wider political economy of South Africa. The other theme, in consequence, is the change in the political and economic processes, and in particular the conjoint series of changes in the constitution of the state and in the content of popular political practice following the Soweto uprising in 1976.

These two strands - or, more accurately, the precise way in which they have been unravelled is captured by Cole in a detailed study of the squatter community of Crossroads. The book is a major contribution to our understanding of the politics of squatter settlements which takes a micro approach to the dynamics of political and social conflict within Crossroads - one of the best known squatter communities in South Africa. Much of the reason for the variety of details about Crossroads, its internal social structures and the various factions and their leaders comes from the author's considerable knowledge of Crossroads. The author is absorbing account of the wretched lives of the squatters at Crossroads comes from an intimate relationship she has cultivated over the years as a community worker. Keeping her personal involvement out of sight, Cole maps out the difficult terrain of community struggle and the 'tragedy, complexities and contradictions which define squatter history in the Western Cape, (p. 158).

The history of the squatter communities at Crossroads since the mid 1970's is written with skill and sensitivity reflecting a careful shifting of the available materials that Cole had gathered as a participant observer of the unfolding contradiction between the various forces involved in shaping the history of Crossroads.

Cole makes the observation that the dynamics of social stratification internal to Crossroads, the ideology and political orientation of the community leader and the institutions within which these elements mediated are central

points of departure towards an understanding of the complexity of community struggle in the Cape Peninsula. By 1986, the year her study ends, the community leaders had reached a position in which they regarded it as being in their interest to ally with the state security forces in a war against other squatter communities that had grown around Crossroads. This realignment in the balance of forces within the squatter communities brought both the destruction of Crossroads and the death of many progressive individuals working for social justice and democracy within the squatter communities. Cole suggests that

> *"unless progressive forces consistently analyze the past and present political terrain and base their actions on this, they will find it difficult to win the hearts and minds of the unorganized masses, and thus they will allow the forces of reaction to gain the upper hand", (p. 163).*

An appreciation of the history of Crossroads and the squatter communities in the Cape Peninsula requires an understanding of the historical, economic and social conditions which have historically been generated on a sustained basis, successive waves of squatter communities to mushroom in all major urban centers of South Africa. Unlike squatters elsewhere, the squatter communities in South Africa have come into being as a result of the government's territorial and residential segregation policies which have been embodied in the apartheid program of the National Party since 1948. Territorial segregation in South Africa with designated areas for Africans and whites was codified in the Land Act of 1913 which set aside 13 per cent of South Africa's land surface as "native reserve" amounting to approximately 9 million hectares or 7 per cent of the total land surface and stipulated that no African could in the future purchase land outside the 'reserves'. It was in this "reserve" area that Africans could, so the racist lingua went, "emerge from barbarism to civilization". The Land Act was intended to provide for the African peasant producer a restricted access to the means of production in the "reserves", in return for which they were obligated to offer services as laborers and tenants. Thus, the immediate motivation behind the passage of the Land Act of 1913 was two-fold. First, through the elimination of squatting and occupation rights outside the "reserves", the Land Act facilitated a greater supply of cheap African labor for white agriculture. Second, the imposition of legislation to curtail whites from buying "reserve" land, served to maintain and fortify the function of the "reserves" as main sources of cheap migrant labor for mining industries. Thus, the broader effect of the Act was to overburden the "reserves", and to limit the ability of Africans to mitigate the results of land pressure by moving beyond the confined areas to the "reserves". The consequent increased flow of cheap African labor to mining, industry and agriculture provided the material basis for the rapid industrialization of the country. Thus the Act led to the destruction of the African

peasant production and created the material condition for the coercive migrant labor system.

In addition, the reorganized and consolidated racial state enacted the notorious Native (Urban Areas) Act in 1923 which was based on the philosophy of the Stallard Commission on 1921 which deemed that all Africans were only temporary residents and "should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister" (Transvaal Province (-1922), para. 267). Strict application of influx controls and residential segregation were intensified during much of the 1930's and 1940's to curtail the movement and settlement of Africans in the urban areas.

A combination of factors, including the rapid development of secondary industry during the war, the relaxation of pass laws, low agricultural wages and the growth of rural landlessness led to an intensified and uncontrolled urbanization resulting in the development of large squatter settlements on the periphery of major urban centers.

The expansion of secondary industry and the accelerated urbanization exacerbated the housing crisis in the major urban centers. The housing shortage has resulted in overcrowding and rent gouging by landlords. Hence, for the African migrants who flocked to Johannesburg and other urban centers in search of employment opportunities, conditions were no better than the "reserves" they left behind.

Despite the availability of industrial employment, wages have not kept up with the escalating cost of living in the urban areas, and in particular, with the cost of housing. As a result, squatting offered a way out to reduce the high cost of rents. Even in areas where Africans had freehold rights such as Sophiatown, Alerandra and Newclare, the rising cost of rents was so prohibitive that many were forced to become squatters in the outskirts of the city.

The most obvious manifestation of the urban and housing crisis was the growth of squatter camps. In January 1947, the Johannesburg municipality estimated the number of squatters at 63,000 (Stadler 1979: 19). In this analysis of Nathaniel Mapanza's squatters movement around Johannesburg during the 1940's. A.W. Stadler observed that "squatting was a response to a situation in which the costs of family subsistence had to be met entirely from wages, yet in which wages were below the cost of family subsistence". Thus as Stadler observed, "squatting may be seen then as an attempt to reduce the costs of subsistence in a situation in which, because of the swollen "reserve army" moving into the city relatively unimpeded by influx controls, wages could be held down during a period of rapidly rising living costs", (Stadler 1979: 22). Stadler has also shown how clashes between squatter communities and local officials as well as the police have been crucibles in which squatter leaders have learned the tactics of political challenge "not as a political party, but directly as a pressure group mounted on the basis of popular

action", (Stadler 1979: 42). A review of these developments would have strengthened Cole's analysis of the squatter history in the Cape Peninsula.

Similar squatting development was also taking place in the western Cape in large part due to the imposition of residential segregation by the local municipality. The first occurred in Cape Town when Uitvlug (later named Ndabeni) was established in 1901 as the first segregated residential area for Africans. By 1923, the year when the Native (Urban Areas) Act was passed, the Cape Town City Council was reported to be demanding stricter influx control of the Africans by the government. When the Act was applied in Cape Town in 1926, 10,000 Africans, constituting 12% of the employees of private industry were registered. In an attempt to escape the control associated with locations and other aspects of the Act, the African population increasingly chose to live outside the municipal boundaries in the areas such as Windermere, Kensington and Elsies River. It is from this period that one can trace the beginning of squatter communities in Cape Town, By 1930, a census taken in Langa, (built in 1927) showed that only 2,000 of the registered workforce was living there.

The growth of these squatter camps coincided with the development of manufacturing industries in Cape Town largely as a result of the governments artificial import barrier policies during the Second World War. The region became the largest center of industrially processed and manufactured products in South Africa. It is not therefore surprising that both the local African population and squatter settlements grew rapidly in this period. By 1948, the squatter population was estimated to have climbed to 150,000, who lived in make-shift camps such as Windermere, Cooks Bush, Blouvlei, Vergrond, Marabastad, Eureka, etc.

The political problems posed by the squatter movements and more generally by the presence of a proletarinized African working class throughout South African urban centers were a pivotal issue in the parliamentary election of 1948. During the parliamentary election, the white voters were asked to determine the future of all Africans who have settled in and around white cities. The United Party's Fegan Report of February of 1948 argued that the urbanization of Africans was inevitable and that the process needed overall supervision and control by the authorities. The United Party, endorsed as its party platform the finding of the Fagan Commission which concluded that "the idea of total segregation is utterly impracticable and that the townward movement of Natives is simply an economic phenomenon which is occurring with regard to other races..." (UG 20-1949 para. 20). The Fegan Commission recommended a gradual movement away from dependence on migrant labor to a stabilized labor or even the permanent settlement of the African families in the urban centers. This implied that part of the reproduction and maintenance of the African working class and a substantial reserve army would be situated in the urban townships near industrial centers.

The opposition National Party which campaigned hard for the votes of Afrikaner workers, responded by elevating the Stallard segregation doctrine into a full-blown ideology of apartheid. The party's apartheid programme was outlined in a report of the party committee under the chairmanship of P.O. Sauer which was released in 1947 and merely repeated the Stallard doctrine, that towns were the sole domain of whites and Africans should be "regarded as migratory citizens". Hindson has summarized the report as follows:

All whites were to be treated as a single racial group with equal property and political rights in areas defined as 'white'. The Black population was to be separated not only from Whites but also internally along 'ethnic groups' 'in its own areas' to promote its 'national development'. In these areas, Africans would acquire full property and political rights whilst other groups would be denied such rights" (Hindson 1983).

From this political vision flows a series of programmatic policies to affirm the Stallard doctrine that Africans were to remain in the urban areas only so long as they continued to 'minister to the needs of the white man'.

The Bantu in the urban areas should be regarded as migratory citizens not entitled to political and social rights equal to those of the whites. The process of destabilisation should be arrested. The entire migration of Bantu into and from the cities should be controlled by municipal bodies. Migration into and from the reserves should likewise be strictly controlled. Redundant Bantu in the urban centers should be returned to their original habitat in the country or the reserves. Bantu from the country areas or the reserves should be admitted to the European cities or towns only as temporary employees, obligated to return to their homes after the expiry of their employment. For this purpose, a convenient identification and control system will have to be devised (Kruger 1960: 404).

The National Party won the election with a narrow margin and the government became much more directly involved in the regulation of African housing in the urban areas. Six years later, the government announced that it would use Cape Town as a model city not only for the strict application of apartheid laws in residential segregation but also in removing all Africans from the city.

The first systematic onslaught against 'illegal' squatters began to be formulated in 1954. In may of that year, Verwoerd the architect of apartheid, in a reply to the Federated Chamber of Industries, indicated that 'Native' families would be discouraged from settling in the Western Cape and that migrant labor would be regarded by the government as the most suitable form of 'Native' labor in South Africa. Immediately afterwards, Verwoerd announced in parliament that the Western Cape was to be a preferential area for 'Coloured' people and that no further family housing would be built for Africans. This policy, which became to be known as the Coloured Labor

Preferential Policy (CLPP), was clearly elaborated and systematized by Dr. Eiselen in 1955 - a policy which he justified as having as its aim 'the reduction of unfair competition (labor) between the two groups' (Eiselen 1953: 7). Eiselen also linked the increase in the African population, especially in the squatter camps, to the industrial development in the Western Cape.

Industrial development was the bait which attracted the 'natives' for the rapid increase in their numbers fell within the same period as that development is in the main linked with industrial development (Eiselen 1953: 2).

In order to control the squatters, the government in 1955 spelled out its intention to build a site and service emergency camp at Nyanga. The site and service camps were considered to be "the most practical method of tackling the housing problem... and of obtaining effective control over the Native in the urban areas within a short period". The government instituted eligibility and qualification criteria and set standardized rental fees. Those who failed to secure employment were liable to have site permits cancelled and were ordered to evacuate the camp (New Age, April 28, 1955).

Although the CLPP was formulated in 1955, the policy was not strictly enforced until 1962, when a Standing Cabinet Committee was appointed to streamline the policy that designated the Western Cape as an employment area only for 'white' and 'coloured labor'. The policy as it unfolded in the years 1962-1969 envisaged (a) reducing the complement of African labor in the areas; (b) freezing the building of family housing for Africans; and (c) a vociferous policy against the employment of African women. Despite the various campaigns by the government to reduce the African workforce in this period, they were only successful in the years between 1960-1965, when the number of contract workers employed decreased by 73%. A steady increase has been noted in the years between 1968-1974. In the construction industry alone the number increased from 3,400 to 13,400. In the government sector where one would have expected the CLPP to have the most vigorously applied, the number grew more substantially - 1,400 to 6,000, the overall growth of migrant workers between 1970-1971 was 56,3% (Goldin 1984: 108).

By the time the economic recession began in 1973, the state began to reduce the size of its labor reserve camped in some 37 "informal settlements" in the Peninsula. These "informal settlements" were racially mixed and some had only "coloured" squatters. By 1975, Crossroads, Modderdam, Unibel and Verkgenot were four of the thirteen camps in which African squatters lived near Cape Town and these settlements became the focus of the government's demolition campaign.

The squatter settlement at Crossroads came into being as an informal settlement in 1975 for people who were evicted by the Divisional Council. In June 1976, Crossroads was proclaimed an emergency squatter camp as a result of a court decision. The South African Supreme Court rejected the

Divisional Council and Bantu Affairs Administration Board's (BAAB) application to demolish Crossroads on the grounds that the camp posed a health hazard. As a result, Crossroads was given a legal protection from demolition. The Divisional Council was instructed to provide rudimentary services such as water taps, refuse and night soil removal for a nominal service of R 10.00 per month.

The residents of Crossroads - migrants, women, the aged, the unemployed, petty traders - fearing the intensified campaign by the government to demolish the community - began to organise in a popular alliance against removal. Rudimentary community organizations began to take shape in the form of Men's Committee under the leadership of Mr. Nyembezi and an ad hoc Women's Committee led by two women - Jan Yante and Elizabeth Lutango.

The construction of two schools created a sense of permanence and community solidarity. Together with other formal bodies that provided community services and settled local disputes, Crossroads was slowly transformed from an emergency camp into a more organised and structured community.

The legal victory won by the Crossroads community came increasingly under attack by the government. Numerous tactics were being utilized including frequent raids to flush out illegal refuges and "crime prevention" raids. The repeated brutal government intervention galvanized the community's resistance at two levels: inside Crossroads and amongst individuals and organizations with long standing links with the community. The two strands of community resistance coalesced into a major "Save Crossroads" campaign.

The concerted campaign by the residents of Crossroads began to save their community and became a major focus of international news coverage. Scores of journalists and politicians came to Crossroads to express their solidarity with the squatter communities. A number of dignitaries such as Reverend Jesse Jackson and Senator George McGovern - both of whom later became US presidential candidates - visited Crossroads to focus international concern. Despite the local and international campaign to "Save Crossroads", the government began its assault in September of 1978 under the pretext of "crime prevention". Hundred of residents were detained in a pitched battle against officials of BAAD and the police. The methods used by the government towards the residents of Crossroads were condemned universally: the brutal tactics employed alarmed local business leaders and liberal organizations. The former represented by the Urban Foundation "perceived the state's action against the Crossroads as a major threat to economic and political stability" (p. 24) and became involved in finding a solution to the escalating conflict in Crossroads.

Following the involvement of the Urban Foundation and the appointment in 1978 of Dr. Koonerhof as head of the Department of Cooperation and Development, the conflict in Crossroads was reconstituted. The state and

private capital were prepared to underwrite reformist programs in order to redefine a new political and social programs for the squatter communities in the Cape Peninsula.

The residents of Crossroads found themselves caught up in the politics of reform from above. Throughout the latter part of 1978 and 1979, Dr. Koonerhof's reformist intervention set in motion significant realignment at the level of community leadership. His earlier announcement of an 'ad hoc' solution to deal with Crossroads and the "April Settlement" in categorizing the residents into "illegal" and 'legal' for the purpose of determining qualification for accommodations in the new townships to be built created new opportunities for divide and rule. This distinction and the limited concession given to 'legal' squatters in terms of the notorious section 10 (1) (a) and (b) of the Urban Areas Act as well as other provisions of the 'settlement' created widespread confusion among the Crossroads residents as well as those who supported their struggle against demolition from outside.

The concerted response by the state and capital to the squatter crisis in the Cape Peninsula was part of the overall restructuring process to provide limited concession for those Africans communities around white cities and towns. The Riekert Commission Report attempted to give this restructuring process a framework by according legal recognition to permanent urban black workers within the geographical and political framework of the apartheid state. A number of economic initiatives were put into motion by the state to carefully cultivate the black middle class within the township and in the Bantustans.

The emergence of Johnson Ngxobongwana as a community leader from 1979 onwards and his supporters at Crossroads and the intense intervention by the state and capital to restructure the urban problematic by developing an African middle class has to be seen as a strategic response to the crisis which griped South Africa since 1976. In a revealing statement, Judge Steyn, the Executive Director of Urban Foundation suggested that:

> *"I cannot see any thinking businessman declining to participate in South Africa's future through the Urban Foundation. His dividends will be the emergence of a black middle class and a greater stability in our urban societies. I am convinced that there is a new appreciation on the part of commerce and industry of the gravity and urgency of our situation, not only as far as the maintenance of the free enterprise system is concerned, but in regard to the survival of everything we hold dear".* (Financial Times March 11, 1977).

From 1979 onwards, as Cole notes, Crossroads was ridden with political struggle among various factions over who would control the tempo and direction of community politics. The period was also marked by state sponsored violence against those who were opposed to the Johnson Ngxobongwana

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and his local community officials accumulated an array of resources and were able to use it to further their economic and social position. They rewarded those who supported them and deprived those individuals and groups who opposed the politics of their leadership. By 1985, Johnson Ngxobong-wana and his supporters completely dominated the political life of Cross-roads.

The complexity of the power struggle among various factions and the issues that divided them in Crossroads is captured in greater detail by Cole. In particular she has shown how women who initially played a pivotal role in the community struggle between 1976-1978 were expunged from position of influence by men. "The men were made to feel helpless" one woman activist said later.

They were unhappy because according to custom a woman does not have the right to do something in public without consulting them. "We didn't care what the men said" (p. 64).

But then the men went on the offence. "The men decided", according to the same informant, "to have just one committee and kick the women away. They started to grab everything" (p. 65). As a participant observer, Cole shows the material circumstance of women's oppression, the historical and social position they held both as women and squatters and the dynamics of community struggles in the political consciousness of women in Crossroads. The power struggle among various community factions and the involvement of women at Crossroads precipitated as Cole notes the demise of the women's active participation as leaders in determining Crossroad's history, (p. 69). While the Crossroads women have been initially at the forefront of the formation of Crossroads, the conflict between the squatters and the state and among various factions within Crossroads itself created significant barrier for women,. The absence of an organised political organization in Cross-roads that can provide a vehicle for the active and equal participation of women in all fields of the community formation and defence has contributed to the strengthening of the prevailing patriarchal attitudes towards women. The demand placed on them both as women and as squatters placed greater distance between the need of the community to resist demolition and their struggle for equality.

In 1983, the state announced its plan to build a new African township of Khayelitsha as a solution to the growing squatter problem in the Cape Peninsula. The resettlement plan was part of the state's objective to settle all Africans with rights in terms of section 10 (1) (d) to be in the Western Cape and at the same time repatriate all 'illegal' Africans to the Bantustans. The plan doomed to failure from the beginning because the squatters refused to move. As Cole noted the squatters, "in open defiance continued to erect plastic shelters on every piece of land in and around the Old Crossroads" (p. 92). The defiance was also supported by the newly formed United Democra-

tic Front (UDF) in 1983 which further escalated the state/squatter confrontation in the Cape. Throughout 1984, the state tightened its repressive tactics by launching an assault on a regular basis to remove 'illegal' squatters. At the same time, the government came up with new initiatives which included:

(a) the removal of the Coloured Labor Preference Policy

(b) the introduction of 99-year leasehold for Africans qualified to be in the Western Cape (Khayelitsha and 'other areas')

(c) the 'repatriation' of the estimated 100,000 'illegal' African in Cape Town (Cape Times 26, 1984).

This "concession" was part of a broader offense aimed at removing certain barriers to the social mobility of an emergent black middle class as well as by incorporating a layer of the skilled black workers in the 'labor aristocracy" through the elimination of racially-discriminatory clauses in the existing Apartheid legislation. This was to be achieved by mobilizing resources to upgrade the social-economic conditions of the settled urban black residents, while tightening influx controls -(Murray 187: 65).

As part of this offense, the government announced that all squatters in the Cape Peninsula both "illegal and legal" would be resettled in Khayelitsha a move which was that was rejected by all between the UDF activists and the followers of Ngxobongwana. However as Cole notes the continuing unrest in the Cape in the second half of 1985 together with the escalated state repression, the Ngxobongwana leadership seized the opportunity from progressive activists of the UDF and its affiliates to control local politics at Crossroads.

Between April and May 1986, Crossroads was engulfed with a power struggle between progressive political activists and Ngxobongwana group. At Crossroads, Nyanga and KTC and other areas, squatter camps near Cape Town, thousands of UDF activists were attacked by vigilantes acting in collusion with the security forces. The declaration of the state emergency in 1986 further weakened the progressive political activist from organising in squatter communities.

The author consistently builds from her observation of social and political conflict and thoroughly explores the various factors which precipitated in the destruction of Crossroads. The relevance of her analysis of community struggle at Crossroads brings out the centrality of class alliance in the struggle to dismantle apartheid. As Cole noted, this issue was not given the attention it requires within the anti-apartheid movement. The UDF alliance with the Ngxobongwana group proved to be a disaster which led to the death of many UDF activists and the destruction of Crossroads.

"This history", Cole writes at the end of her book

"with its blatant examples of divide and rule strategies from without and from within the communities, poses a challenge to all those people committed to be social transformation of South Africa... Crossroads history

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> *illuminates the consistent failure of progressive forces to fundamentally
> win the heart and minds of those who lead and inhibit squatter com-
> munities on a large scale", (p. 163).*

Implicit in her conclusion is the significance of analyzing and under-
standing class forces and interests at play within communities-in-struggle. A
proper understanding of the class forces and contradictions will enable mo-
vements-for-change to grasp the nature and content of the anti-apartheid al-
liances in specific places and situations. Such an understanding generates an
"invaluable lesson" for all those activists working to dismantle apartheid and
bring about social justice and democracy in South Africa.