

Chapter 8

Description of the South African Context



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8.1 Introduction to the South African Research Context

Contemporary South Africa remains the dominant country in sub-Saharan Africa, both economically¹ and politically.² Despite this, it is also one of the most socially fractured and unequal.³ Both as a function of its political history and as a result of numerous ongoing governance concerns, seemingly immaterial differences have become translated into deeply embedded structural forms of marginalization. South Africa's predilection with racial distinctions is one such example. Under the apartheid regime, five entirely artificial racial characterizations were invented in order to justify the systematic division of society, the result of which is that long after the fall of apartheid these racial distinctions are still manifest in the economic and social patterns which structure society and indeed the physical spaces of its urban areas. There remain, in short, predominantly "black" townships, "colored" ghettos, small pockets of "Indian" areas and "white" suburbs.

Before providing a descriptive account of the specific research sites and locations, it is worth situating those descriptions in the broader configurations which serve to define South African life. Perhaps most noticeably, the country is extremely diverse and the population far more heterogeneous than many others. For instance, the country has eleven official languages, a geographically representative separation of powers,⁴ and officially recognizes numerous African royal houses and institutions.⁵ As touched upon, while frequently lauded as an emblematic example of democratic

¹As per the World Bank (2017a) GDP Ranking Scale.

²As per the World Bank Worldwide Governance (2017b) Indicators Scale.

³As per the Gini coefficient at the time of writing.

⁴Cape Town functions as the legislative hub and home to parliament, Tshwane (formerly known as Pretoria) acts as the primary executive center and seat of government, located in the Union Buildings, and Bloemfontein playing the role of the primary judicial center, as it is home to the highest court in the country, the Constitutional Court.

⁵A complete overview is provided by the South African Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.

rule, such diversity exists in conjunction with significant disparities. The unemployment rate is estimated by the government to stubbornly persist at approximately 26%; however, independent analyses have noted that the real effective rate may be closer to 40%.⁶ Nearly, 17% of the population also lives below the international poverty line, with 17 million people (from a total estimated population of 56 million or approximately 30%) existing on social grants as their primary income. Such grants are themselves of very low value, with the largest awards amounting to only USD 116 per month (or USD 3.7 per day).⁷

As both a product of a deeply traumatic history and the failure of the post-apartheid state to capitalize on the resources with which the country is endowed, South African society is itself fragmented, often troubled, and seemingly intersected by contradiction. It is, for instance, a “nonracial”, yet a racially defined society, one of the most economically unequal in the world and yet enshrines equality in the Constitution, and one in which the oppression which characterized its history continues to define the contemporary (Howell and Shearing 2017). Despite this, however, the country and society have overcome nearly a century of racial segregation, oppressive state governance, and international exclusion. While the country’s history haunts its continued development, there are innumerable examples of success, of individuals and communities overcoming adversity, and of the collective efforts of many bringing about ongoing peace.

From a conceptual standpoint, the heterogeneous structure of South African society brings into question the utility and the desirability of providing very broad generalizations or abstractions, such as have often previously been used in comparative assessments of the country before (Marx 1998). Moreover, and in contrast, it would be very difficult to access and engage with representative samples from all of the different economic levels, cultural/language groups, racial/ethnic groups, and so on. As such, the data presented here and in the comparative analysis is *not* presented as emblematic or indicative of anything broader than the communities in which the field research was conducted and indeed cannot be seen as representative of the communities themselves, for they remain very diverse.

So as to encounter the diversity of the country’s people, however, the South African sample for the larger study drew on interviews with young men from two communities very different in their composition, located in two cities quite distant from one another. The first, Hanover Park, is located in the city of Cape Town and was artificially created by the apartheid state to house people dislocated by the Group Areas Act of 1950. The second, Umgeni/KwaMashu, is a large “township” on the outskirts of the city of Durban, which organically emerged as a result of urban migration to the city by those seeking economic opportunities. A more detailed description of both is provided in the following section, including an overview of the economic, socioeconomic, and structural factors that shape the communities, provide a backdrop for the lives of the young men who live in them, and inform in important ways the norms

⁶There are frequent disparities between official estimations and others. Primarily, these occur as a result of definition, with the government not including “discouraged job seekers” (someone who has been unemployed for 6 months) as officially unemployed.

⁷As per the South African Government Social Security Agency.

in which violence is understood, accepted, and used by them. With this in mind, this chapter has two overarching goals.

First, it aims to provide an account of the context in which the participants interviewed for this study live, recognizing from the outset that such an account can never be complete or definitive (Robinson 2016). Rather, the account provided here seeks to highlight a selection of socio-structural features of the communities in which the interviews were conducted, so as to provide a (limited) picture of the contextual reality faced by young people in them. In so doing, it should be noted from the outset that this selective reading does *not* seek to speak *for* participants or indeed the wider communities in which they live but rather seeks to paint a picture *about* the primary conditions which are of relevance to the wider research project. Such an account is necessarily selective, and always limited by the researchers' own experiences and backgrounds—in such contexts, and despite employing a research methodology which aimed to maximize familiarity with and make as comfortable as possible the interviewees, interviewers remain “outsiders” (Padgett 2016). It is, in short, the participants themselves who are the authority on their own lives.

Second, this chapter situates the coding comparison and analysis undertaken in Chap. 9 by providing a thick description of the contextual parameters in which the violence-related norms analyzed there operate and in which, as shall be argued, they have become dominant. In short, that the specific norms are apparent in the communities under analysis is as much a function of the context in which those norms find traction as it is a product of the norms themselves—norms relating to the use of violence as a means of control would be far less apparent in an explicitly practicing nonviolent community, for example. Such contextual information is also very useful in providing a deeper comparison between the three countries which, at least superficially, may not seem very similar. In focusing on the South African example, it is perhaps history itself which has shaped the contemporary most significantly, and it is through history that the communities under analysis were predominantly shaped.

8.2 Political Eviction and Economic Migrancy—The History of the Communities in South Africa

Post-apartheid South Africa remains bound to its own history in innumerable ways. Indeed, the present context is built upon the design of difference formulated in the past—so much so that it is arguably very difficult to understand the contemporary subject matter without an understanding of how this history shapes both the subject and subjects found in the data. While often most powerful in the forms and practices that constitute the minutiae of daily interactions between people, this historical legacy is most visibly reinforced in the material structure of the cities (Lemon 2016). Despite significant efforts by the government to provide housing and decent sanitation, and despite ongoing large public works programs, the imagined differences of apartheid still find material reality (Maylam 2017).

Table 8.1 Number of interviews per area, South Africa

Neighborhood	Number of interviews
Mitchells Plain/Hanover Park, Cape Town	15
Umgeni/KwaMashu, Durban	15
Sum South Africa	30

The different “races” (as defined under apartheid) invariably live together in separate communities, for instance, and despite no longer having political capital, these artificial ontological differences are mirrored economically and culturally (Strauss and Liebenberg 2014). For instance, in Cape Town, the large “township” of Khayelitsha was established on the outskirts of the formal city to house the migrant labor pool needed daily to perform menial labor, still has a racial profile in which 98.6% of inhabitants are “black”, 90.5% of the community speak Xhosa, and 18.8% are unemployed. In contrast, Rondebosch was demarcated a “whites only” zone under apartheid and yet has been more integrated since apartheid as a result of it including a national university. Despite this, 62.7% of the population are classified as “white”, 84.3% of the community speak English, and the area has a far lower unemployment rate of 14.3%.⁸ While direct comparisons are of course difficult to make, it is clear that there remain significant differences in the composition, conditions, and character of places, and these differences influence the way in which people live, understand each other, and themselves in both obvious and subtle ways. In relation to norms relating to understandings of violence, its use, and its forms, such differences continue to provide the discursive parameters in which the norms are understood. With this in mind, focus is now sharpened on the two sites from which the comparative data has been drawn. So as to provide a comparative tabulation of the number of interviews conducted per area, the interviews can be numerically summarized in Table 8.1.

8.2.1 Hanover Park—Cape Town

Hanover Park is situated on the “Cape Flats”, a vast portion of land developed by the apartheid state as the primary location for “colored” communities who were to be forcefully evicted from their homes should they fall within the borders of any “whites only” zone defined by the three statutes which comprised the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Hart 1988). It had previously been only sparsely inhabited, as it is a largely windswept and barren collection of semi-stable sand dunes (McEachern 1998). However, while the apartheid state would not tolerate the “mixing” of what it defined as ontologically distinct racial categories, such an assemblage required the support of a vast workforce of menial laborers, primarily undertaken by “colored” people (Jensen 1999). Thus, to prevent “mixing” but to ensure the continued supply

⁸Statistics drawn from the last national census.

of labor, the “Cape Flats” were developed to house “colored” communities, while areas defined as “white” were built up and individuals of any other racial group physically removed by force from their homes. These forced evictions were violent and traumatic, and in some instances resulted in the physical structures of entire communities being bulldozed and destroyed. In one instance, that land still remains barren.

The spatial areas of the communities—such as the infamous District Six—that were bulldozed by the apartheid state were not only physically broken apart, but in the process, the social structures and ties which provided individuals both with invaluable support in the face of daily oppression and an identity were also destroyed (McEachern 1998). Moreover, existing networks of familial and social relationships that had structured and provided meaning in many people’s lives were torn apart as individuals were haphazardly and often randomly relocated. Such processes negatively affected young people in particular, who could no longer draw on extended kin networks, familial matrices, and were no longer subject to informal disciplinary structures that had both provided support and a means of controlling behavior (Pinnock 2016). There were, for example, instances of gangsterism, drug use, and violent crime even in those original communities, but young men were also subject to the oversight of the community as a whole, and these groups were comparatively benign compared to the contemporary gangs found on the “Cape Flats” (Du Toit 2014).

Indeed, it is difficult to speak of young “colored” men in South Africa without mentioning gangsterism. The rise of gangsterism can, however, be directly correlated historically to the forced removals of the 1950s, and the destruction of numerous communities in Cape Town (Standing 2003). The result was a population of bored, disenfranchised youngsters whose sense of identity and community had been undermined, who spent time in groups with limited supervision, and who were faced with the violence of apartheid, poverty, unemployment, and the knowledge that their life prospects were extremely limited. Almost instantly shorn of family and friends, and with these structures no longer in place, many young people attempted to create a new sense of identity and belonging by forming small groups and associations. The net economic effect of dislocation, moreover, resulted in the production, distribution, and use of drugs arose as a key source of income, of activity, and of socialization (Chetty 2015). Levels of drug use and addiction soared. So too did levels of crime, as the youth groups came into competition for profits. Territory became economically important, resulting in spiraling turf warfare. The cyclical nature of this violence, driven by the apartheid state, further tore apart the communities, which further encouraged more violence.

While the history of the “Cape Flats” is not a moral or normative justification for the continued prevalence of gangs and illegal drugs in these communities, it is a necessary explanation. It is in the volatile aftermath of forced removals that the gangs of today emerged and gained power and allegiance. It is also here that the use of drugs became prevalent. The contemporary problems faced by these communities are embedded in their very structure and ontology. This may help explain why symptomatic responses by the police and state have been ineffective. Drugs and

gangs provide, however, problematic, meaning, and reprieve in communities forged by state violence and exclusion.

Focusing specifically on Hanover Park, the community is relatively small, covering only approximately 2 km², and has an approximate population of 35,000 people. Of these, census data indicates that some 96.5% are classified as “colored”, with 70.8% of the population speaking Afrikaans. Unemployment levels are approximately 13%, however, some 45.5% of households are headed by women, an especially important concern in relation to young men and violence. Of further importance to this cohort, data indicates that 57.8% of inhabitants have never been married, and only 25% of the community has graduated from secondary schooling—attendant to this, some 60.5% of residents do not have access to the internet, and only a third of households have access to a computer.⁹ The community is serviced by one primary school, and one secondary school, although students may attend schools outside of the immediate borders of Hanover Park, as the area falls within the larger municipal demarcation of Athlone.

In terms of structural design and position, Hanover Park is 18.5 km from the city center of Cape Town. The primary housing units are one- or two-bedroom apartments, which collectively make up low-rise apartment blocks. Built in parallel these buildings form long cement corridors, initially designated as communal areas, but have since become the primary conduits for people moving between buildings. Because of their design, furthermore, they contribute to the high number of bystander deaths from gunshot wounds, as the bullets ricochet down these brick corridors. There is one sports ground, which is not maintained, and no functional parks or play areas. The young men interviewed, primarily reported spending their free time “on the streets,” as there is no functional youth clubs, sports teams, or collective forms of organized entertainment available to them (other than, of course, the gangs themselves). There is no accurate data on religious groupings; however, there is one mosque and two small churches in Hanover Park. While contemporary crime statistics and concerns in relation to youth violence will be explored below, it is noteworthy that few of the streets are adequately lit at night, and the area is classed as a “red zone” in terms of emergency response—ambulance crews will not attend emergencies in the area unless accompanied by an armed police escort, which often delays response times.¹⁰ At the time of writing, the dominant gangs who claim territory in the community are the Mongrels, Hard Livings, and Sexy Boys.

8.2.2 Umgeni/KwaMashu—Durban

The second site, KwaMashu (the residential zone attached to Umgeni), is located in the city of Durban on the east coast of the country, some 1,600 km from Cape Town

⁹Statistics drawn from the last national census.

¹⁰See, for example, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/police-escort-for-medics-in-red-zones-7594245>

by road. Durban has traditionally played the role of one of the primary shipping ports for the country, and the closest port to the industrial heartland of Johannesburg (Maylam and Edwards 1996). Both as a result of historical development and economic necessity, moreover, it has developed in a relatively more inclusive fashion in comparison with Cape Town, displaying a more typical social configuration in which many of the poorer residential areas are nearer the city center so as to expedite labor utility. The “whites only” zones, such as Kloof and Berea, are located further away from the city and form part of a wider commuter belt (Turok 2014).

KwaMashu is as such a medium-sized “township”, constituted by many thousands of informal dwellings or “shacks”, with few sanitation services, tarred roads, recreation areas, or facilities. South African townships are often characterized by numerous public health and safety issues, derivative of the informal housing structures, population density, and lack of government services (Bobat et al 1998). Disease and infection rates of TB, cholera, and HIV/AIDS levels are consistently higher than in other urban settings. The majority of dwellings do not have formal access to electricity, resulting in frequent injury or death resulting from the use of illegal electricity connections or periodic fires that spread rapidly among the closely built shelters, usually caused by these connections or from the use of paraffin gas lamps/stoves that are used because the fuel source remains relatively cheap (Jürgens et al 2013).

The maintenance of law and order is difficult in “townships”, as the pathways between buildings are too narrow for vehicles to pass through, are rarely accurately mapped, and even in instances where they are, frequently change as buildings are erected and destroyed. The narrow walkways and lack of street lighting make escape from detention easy for individuals who commit crime, and the darkness of these conduits lend themselves to the commitment of opportunistic crime. In an attempt to overcome some of these concerns, the apartheid government installed overhead spotlighting on very high masts; however, the shadows cast by the overhead lighting is as problematic as the lack of street-level lighting in terms of aiding criminal activity. KwaMashu further typifies the population statistics found in “townships” across the country, with 98.8% of the resident population defined as “black”, 91.3% of the population is Zulu speaking, 77.5% of individuals never having been married, only some 40.7% have graduated from secondary school, and 67.8% have no access to the internet. In terms of socioeconomic statistics, 25.2% of the community is unemployed, and 38% of households are headed by females, with only 9.6% of households having access to a computer.¹¹

As such, the low risks associated with criminal activity and the lack of formal employment contribute to very high levels of crime, which will be discussed in the following section. Illegal drug use prevalence is very high, and distributors become powerful as a result of income derivative of this. Indeed, distributors employ numerous marketing strategies, both to encourage loyalty and to increase sales. Users’ primary sources of income include collecting cardboard or glass for recycling, the offering of unskilled services, begging, petty crime, transactional sex, and selling illegal substances. The illicit drug economy is dynamic, profit-driven, and yet also

¹¹ Statistics drawn from the last national census.

Table 8.2 Frequency of the codes, South Africa

Code	Sum
Neighborhood perception	88
Street Wisdom	76
Respect	92
Symbols	58
Toughness/Masculinity	23
Friends ^a	302
Enemy	24
Violence	95
Success	98
Family ^a	302
Technology	21
Police	49
Others	573
	88

^aFriends and family were coded together, because the interview partner often mentioned friends and family in a close connection. The number has been counted only once

regulated by market forces—it displays numerous similarities with the regulatory mechanisms that shape the formal economy (Howell et al. 2015). Users are active participants in this economy. Ironically, however, in terms of government-led developmental initiatives, KwaMashu has received far more resources and attention, and plays hosts to one of the largest government housing projects in the country. While many houses have been built, the community has not developed or been developed and remains an extremely impoverished, dangerous, and fragmented place.

In this context, young people have few opportunities, are often subject to violent crime, and may live in extremely impoverished households that lack the resources to provide an adequate developmental environment. With few resources and only a small number developing their skills and interests, the benefits of education are often reported as very distant (Adebayo 2016). The lack of legitimate sporting and cultural organizations further compounds the attractiveness of criminal enterprises, the use of illegal drugs, and the high consumption levels of alcohol. Violence, beyond the auspices of legitimate state enterprises, becomes the *de facto* tool by which to both defend oneself and define an identity, with its symbolic use becoming an important means by which to further bolster social position, access to resources, and a more comfortable life (*ibid*). As we show below and in the following chapter, the numeric overview of violence and violence-related concerns is reflected in the attitudes, beliefs, and understandings of the young men that were interviewed for this project.

As in the other countries, all interviews were transcribed and coded with MAXQDA 18. Table 8.2 shows the frequency of coding in the South African sample.

8.3 Contemporary Context, Criminality, and Youth Violence in South Africa

The transformation of South Africa from apartheid to a constitutional democracy was once commonly referred to as a “miracle” or “dream”. Such characterizations have become increasingly ironic (Alloggio and Thomas 2013), and the dissonance has grown between the promises of the Constitution and the lived realities of many of the country’s residents (Murray 2013). The “new” South African government has yet to fundamentally correct the political, economic, and societal injustices that defined the apartheid system (Ibid). Substantive freedoms, rights, and dignity remain inaccessible to many, especially those who still live in overcrowded, poorly serviced “townships” or urban slums. For these, the “dream” of democracy has largely been deferred (Howell and Shearing 2017).

A paradigmatic example of the failure of sustainable development, development without ownership, can be drawn from the country. With the fall of apartheid, housing was identified as one of the critical developmental needs by the national government. As such, the government undertook many massive public works projects, building over 1.1 million small houses in the country, many of which were not only constructed in urban areas, but became urban areas in their own right. A study in 2000 found, however, that only 30% complied with building regulations, and they were planned and built using designs that were very similar to those used by the apartheid regime, and when built were often not connected to basic services such as water and electricity. As the result of nontransparent outsourcing processes—known as “tendering” in the country—the government wasted many millions of Rands on the projects, the housing estates that were created were not in tune with the needs of the communities, and many have now fallen into disrepair. Indeed, many of the urban areas that were either extended or created by these projects now have high crime levels, high disease prevalence levels, high unemployment, and are victim to entrenched criminal networks. Rather than initiate development, many are now extremely dangerous and impoverished areas that further undermine the development of surrounding districts. In retrospect, the project’s failure was not only the result of a lack of research, local knowledge, and oversight. The project’s failure is also a failure of understanding—houses were built, many thousands at a time in some cases, but few communities developed. While houses were built, parks, community centers, infrastructural and transport services, places of worship, and police stations were not. The houses were often provided in a haphazard fashion, and the people who were moved into them were taken from other areas of the country, who knew nothing of the local dynamics or environments in which they were asked to live. As such, this example illustrates the central rule above—the development of communities, and not merely places of

residence, requires that local knowledge inform the processes and that community members take ownership of the projects.

It is in these communities that gangsterism and drug use are most prolific. Here, the state has been unable to provide the legitimate points of contact and services with which many disenfranchised youths might identify. The education system fails to provide a viable entrance to the legitimate economy and social support is vastly unequal to the demand for its services. Claims of “liberation” and “democracy” ring hollow in the face of endemic poverty and ongoing structural exclusion. In Mitchell’s Plain and Hanover Park, drug abuse and addiction, especially to “tik” (methamphetamine), have become rampant (Kapp 2008). The gangs and “tik” are intricately enmeshed—the drug’s production and distribution are a primary income source for the gangs, while the use thereof plays a role in increasing and maintaining allegiance (especially with regard to the very young). Children as young as nine have been targeted by the gangs as future members, with “tik” playing a prominent role in this recruitment process. Moreover, its distribution contributes to turf wars over economically viable territories.

8.4 Comparative Considerations and Concerns for the South African Context

A principle variant between the study sites—South Africa, Pakistan, and Germany—is that of language. Such variations exist not only between the country sites (inter-variation) but also within the study sites (intra-variation). While language is of course also a means of communication, expression, and the structure by which thoughts are narrated, it should be remembered that it is far more than an assemblage of signifiers. Each signifier is, fundamentally, an interpretation of the signified and therefore language has as variation a constitutive feature of its own structure. That the translation of the signified into that of signifier requires an act of interpretation necessarily embeds variation into the structure of language use itself. Such variations are of course quite obviously spoken to when one is “lost in interpretation”; however, such variation is far more impactful than this—if language is a primary means by which reality is articulated, then variations in the interpretations of the signifiers will present variations in the signified. In other words, if we all understand what each word means in slightly different ways, the things we associate with these words will all be understood a little differently. Drawing on a familiar European example, despite there being only one Statue of Liberty, American and French understandings—not to mention perceptions—of this physical object, encapsulated and inferred when the signifier is uttered, will often be quite different.

Such considerations are especially important in the South African context. In the first instance, this is because the country has eleven official languages. Second, these languages may both in form and function be quite different from one another. South African English and Afrikaans have as their roots West Germanic origins,

for example, while there are three primary branches of the Bantu language tree represented in the country. The Sotho–Tswana group (comprising Sesotho, Northern Sotho, and Tswana) is primarily spoken in the north of the country, the Nguni branch (comprising of Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, and Ndebele) primarily spoken in the east and south of the country, and the Tswa–Ronga group (comprising only Tsonga) spoken in the central regions. While dialects of these languages may find resonance with one another, they do contribute to a heterogeneous society, the result of which is that members of the different linguistic groups share quite different cosmologies. As a result (and in terms of the study), understandings of events, processes, and narratives can vary greatly, and these local differences need to be understood as far as possible from the perspective of the participants themselves. An immediate example that is of direct relevance to the study is that of the concept of an expert—*who* an expert is, *how* they should conduct themselves, and *what* social markers they should bear can differ between Afrikaans speakers and Zulu speakers, the former presupposing that an expert is defined by the formal context and by the markers of office that they may display, while the latter define an expert in relation to their tribal position, knowledge of customary law, and formal position in the tribal hierarchy.

Derivative of the above, another important consideration is that the majority of South African citizens are dual- or multilingual and that the assemblage of official languages is colloquially drawn upon in innumerable ways to create hybrid languages that may be unrecognizable to those outside of the local cohort. Three relevant examples of this are “Tsotsi taal”—a hybrid language primarily used by members of African gangs—the three dialects of the Number—the verb of which is to “sabela”—and Funagalo—a hybrid dialect first spoken by miners in order to communicate with one another in the workplace, but now spoken more broadly. These are unwritten languages, and passed to others only through verbal communication. There are no complete dictionaries for them, and they may change quite significantly between different groups of local speakers. However, they do contribute significantly to speakers’ understandings of the world and their place in it, and therefore the variances must be taken seriously in understanding how they construct and position different norms in relation to violence.

8.5 Reflection About the South African Context

As has been shown in numerous, diverse fields, there is an increasing dissonance between the promises of the extremely inclusive Constitution and the lived realities of many of the country’s citizens (Murray 2013). This dissonance is felt in a number of ways—the continuing (and indeed, increasing) income disparities between different groups and citizens, the increasing differences in how the state interacts with diverse citizens, and the continuing political disenfranchisement of numerous groups in the country, to name but three. While many of these problems have their roots in apartheid, the “new” South African government has increasingly shown itself unable to initiate and sustain substantive changes to the political, economic, and societal

differences that defined the apartheid system (Alloggio and Thomas 2013). Substantive freedom, a right to dignity, and a right to the freedom of movement are not possible if one is unemployed and living in what the international community classifies as “extreme poverty.” Thus, while the “dream” of democracy was heralded by the numerous procedural changes which structurally delineated the “new” South Africa from the old, for an increasing number of the country’s citizens, who still live in overcrowded, poorly serviced “townships” or urban slums, there has been little substantive change. Indeed, with reference to the “dream” of democracy, Sharlene Swartz has argued that for many of South Africa’s youth, it is now a “dream deferred” (Swartz et al. 2013).

Finally, before engaging with the data, a brief but important note of caution should be added. The use of statistical and numeric data, especially when encompassing entities as large as cities, often has the effect of decontextualizing the lives of the people that make up those numbers. While the concept of development can be articulated through many lenses—economic growth, education rates, and access to healthcare, for instance—these data can never be divorced from an important albeit often implicit normative concept, that of betterment. In the process of quantifying human life, it should never be forgotten that developmental policy frameworks, strategies, and toolkits should always be attentive to the manner in which they describe and understand the people they are intended to help. Simply pathologizing entire communities as “victims” or, with regard to security concerns, “innately” criminal, belies the complexity of the lives that make up these systems. Moreover, that policy or strategy may produce positive numeric indicators may not necessarily translate into the improvement of resident’s environments in real terms. In short, to do justice to the normative impulses informing the concept of development requires that the complexity of the relationships and interactions that define peoples’ lives are taken seriously. To not do so is to not only prioritize the politics of development over the betterment of lives but to reduce individuals to mere points for measurement. Forethought, care, and attention, above all else, is required for development to be reflected in substantive changes in individuals’ lives, rather than simply procedural changes to the statistical models used in their quantification. Such development, as articulated by the participants themselves, will be discussed in the comparative chapter.

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