



A Poisoned Sense of Place: Characterising Spatial Politics in a City: The Case of Cape Town's Property-Owning Democracy

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Abstract

South Africa is undergoing a rapid decline in social and political cohesion at various scales. This paper explores Cape Town's experience of socio-territorial messages and identities deployed by the City administration and the leading party, the Democratic Alliance. I focus on relational constructions of the subjectivity of the 'ratepayer' and the deserving Capetonian as constructed in the City and the DA's discourse and policy measures in juxtaposition to 'street people' and other supposedly deviant urban subjects and how, as such, the wilful ignorance of the first remains both unchallenged and in service of an exclusionary and unjust spatial order.

Keywords Urban citizenship · Municipal policy messages · Democratic Alliance · Middle-class ratepayers · Property-owning democracy · Local patriotism · Politics of place

Introduction

Ideas and messages about “roots, belonging and homeland can all too easily be used as a justification for exclusion while poisoning citizens. This lends itself to ... *a poisoned sense of place*” (Relph, 1997, my italics).

This paper aims to understand how the local state and the Democratic Alliance (DA) shape the subjectivity of the 'ratepayer', middle-class homeowner and the “deserving” Capetonian in public discourse, policy statements and implementation measures often in juxtaposition to 'street people' and other supposedly deviant urban subjects. I also probe the wilful ignorance and historical amnesia which is unchallenged and serves an exclusionary and unjust spatial order. While undoubtedly many

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forces promote this kind of complex identity politics, the focus here is on the state and parties. Since the mid-2000 the Democratic Alliance (DA) has been the majority political party in Cape Town (CT), a deeply divided city (Turok et al., 2021) with close to 4 million people where the lowest income groups live on the margins of the city and the high-income groups live in the now partially deracialised “first-world” city (Olver, 2019; Turok et al., 2021). It has been in power since 2006 with Helen Zille, former Mayor and DA leader as its controversial leading public figure. The DA’s successes can be linked to Cape Town’s property value which increased by 141% since 2010 – far more than other metros. Zille, in an interview, also suggested, “We already provide *generous* free basic services in Cape Town. And the *only* reason we can do this is because we have a middle class who can subsidise the poor. ... Of course, we cannot continue raising rates. But fortunately, most people from the middle class realise that we have to give services to the poor” (in Stephanie Nieuwoudt, 2009). In 2022, when more than 260 homes were destroyed in a fire in Langa township¹ leaving more than 750 Black residents displaced, Zille pronounced: “To be poor in Langa in CT is a hundred, probably a thousand times better than to be poor in many of the townships of the rest of the country”.² The generous ‘ratepayer’, is not only well organised but as this paper argues, is also projected as a ‘rational’ DA voter able to appreciate hard facts about better service delivery, economic growth, law and order and clean finances. The poor, on the other hand, it is held, need to appreciate what they get in CT.

The question addressed by this paper is: do the persistent ideas and messages make for a poisoned city? Do these ‘local patriotic’ messages create and encourage certain forms of mobilisation, dispositions and conduct? To what extent does this represent what Mills (1997: 18) describes as the “epistemology of ignorance” among DA supporters, which serves “to preserve a sense of self as decent in the face of privileges dependent upon obvious injustices against Black others” (Gibbons, 2018: 732). How might it make CT a “poisoned place” for the majority of citizens and workers whose role is rendered invisible or at best secondary? What does this mean for a common inclusive society?

This paper focuses on how the Cape Town local state is a relatively successful enabler of urban class elitism in part by constructing a heroic, caring middle-class ratepayer in policy messages. The “indigent” and workers, who produce and maintain the city and the lifestyles of the wealthy, are depicted as “dependents, refugees”, and second-class others. This question of policy messages has been neglected in SA although there is substantial literature on urban segregation, municipal services and “indigency”, public participation, neighbourhood watch movements, city improvement districts, crime, and inequality (Ruiters, 2018; Miraftab, 2007; Pieterse, 2009; Turok et al., 2021). The “forward feed effects” concept is mobilised here to explore the figure of the heroic voter and ratepayer presented in policy as the ideal middle-class citizen. Here, “feeding forward” refers to positive returns that policy design

¹ More than 500 people have died in CT shack fires in three years since 2015 (Cape Times, 2018).

² (<https://www.702.co.za/articles/443330/to-be-poor-in-langa-is-better-than-to-be-poor-in-many-sa-townships-helen-zille>).

generates to reinforce existing policy dynamics and treatments. I stress that policies frame constituents' subjectivities (or so-called "feed-forward" effects) and also help build electoral success (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The paper offers an example of how private property and scale articulate in a complex way with historical peculiarities of Cape Town within the context of democratic electoralism.

To limit bias, I looked at a sample of messages over a long period (2007–2022) from all three DA mayors since 2007. These statements gained widespread coverage around certain "focusing events" such as a budget speech, or a "land invasion", mass protest or avoidable disasters such as mass shack fires.³ I reviewed strategic plans, and relevant policy-related press releases/statements (available on the CCT website).

Messages and Feed-Forward Effects

Messaging's importance lies in "feed-forward effects" on the self-understanding and empowering or disempowering of "target" populations (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Schneider and Ingram (1993: 334), point out that policies send messages about targets "... which citizens are deserving and undeserving... different target populations receive quite different messages". The social construction of policy problems concerns the politics around positive and negative connotations associated with "target" populations. Dependents have limited political power and are disempowered. Newman similarly argues that policy framing and messages are understood here as a "field of power" in which government officials and parties not only assert hegemony by representing issues and classes of people in specific narratives and promoting particular definitions of 'truth' (Newman, 2004) but also empower some selected groups.

The state and its messages play an active role in shaping civil society and the "urban imaginary" (Makhubu & Ruiters, 2020). The social constructions of different citizens matter for a city's public culture and democracy. This echoes the Gramscian notion that every hegemonic relation is necessarily an educational and normalizing one. It involves moral, intellectual leadership and prestige.

Moreover, "people in policies are constructed in specific ways as taxpayers, workers, consumers, and welfare-dependents" (Ong et al., 1996: 738). Neoliberal governance celebrates the citizen as a bargain-hunting entrepreneur and profit-maximising property owner, acting out of self-interest and responsive to the market. Thus, Clarke (2004: 31) argues neoliberalism, "has disintegrated conceptions of the public as a collective identity, attempting to substitute individualised and *economised identities* as taxpayers and consumers". The promotion of local patriotism or militant particularism among ratepayers requires a network between civil society and the local state (councillors, estate agents, newspapers, lawyers and security companies). 'For the privileged "community" of fragmented cities like Cape Town success often means securing and enhancing privileges already gained. For the underprivileged,

³ Although Zille was not the mayor after 2009, she has influenced the City as DA party leader and key spokesperson for whiteness and class elitism (so statements she made after 2009 were included in the study).

it all too often means ‘controlling their own slum.’ (Harvey, 2000: 238). Neoliberal messages, however, do not always have to be crudely anti-poor, if they are to gain wider respectability and traction. And they work in tandem with other moments of the social process such as control over material and repressive power.

DA and City Ratepayer-Centric Positive Messages in a Property-Owning World-Class City and Democracy

In this section, we first present the legal and economic context of the rate-payer in national laws; then the City of Cape Town’s administrative policy messages and finally the DA’s political-rhetorical construction of the “rational, heroic ratepayer/voter”.

Municipalities in democratic South Africa (SA) were set up to rely on property rates. Municipal property rates are set and collected locally by local authorities. In Cape Town (CT) poor ratepayers living in homes valued less than R300 000 are exempt from paying rates. “Trading services” (water etc.) however, are charged based on usage. The working-class homeowner or tenant in Cape Town pays a much higher portion of income for municipal services—rates, water and lights than wealthy homeowners (SACN, 2022). In CT there are special ratings areas or city improvement districts (CIDs). “CIDs are selected zones or districts within the city where property owners pay additional fees to access superior services from the municipality concerning policing, cleaning, and marketing. ... CIDs in Cape Town business district or CBD, in particular, has brought wealth almost overnight to a few real estate capitalists holding property in almost the same historic quarters of the town” (Miraftab, 2012). In 2018, Cape Town *reduced its cent-in-the-rand by 17.4%*, but property rates revenues still increased by 13% (SACN, 2022) because the property market has boomed. In 2021, CT obtained 24% of its revenue from property rates and since 2016 has had an average annual increase in rates of 6.1%—lower than all other major cities and close to the inflation rate (SACN, 2022). CT like other municipalities also receives national government grants to pay amongst others, for free services for “indigent households” – an amount of R2,8 billion in 2022 (SACN, 2022).⁴

Valued at R1.229 trillion as of June 2021, Cape Town’s residential property market is the largest of the eight metros by value. This translates into around R11 billion in rates revenue (trading services bring in about R20 billion). By 2018, seven of the ten richest suburbs in South Africa located were in CT.⁵ This property value city reflects McDonald’s contention that CT’s ambition to be a “world-class city” inevitably means tactically preserving its white feel and building a transnational (largely

⁴ SACN notes that “The adequacy of the LGES is the subject of much debate, yet allocations to the cities grew rapidly between 2016/17 and 2020/21, well above inflation and other city revenue sources, and despite a difficult national economic environment”. (2022: 28).

⁵ Unjust tariffs have animated groups like Stop-CT, DEAR CT and Gatvol CT.

Number of residential properties by market segment

City of Cape Town, 2021

NB: 2021 figures are as at 30 June 2021.

Market Segment
 ■ Under R300 000
 ■ R300 000 to R600 000
 ■ R600 000 to R900 000
 ■ R900 000 to R1.2m
 ■ Over R1.2m

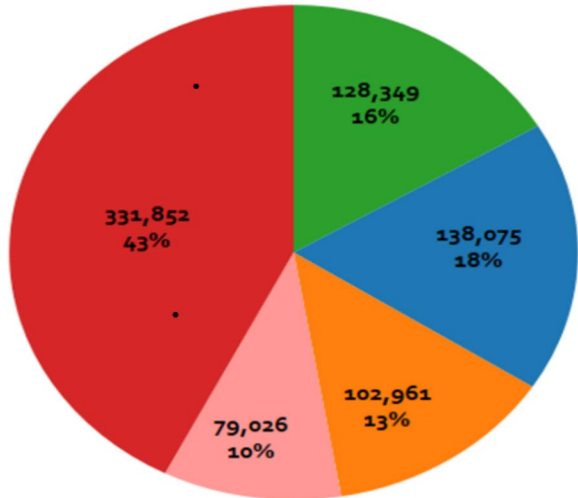


Fig. 1 Cape Town residential properties by market segment. Source: Centre for affordable housing <https://housingfinanceafrica.org/app/uploads/2020/10/Cape-Town-Property-Report-2020.pdf>

white) elite network (2008: 270). It is important to recognise the various segments within the ratepayer group as depicted in the figure below. Thus, 16% of properties were valued under R300 000 and 41% were in the affordable segment (R300 000—R600 000) and were government-subsidised (Fig. 1).

As is evident from the figure, the upper-middle-class homeowners, whose properties exceed R1,2 million, make up 43%.

Cape Town had the lowest rates for both commercial and residential properties in 2023. The mayor in 2023 noted: “I would like to take this opportunity to thank our ratepayers who enable us to subsidise services for the poor and vulnerable of our city. We are working together to create a shared future for all – regardless of race or economic background. Here in Cape Town residents can feel assured that we are delivering and caring for the poor, building hope for the future, and doing it while ensuring fairness and respect for ratepayers,” (Mayor Hill-Lewis, <https://www.da.org.za/2023/04/cape-town-tables-by-far-the-largest-infrastructure-budget-of-all-metros>).

High-level messages specifically target these “heroic” ratepayers who supposedly make the city great. Consider a very similar rhetorical construction from 2009. Soon after being declared world mayor, Helen Zille (2009) wrote,

During the recent election campaign, ANC activists spread many lies ... They consistently described the DA and Cape Town as "racist". If Cape Town is racist, why are people moving to the City in such significant numbers? And once here, why are most of them so keen to stay? The answer is

that they are making a *perfectly rational and intelligent decision* about what is best for them and their families. Cape Town offers them better services, higher subsidies, better education and job opportunities than they would ever get in the ANC-controlled Eastern Cape. *Middle-class ratepayers* of the City pay a lot to ensure *more free services* for Cape Town's poor than any other City.

The City plays on its reputation for better administration than most cities in SA and can credibly claim to deliver “better” services on average than other ANC-controlled cities where the infrastructural and governance collapse is more advanced (Turok et al., 2021).

However, ratepayers/homeowners want to pay as little as possible and also want to increase the value of their assets and preserve pleasant neighbourhoods, limit crime, noise, keep the poor out, and ensure higher rentals in cases where they are landlords or Air B & B. Ratepayers are neither “generous” nor magnanimous but form associations and use lawyers to defend their interests. As Oelofse and Dodson (1997: 98) put it,

The ratepayers formed residents associations aimed at protecting their own interests and what they perceived as the special nature of a locality, which to many meant the exclusion of squatters from the area (often expressed in terms of conserving the natural environment or ‘maintaining standards’.

The Camp Bay Ratepayers Association, for example, which also represents a very wealthy part of Cape Town, listed as one of its major achievements that it “assisted in obtaining *large* rates repayments for CBRRA members from excessive rate assessments.” (CBRRA website ND).

The City seemingly contradicted itself by boasting that ratepayers in CT pay the lowest rate yet are “generous”. In this context, it is also remarkable that the city allocates less than 1% of its operating budget to free basic services (see 2022/2023 Budget). At the end of April 2021, this was a mere 8,400 households. The city applies a “blanket approach” to free basic services in other words it does not require residents to register as indigents as is the case with formal areas. In several informal settlements, only “emergency services are provided. Many informal settlements are also unrecognised (by the City) and therefore not provided with any basic services. The City spent R106 million on free basic electricity (60 Kwh or units) for the “poor” (over a million people) but the total electricity revenue for 2022 was R13,895 billion (CTC Budget 2022: 79). The costs for the indigent support such as free electricity are financed by National Government through the local government Equitable Share.

The DA's vision of CT and its colonial-racist paternalism also insists on “forgetting, getting over, moving on”. (Goldberg, 2009). In effect, it seeks to bury race. “Burying race” as Enck-Wanzer puts it, “becomes the modus operandi of contemporary public discourse” (2011: 25). The DA denies widespread structural racism in

all its institutions limiting it to *incidents* of prejudice and *intentional* action by a few ignorant “bad apples” (CCT 2017, IDP: 121).⁶

The DA and the City openly demonise social movements that criticize it. The Social Justice Coalition (SJC) was labelled by one of the leading conservatives in the DA, Councillor JP Smith as “splendidly funded, but politically devious” (<https://sjc.org.za/posts/press-statement-the-city-of-cape-town-has-no-cctv-master-plan>). Many other movements have been similarly demonised (Total Shutdown, STOP CoCT, Dear CT, Gatvol CT, Ndifuna Ukwazi and the Housing Assembly).

According to the (SJC) leader the City ignored them:

(In 2015), with assistance from the SJC, 502 residents from Khayelitsha, mostly from informal settlements, made submissions on the 2015-16 draft budget. The City had never had so many budget submissions. The previous year there were 38, and 23 of them were from the (mostly white) public. In fact, since 2007 there hadn’t been more than 57 submissions. (Notywala, 2016).

Activists have argued that “spatial apartheid in CT, and an institutional culture designed to “keep poor people out” is more apparent now than it was before 1994” (https://www.groundup.org.za/article/expropriate-suburbs-say-activists_2089/).

Consider the DA leader, James Selfe’s reasoning. Selfe generalises using the term “Black voter”: “If you polled Black voters, you would find that land itself is not the issue. ... the real need of Black voters is skills and jobs” (cited in News24, 12 March 2018). This exemplifies what Rosaldo (1994: 405) defines as a “culturally conditioned tendency to make authoritative pronouncements... (it) would be like hearing somebody say that he or she felt thirsty and then trying to convince him or her that they were mistaken”.

Elevated Ratepayers Associations, Community Policing and Neighbourhood Watch

Homeownership has been seen as an important right and aspiration with advocates suggesting it provides stability, and can change our view of the world. It is praised for giving citizens a stake in society and making them more active participants in the democratic process. Conservatives suggest ownership can deepen self-respect and respectability in the eyes of others. Ratepayers’ organisations in this context, operate within various defined communities of property owners in South Africa: these range from semi-enclosed neighbourhoods, to enclosed security villages. The semi-enclosed residential area has mobile patrols often using a combination of private security and civic volunteers mobilised in Neighbourhood Watch (NW) groups linked through cellphone networks such as WhatsApp. The

⁶ The 2019 DA Commission into its poor performance in 2019 elections (Coetzee et al., 2020: NP) noted that “every person is an individual ... anyone who sees themselves primarily as a representative of a group should not feel at home in the DA”.

“enclosed” areas refers to existing neighbourhoods that have controlled access through gates or booms across existing roads. The are more expensive option is gated security village: physically walled, electric fenced, with a security gate with private security guards.

The neighbourhood watch requires active citizens working as a team usually linked to the Community Policing Forum (CPF). Possibly one of the biggest unrecognised social movements in South Africa, the CPF operates on a commitment basis. This is not a retreat from public life, but the collective defence of private interests often based on keeping “blacks out”. As the Newsletter for Plumstead NW implored,

Our number of members is growing steadily, but we need to get ALL the residents on board in the vast area that we cover. We ALL need to stand together in the fight against crime. Please speak to your neighbour and ask them to join the watch if they are not a member. If you are unable to patrol then please consider assisting a section with their administrative work.

The objectives of CPFs are to work with the police to improve community safety joint problem identification and problem-solving. Chairman of the Tamboerskloof Neighbourhood Watch noted: “The biggest single investment you will ever make is property. Make sure that it is in a good place.” (Schuermans & Spocter, 2016). The Newlands Residents’ Association (NRA) “plays a proactive role in ensuring that the character and history of this special suburb are retained. The NRA represents Newlands and Westerford residents at regular **meetings** with the SAPS, GSCID and ADT to monitor crime trends and ensure optimum service delivery” (<http://newlandsresidents.org.za/>). The Bergvliet Meadowlands Ratepayers have noted, “In Cape Town we are fortunate to have a municipality that is functional. ... this is not the case in many other municipalities in South Africa” (<https://www.bmra.co.za>). The Camps Bay Ratepayers and Residents Association note that they are “working together to retain the unique character of Camps Bay”.

As can be seen from the quotes, ratepayers’ social movements co-ordinate crime prevention, preserve the historic “character” of a suburb as well as build loyalty and appreciation for the competency of City administration. Pieterse (2009) noted “Typically, these organisations have no shortage of access to legal expertise In other words, Nimbyism is ... always backed-up with a litigious disposition”. The poor, on the other hand, generally resort to insurgent protest, land invasions, blocking roads, throwing poo etc.

CT’s Voting Geography: Class, Race and “Ratepayers”

Cape Town’s historic core comprised White group areas under apartheid where only Whites could buy property. This included areas with above-average property prices (such as Newlands, Rondebosch, Camps Bay, Claremont, Pinelands, Vredehoek and Constantia) far from the working-class Cape Flats (Athlone, Hanover Park, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha). Turok et al. (2021) have observed that “a steep

property price gradient inhibits most people's ability to move into more desirable areas". Desirable areas are coded as safe, with private schools and a great investment. There appears to be a clear geographical pattern of overlapping race and class divides which in turn is reflected in what Gibbons (2016: 863) calls the "articulations of market coded ideologies and geography, connecting circuits of real estate capital to common sense and racialised constructions of 'community'".

The DA as the major opposition to the ANC believes that it "stands alone in building a united South Africa where moderate, liberal voters have a future where they can collectively oppose radical politics" (Moakes, 2019). The DA has absorbed a large group of the National Party (the former ruling party and architects of Apartheid) as its voter support and leadership. Many "Coloureds" believe they have "a prior claim to the Western Cape" as their "homeland" (Giliomee, 1994: 65). Since the mid-2000s, DA has only garnered around 5% of the national Black African vote (Southern and Southall 2019) and even *less* in CT's Black townships.

Black Africans in Cape Town have been rendered an electoral minority and there is a widespread fear that they are deliberately coming to Cape Town to block the DA (Oelofse & Dodson, 1997).⁷ Table 1 shows a divided city with voting polarised around language and "race". In Gugulethu, for example, 81% voted ANC, whereas Mitchells Plain (which is 94% Coloured) voted 87% for the DA. Low population density is an indirect proxy for class. Constantia, which has large properties, gated estates, forests and wine farms has 563 persons per km² compared to Khayelitsha's ward 89 with 28 000 persons.

Khayelitsha's Ward 89 has an astounding 86% of its people living in shacks and is 93% Xhosa-speaking, with 61% of residents born in the Eastern Cape (EC). Here 88% voted for the ANC. Compare this to Constantia, one of the city's wealthiest racially mixed suburbs which rewarded the DA with 88%. The population density in Khayelitsha is 50 times more than in racially mixed (non-racial) Constantia. In the 2019 national elections in Ward 89, the ANC received 80.6% of the vote losing some votes to the EFF; in Ward 41 in Khayelitsha, the ANC received 79.3%. The DA, by contrast, received only 2.1% in Ward 89 and 3.3% in Ward 41 (RSA, 2019). The overlaps between race and class are not the same across these wards. Defence of "non-racial" class interests, understood as real estate capital, becomes the binding force that drives a sense of community in enclave areas like Constantia. Khayelitsha on the other hand is almost entirely mono-racial and Black and working class with a small middle-class stratum – hence a different configuration and articulation of race and class.

However, DA messages and discourses on race, economy and identity are thoroughly contradictory. The DA stridently claims that racism in CT is a 'myth' (Zille, 2009). It is seen as an "open" society and is contrasted with the ANC's "crony" closed society of affirmative action for designated groups (<https://www.da.org.za/>

⁷ Wilmot James (1996), who later became a DA leader, asks "how can the individual interests of distinct racial or ethnic communities be served without endangering the broader enterprise of creating and managing national unity ... in the context of heightened racial tensions between Coloured and Black South Africans who often feel that they are competing for the same scarce resources".

Table 1 Selected wards in historical group areas in CT: 2014 national elections

Ward number	% Dominant group and language	% Born in Western Cape (WC) / Eastern Cape (EC)	Pop. density per sq km	% households in shacks	% vote for ANC	% vote for DA
Gugulethu, Ward 41	African 98, Xhosa 85	WC 84, EC 10	12,238	16	81	5
Khayelitsha, Ward 89	African 99, Xhosa 93	WC 34, EC 61	28,937	86	88	1
Mitchell's Plain, Ward 79	Coloured 94, Afrikaans 62	WC 92	13,387	4	6	87
Grassy Park, Ward 65	Coloured 90, English 61	WC 95	7,945	1,8	6	86
Constantia, Ward 62	White 63, English 72	WC 49, Gauteng 10, EC 7	563	0,3	6	88
Camps Bay, Ward 54	White 66, English 62	WC 36, Gauteng 14, EC 6	1,876	0	6	88

Sources: IEC, Wazimaps (undated, accessed October 2022; RSA, Census, 2011)

[government/city-of-cape-town](#)). The party militantly opposes a living wage and “red tape” for investors, and typically refers to citizens in economic and consumerist terms (investors, ratepayers, indigents, non-paying consumers). Moreover, the DA claims that its good electoral performance proves that its messages are reaching voters. Approximately 40% of Zille’s speeches in 2011 mentioned the DA’s proven track record in delivery and of the 66 DA releases around the 2011 local election period, 41% were about the alleged cronyism of the ANC (Dhawraj, 2013). A crucial move is denying the weight of the past and so it argues that the ANC uses.

‘identity’ politics, which makes it easier to whip up grievances and target scapegoats. The only thing that is currently holding the fragile and fractured governing alliance together in South Africa, is their joint focus on race and history. (Helen Zille, 2015 Mexico address to Liberal International)

In a DA pamphlet, headed ‘The ANC wants to stop you from getting a job’, the DA also accused the “racist” ANC of trying to “prevent thousands of *Coloured people* in the Western Cape from getting jobs’ (sic, DA 2014). This spin was repeated by Patricia de Lille, Zille’s successor: “the CoCT is non-racial, unlike the ANC ... who seemingly only have the race card left to play” (cited in Groundup 2014).

The DA itself uses liberal economic identities and other racial codes in its propaganda. The DA citizen is framed in terms of economic productivity and denying class antagonisms. At a May Day mass rally in 2012, Zille urged workers to make peace with their bosses,

Trade unions ... are wrong to see managers as their ‘class enemy’. This is an outdated model and belongs to the 1950s. Countries with growing economies and growing employment have outgrown this ‘zero-sum’ model where one side’s gain is the other side’s loss. (Zille, 2012)

Table 2 shows that DA made electoral gains up to 2016 but this was reversed in 2021 when it lost almost a third of the absolute voter number (600 000 DA voters from 2016 -2021). The absolute number of voters fell revealing possible overall voter fatigue. The ANC voter base showed the most dramatic disaffection in 2021 as it received close to half the absolute number it obtained in 2016.

Table 2 Absolute numbers of votes and percentages of overall votes for three main parties: Local Government Elections: Cape Town, 2011 -2021

Election year	2011 (%)	2016 (%)	2021 (%)
DA	1,357,949 (60,92)	1,664,514 (66,61)	1,064,657 (58,33)
ANC	731,247 (32,8)	608,867 (24,36)	338,589 (18,6)
EFF	NA (did not stand)	79,114 (3,17)	75,109 (4,13%)

Source IEC (<https://results.elections.org.za/dashboards/lge/>, accessed 3rd April 2022)

Ratepayers, power, revanchism, and the City's framing of relations with other negatively marked groups

In wealthy areas, “vagrants” (also called “street people”) are a major talking and action point among ratepayers (Ballard, 2005). In Sea Point and Table View ratepayers meetings, vagrants are a regular agenda item.

They are still a problem and they are also setting up home in Seal Road. Displaced People's unit needs to come in and action a clean up. Outside Ocean Basket is a hot spot for car guards and drug pushing. The yellow/orange vests are easily available to them, one should take photo's of illegal car guards and email them (Table View CPF, 2013).

The Table View CPF in a “revanchist” turn suggested, “Maybe initiate an operation where we inform the authorities that we will be *loading up* to 20/25 vagrants on a bus, get them booked. While this is happening go through to their “nests” and clear out and throw out all, so by the time they back in the area there will be nothing there” (Table View CPF, 2013).

The City of Cape Town has a “Displaced Peoples Unit” (DPU) that sees “street people” as “homeless, and (who) live in the open or in derelict structures on Council land or in the public domain”. Council noted that it has no power to intervene on private land. The Unit warned that “Turning a blind eye merely exacerbates the problem. It therefore called for “zero tolerance”. The DPU ostensibly received a “flood” of complaints from ratepayers about vagrants (Interview with JP Smith, Radio Cape Talk, 2018).⁸ In the last quarter of 2018, some 2126 complaints were received about “homeless people” (CTC, 2020). The city website draws a distinction between crime and vagrancy which have to be reported to different authorities:

How do I report vagrants or suspicious people loitering in a park?

If criminal activity is suspected and/or by-laws broken, then they should be reported to the local Metro Police unit. *Obvious vagrancy* with no criminal intent should be reported to the People's Displacement Unit. (CoCT, 2018)

The term ‘obvious vagrancy’ plays to blatant class racism, and Black abjection (Ruiters, 2021). Abject here refers to a “guttural and aversive emotion, associated with sickening feelings of revulsion, loathing, or nausea. ... Disgust is (also) ‘saturated with socially stigmatizing meanings and values’” (Tyler, 2013: 20).

Numbering about 7000 in 2014, the city's ‘homeless’ poor (Cape Times, 2015) has been framed variously by the CoCT as ‘displaced people’, foreign migrants, street people and even the ‘winter poor’. In 2013/14 the Displaced People's Programme “conducted 119 joint operations in partnership with City Law Enforcement (Metro Police) to offer (sic) social services to people who have migrated onto the city's streets” (CoCT, 2014: 70). In 2014, the Central City Improvement District (CCID) campaigned for ‘Give Responsibly’ (renamed ‘*Show you Care*’) by the City

⁸ <http://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/331517/city-of-ct-flooded-with-complaints-about-homeless-people-jp-smith> (accessed 23 April 2019).

and the CCID to encourage the public to give to the poor through charitable organisations (CoCT, 2014). ‘Give Responsibly’ stickers are posted all over the City CBD in public places and restaurants. City tourists and locals must not give money to ‘street people’, says the City, as this would worsen the problem. To be a “responsible ratepayer” one must not encourage begging. Moreover, since 2018, the City has been confiscating the personal property of the homeless and fining them (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-12-13-high-court-judge-earmarks-homeless-vs-city-of-cape-town-case-as-a-constitutional-issue/>).

People labelled as ‘street people’ suggest that returning “home” is not an option since they would have to join township gangs. “It’s better for me. When I stay there I (end up) joining the gangsters” (Cape Argus, 2013). The counter-narratives, rights and “logic” of the “homeless” are suppressed by the City while ‘good’ ratepayers are encouraged to report “vagrants”. Racism is thus tacitly embedded in policy and encouraged much like the USA where police responses are systematically racially biased.

The ways the city deals with homeless people cynically exemplifies its overall approach which condones militant bourgeois whiteness⁹ and a social cleansing approach to invisibilizing the poor in the city. The CCID, for example, has powers to contract security companies and welfare NGOs to manage ‘vagrants’ who are ‘registered’ in a database. Vagrants might be a few, but their mere presence is experienced as an affront to “decent people” and investors. The elite (both the ANC and DA) see the expulsion of the working-class from the city centre (gentrification) as necessary for being a successful world city (Visser & Kotze, 2008). Hence the alarming paradox that structurally excluding the poor is presented as “rational” economics in South Africa although this often hides a deep class-ist racial animus. The local state encourages and seeks the forced removal of the poor – an eerie throwback to apartheid’s forced removals and “native administration” (Evans, 1997).

These messages about “vagrants” and saving the City speak to a wider issue: the business/property class which started reclaiming the City in the early 2000s under the ANC’s rule by identifying ‘street people/children’ as a public ‘menace’ likened to ‘vermin’ and invoking a racial disgust or abjection. Already, when CT was run by the African National Congress (ANC) in the mid-1990s the mayor, Nomandla Mfeketo aligned with a power block of City managers, politicians, rich property owners and bankers to “save” CT from “going the way of Johannesburg” and “descending into a morass of crime and grime” social decay and capital flight. They initiated and designed the CCID in 2000, a private–public partnership to provide “safety and cleanliness” and make CT “a pleasant urban environment” to live and work in. Colin Bird, a founding member of the CT Partnership (CTP) described the “crime and grime” in the city before the CCID in the following abject way: “The place was filthy, shops were in a state of depression, rentals were crashing and you could park anywhere. Certainly, there was no thought of a sidewalk restaurant in town” (CT Partnership, 2009: 8). The CCID according to Miraftab (2007), operates as a private quasi-government.

⁹ Following Goldberg (2009), whiteness does not require the absolute exclusion of all blacks.

Ratepayers, land invasions and the Eastern Cape factor

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of illegal land invasions and attempted invasions, ... including the senseless destruction of City infrastructure and damage to private property. (Mayor Dan Plato. <https://www.capetown.gov.za/Media-and-news/Law%20Enforcement%20bolsters%20its%20Anti-Land%20Invasion%20Unit>)

From the beginning of October to the end of December 2018 (in only 3 months), the CT local authority responded to 148 protests (CTC, 2020). Khayelitsha has since the late 2000s become the epicentre of the local protest. The City has a special Anti-Land Invasion Unit and hotline to report “invasions”. “The Anti-Land Invasion Unit is one of our largest units and also the busiest with communities *grabbing land indiscriminately*” (CTC, 2020: 238). Before Plato’s warning, Patricia de Lille, the mayor in 2014, argued that “invasions” were not motivated by need. CT has.

... been vindicated by the Supreme Court of Appeal and the Constitutional Court that its actions in protecting private property from land invaders is compliant with its constitutional obligations ... these invasions must be considered part of a *politically motivated* campaign to make the city ungovernable. (CoCT, 2014)

Township protests are dismissed as politically motivated to weaken the DA. The City officials have repeatedly warned against invasions and illegal settlements. Informal settlements it is argued are also located on illegal land usually environmentally hazardous areas and therefore cannot have formal services (Sonnenberg, 2016). The first DA mayor noted that informal areas as inherently difficult: “Many informal settlements are so densely populated that it is impossible to provide services without moving people out. This lengthy and complex process often leads to community conflict” (Zille, 2008).

Complementing the figure of the “land invader” is the “deviant” figure of the recent Eastern Cape “rural “immigrant, portrayed as a “refugee”, or queue jumper. The Eastern Cape Province is also a recurring theme in what might be termed CT’s poisoned politics of place meant to reassure ratepayers. This Eastern Cape group (Xhosa speakers) is seen as irrationally supporting “identity politics” (the ANC) and “racial nationalism” by persistently voting ANC or EFF.

In 2008, Zille identified the shack settlements as her main challenge but the way she constructs it is notable:

Fourteen years ago, in 1994, there were 28,000 shacks in CT. In 2006, when we came into office, we ... identified 105,000 shacks... CT currently has 460,000 families on a waiting list for state housing, many of whom are *long-standing* CT residents who have been on the waiting list for over 20 years... *poor rural dwellers*, particularly from the Eastern Cape, move here in search of economic opportunities. (Zille, 2008, my italics).

Zille suggests that long-standing applicants on the CT housing waiting list are being compromised by many new arrivals from the Eastern Cape rather than seeing it as in part a historical problem linked to pass laws and also partly the underutilised housing stock in the city's rich, low-density residential areas. She reinforces the idea that the Western Cape in the "natural home" of Coloureds.¹⁰ Zille's reference to *long-standing* residents alongside *poor rural dwellers* from the Eastern Cape plays to a toxic politics of place designed to stoke "Coloured" fears and exploit historical differences between Black African workers and Coloured workers. Zille used the term 'refugee' (Mail & Guardian, 2012c) to refer to the influx of Eastern Cape "poor rural" people – a term many in her party thought she ought to retract. The anti-Eastern Cape sentiment was again repeated by Dan Plato, Mayor of CT, in February 2019 (News24, 2019). Kramer argues that poor Africans in CT have been depicted by the City as unwanted troublemakers 'flocking' into informal settlements (see Kramer, 2015). Although many African Blacks have lived here for a generation and more, they still feel like an oppressed group of strangers – an unwelcomed minority.

The "coastal" drift of wealthy whites out of Gauteng to CT, however, does not earn the stigma attached to mainly Black EC-WC migration because these are "investors" that add to the rates base. According to Pam Golding Properties, "up to 40% of the buyers on the CT Atlantic Seaboard in the high selling season are from Gauteng" (3 July 2015, <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/568/130916.html>). Zille's logic and craft as a politician is notable and show how the articulation between territory, fear, identity, and imagination in the Western Cape and its surrounding provinces can be manipulated.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that middle-class ratepayers receive positive messages from the dominant party and the government in CT, while the poor are cast desperate "refugees" from the Eastern Cape who need to appreciate the generosity of the CT ratepayers. This does not serve democratic ends nor does it help to build a unified inclusive city and democratic policymaking culture. These messages reinforce the legacy of social apartheid and Bantustan divide and rule approach.

The CoCT has also promoted parochial participation within "communities" according to "their areas" that are implicitly racialised rather than practically realise a vision for and of the city as a whole (Tomlinson, 1992). The DA plays on spatial-racial fears using crime and control of vagrancy as proxy for advancing a property-owning democracy. The DA which has struggled to go beyond 5% Black African voter support in the Western Cape Black townships and has yet find resonance among Black voters in the city. The City faces a perfect storm of tightening webs of *spatio-racial* and class contradictions even as property values rise. CT's DA elites have contributed to toxic politics and extreme politico-social polarisation.

¹⁰ From 2011 to 2016 an estimated 47 600 people moved from EC to WC, while 57 000 moved from Gauteng (Stats SA 2018, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022018.pdf>).

This might serve immediate short-term electoral survival on a narrow social base but portends sharpening socio-racial contradictions. The CoCT's and the DA's messages taken as a composite and combined with rising inequalities, racial electoral geographies and a deepening township social crisis portend worsening social alienation of especially African Blacks.

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