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**THE LEGACIES OF APARTHEID AND
IMPLICATIONS OF ECONOMIC
LIBERALISATION: A POST-APARTHEID
TOWNSHIP**

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The legacies of apartheid and implications of Economic liberalisation: A post-apartheid township¹

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This paper is concerned with organisational responses of residents in one low-income urban community located in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.² The area concerned is Mpumalanga Township near Durban, and it is an area that has had a difficult history of political violence.³ This has meant that, despite a coterminous history of trade union militancy and high levels of community mobilisation, social networks have been severely fractured. Firstly, this paper explores the tenuous process of rebuilding community level trust and collective action in the wake of political transition. A process of democratic consolidation has been made more difficult by economic recession and workplace restructuring. The general lack of trust in politicians and popular representatives in the contemporary period has meant that people are retreating into families and kinship networks, a response reinforced by poverty. In contrast to previous modes of trade union organisation in the area, problems of poverty and efforts towards enhancing livelihood opportunities are treated as private issues.⁴ Thus poverty and suspicion undermine community engagement and limit collective action responses to widespread problems. Secondly, the family is seen as a site of stability, but this is only realisable if the institution is supported by government policy. State transfers, such as pensions and child maintenance grants, are critical to relieving the enormous pressures and demands made upon the household. The argument advanced here is that it is on the stability of families, and particularly of older women within them, that the production of future citizens rests. However, due to the enormous burden placed on family networks and unequal power relations within households, the stability of family networks is seriously undermined.

¹ The research on which this chapter is based was funded by the Crisis States Programme in the Development Studies Institute at the London School of Economics, which itself is funded by the Department for International Development of the UK government. I owe a deep gratitude to the individuals, households and organisations that availed themselves to me during the fieldwork for this research. I owe a special thanks to Jo Beall for her useful comments and intellectual guidance.

² The Province of KwaZulu-Natal was formed out of the former Province of Natal and the KwaZulu Bantustan. It has an estimated population of about 9 million people, poverty levels are increasing and the majority of the population still lives in non-urban areas (Statistics South Africa, *October Household Survey*, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 1999). Approximately 284,000 children under the age of 7 and 551,000 other household members are living below the poverty line (A. Sitas, 'The "new poor": organisational challenges', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 22:5 (1998), pp.16-22). It is the poorest province with the third highest unemployment rate of approximately 40 percent.

³ D. Bonnin, 'Claiming spaces, changing places: political violence and women's protests in KwaZulu-Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26: 2 (2000), pp.301-316.

⁴ Livelihood opportunities are defined here as a range of individual and household survival strategies that seek to mobilise available social, economic and political resources and opportunities. This mix is then adjusted according to season, climate, location, age, gender, life cycle, and education level. They have also been defined as including capabilities, assets and activities required for achieving a means of living (C. A. Grown & J. Sebstad, 'Introduction. Toward a wider perspective on women's employment', *World Development*, 17:7 (1989), pp.937-952; D. Carney (ed.), *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: What Contribution can we Make?* London: Department for International Development, 1998; C. Moser, 'The Asset Vulnerability Framework: Reassessing Urban Poverty Reduction Strategies', *World Development*, 26:1 (1998), pp.1-19.

A crisis of reproduction surfaces as incidence of alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence become common features of most households. Thirdly, the crisis of representation has informed the emergence of alternative forms of community organisation. The link between household survival and urban services has also given rise to popular responses so that engagement with metropolitan government becomes another site of emerging citizenship. Finally, the consolidation of democracy is emerging out of conflict as citizens demand accountability from politicians. I argue that this constitutes a potential faultline in the process of democratic consolidation.

Mpumalanga in Context: The Legacies of Apartheid

Protectionist apartheid policies facilitated the growth of manufacturing industries such as clothing and textiles, which became major employers throughout what is the present-day Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Government policies that promoted labour intensive industries through a process of industrial decentralisation led to the development and growth of industrial geographic zones such as Hammarsdale.⁵ This apartheid industrial geography gave rise in turn to connected 'labour reserve' townships such as Mpumalanga Township.

Mpumalanga Township was established in the late 1960s as a typical apartheid labour reserve. The township provided labour to subsidised industries in Pietermaritzburg, Pinetown, and Durban, given its proximity to these three centres. Most important, however, was the employment afforded by Hammarsdale, an adjacent clothing and textile industrial zone. The Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), which was behind the establishment of Hammarsdale, argued that "a well-established textile industry would have tremendous employment potential for semi-skilled operatives, which meant that it could raise the standard of living of the Bantu".⁶ The first clothing factory, Hammarsdale Clothing, was established in the area in 1957. Within three years Hammarsdale had three textile factories and a manufacturer of sewing machines with a total labour force of 2,135. At the end of 1971 there were 13 factories and 8,500 workers were employed in the area.⁷ In the 1980s, nearly every second person was working in one of the factories in Hammarsdale, with a number of people also working in clothing and textile factories in Pinetown, Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

In the 1980s, Mpumalanga Township had a strong public ethos, and many political and community organisations were formed and grew in strength. These included local branches of national political organisations, resident associations, trade unions, student organisations, and church organisations. However, in the late 1980s this vibrant public and political life came under threat from the political unrest and violence that swept across many townships in present-day KwaZulu-Natal.⁸ Township conflict and violence was largely shaped by a lack of political tolerance between contesting organisations.⁹ Politically motivated crime and violence increased and many people lost their lives, families lost their homes and schooling was

⁵ M. Morris, J. Barnes & N. Dunne, 'From import substituting industrialization to globalised international competitiveness' in B. Freund & V. Padayachee (eds), *(D)urban Vortex: South African city in Transition*. Durban: University of Natal Press, 2002.

⁶ IDC (1971), p.57, cited in B. S. Young, *The industrial geography of the Durban region*, Durban: University of Natal Geography Department, 1972.

⁷ Young (1972).

⁸ Bonnin (2000), pp.301-316.

⁹ A. Minnaar, (ed.), *Patterns of violence: case studies in Nata.*, Pretoria: Human Science Research Council, 1992.

disrupted.¹⁰ During the 1990s, these patterns of disruption continued, ‘no-go’ zones were introduced, and territorial and political barriers erected so that normal life ceased to exist for a number of years. The mistrust evident in Mpumalanga today has its roots in this history, reinforced by the involvement of the apartheid state, which was active in fuelling the violence in the province. The direct involvement of the South African Police (SAP) in support of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) against those supporting the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies has been well documented.¹¹ At a more passive level, the police did not investigate crimes committed against and reported by United Democratic Front (UDF) members. The role of trade unions organizing in the factories in nearby Hammarsdale was often supportive and mediatory between the warring political organisations in Mpumalanga, with trade union leaders occasionally being called in to negotiate peace deals between the IFP and ANC at the local level.¹²

When, after several years, the violence and killings came to an end and there were signs of peace returning to the township, people started returning to their homes, going back to school and tentatively crossing former no-go areas. However, things were never the same again, socially or politically. In fact, as is revealed in what follows, it will take a long time to restore the dynamism that characterised the township before the war years. Even simple services, such as the taxi route that was disrupted and halted during the war years, have yet to be re-established and today the alternative route that was put in place still prevails. These are the silences, invisible and inaudible to outside eyes and ears but still palpably obvious to the residents of Mpumalanga today.

Hence, by the late 1990s, politically motivated crime and violence had significantly decreased but its impact was still being felt. Most importantly, any sense of community and social cohesion has been seriously undermined. The post-1994 era has seen significant strides being made in rebuilding many communities such as Mpumalanga. More than ten years later, the community is showing signs of slow recovery. This has been largely a private affair, taking place in the context of homes or within safe public spaces and indeed, a number of the more prominent community organisations in the township have disappeared or lost their political will. However, there are signs that the vibrant community life is re-emerging as people re-establish old networks and negotiate new ones in a new social, economic and political context.

Although political intolerance - for example between supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) - is largely a thing of the past, it is interesting that both new and old community organisations tend to avoid political issues in favour of socio-economic or developmental issues. When political agendas emerge in Mpumalanga today, these generally relate to conflicts between community residents and the local government around issues of service delivery and political accountability. The local government of Durban, eThekweni Municipality, has been described as “led by a centre-left coalition of ANC councillors, bent on equity and improvement of the quality of life, and the economic empowerment of the black majority”.¹³ It is precisely this institutional character,

¹⁰ B. Nzimande & S. Thusi, ‘Children of war: The impact of political violence on schooling in Natal’, *Research Report*, Education Policy Unit, 1991.

¹¹ D. Bonnin, “I am Poor, I must start all over again” The impact of political violence on household economies: A case-study from KwaZulu-natal’, *Society in Transition*, 32:2 (2001), p.194.

¹² Interview 26 March 2003: Jabu Ngcobo, a former South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) organiser in Hammarsdale.

¹³ A. Sitas, *Bonds that shape, the bonds that bind, the bonds that break: Undigitalised bodies in a globalising economy*, unpublished manuscript, n.d.

combined with its own inadequate delivery of services in peripheral and poor areas of the city that has helped reignite a sense of public engagement in Mpumalanga. Moreover, it is one around which erstwhile enemies can find something of a common cause, alongside other factors that bind people, such as high levels of unemployment in the township and the mounting problem and challenge of HIV and AIDS. The latter helps explain the growing salience of organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in Mpumalanga.

The Political Economy of Transition in Mpumalanga Township

Regrettably, South Africa's political transition in 1994 was accompanied by structural challenges that had their roots in economic processes set in motion sometime earlier, giving rise to jobless growth and mass unemployment at just the time democracy took root. Macroeconomic policies adopted in the post-apartheid era, associated with increased trade liberalisation, exacerbated these problems, and in 1999 alone, 180,000 workers lost their jobs through factory closures, relocations or retrenchments. Since 1994 approximately 500,000 jobs have been lost in South Africa.¹⁴ In Durban, by 1998, it was already estimated that 23% of manufacturing jobs had been lost.¹⁵ The most affected sectors have been the public sector, mining and manufacturing. This trend was accompanied by growing informalisation of work, particularly evident in the clothing and textile industry in Durban, which began to use subcontracted labour to deliberately downsize formal factory production and evade labour legislation.¹⁶ This drastically exposed the clothing and textile industry to international competition, doing little to curb unemployment in the industry. Retrenchments, relocations, and factory closures became a feature of the industry as factories tried to compete with imports coming from China and Taiwan. The former industrial decentralisation zone of Hammarsdale, and Mpumalanga as the township that served it, were caught up in these trends and were not exempt from their impact.

Politically, the legacy of apartheid, alongside the aftermath of political violence across much of the province, meant that KwaZulu-Natal was tainted as a politically difficult province.¹⁷ This posed serious challenges for the newly elected local government in rendering services to all. The aim of the democratically elected local government was to move away from a racially divided government and include African townships. The demarcation of municipal boundaries became central to how delivery was going to be organised. It was a politically contested process, not least of all in Durban. The points of contestation were around which areas were to be included within metropolitan boundaries and which excluded. Durban City Council had a history as a powerful and financially viable local authority and the city constitutes the economic core of the province. The Council was the only municipality that had the finances and resources necessary for rendering effective service delivery. Hence there was some pressure to be one of the poorer peripheral areas included within the boundaries of Durban Metro. The restructuring process was uneven and contested,¹⁸ but ultimately Mpumalanga

¹⁴ COSATU, *Cosatu Memorandum of Job Creation Demands*, March 2000.

¹⁵ Sitas (1998).

¹⁶ See also G. Fakude, 'Informalization in KwaZulu Natal's clothing sector', *Industrial Restructuring Project Research Report* no. 37, School of Development studies (SDS), 1999; C. Skinner & I. Valodia, 'Labour Market Policy, Flexibility, and the Future of Labour relations: the case of KwaZulu-Natal Clothing', *Transformation*, 50 (2002), pp.56-76.

¹⁷ Indeed while South Africans were voting for their local governments on 1 November 1995, elections could only be held in KwaZulu-Natal on 26 June 1996, given high levels of political intolerance and violence.

¹⁸ P. V. Hall & G. Robbins, 'Economic Development for a new era: an examination of the adoption of explicit economic development strategies by Durban local government following the April 1994 elections', in W. Freund

Township was successfully negotiated into the new Unicity Council of Durban, known as eThekweni Municipality.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the new and enlarged municipality was somewhat hamstrung by the economic context into which it was born. The role and responsibilities of local government in South Africa shifted and, as McDonald has described, “from 1996 [with the adoption of the new macro-economic policy, ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution’ (GEAR)], local government development paradigms shifted steadily from a redistributive state to a neo-liberal ‘enabling’ or ‘facilitating’ state”. The role of local government became more complicated and contradictory. Not only was local government going to be an agent of service delivery, as envisaged by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in the early 1990s, and “a powerful sphere of governance”, it was also going to be an agent of cost recovery as advanced by GEAR. Government spending was reduced and basic services, such as water and electricity, were privatised with households left without these resources because of an inability to pay for them.²⁰ Across the country, poor communities responded by illegal connections, marches and community campaigns. These various responses had resonance in Mpumalanga and are explored below.

These new challenges, deriving from South Africa’s compromised political and economic transition, have had an impact at both household and community level. The rest of the paper looks at these challenges by exploring four themes: the crisis of representation and decline of old organisations; the fragile stability of families and kinship networks; the process of facing up to faultlines and the new face of community organisations; and consolidating democracy out of conflict.

Crisis of Representation and the Decline of Old Organisations

The changing social, economic, and political context in Mpumalanga affected various social networks and community organisations that serve as potential ‘social resources’ for the poor.²¹ This section of the paper discusses two key old community-based organisations, as they exist in the present context: political parties and trade unions. The question asked is what has become of these organisations in Mpumalanga and how effective have they been in representing their members? Evidence shows that both have lost their moral authority as they have failed to effectively represent people in the post-apartheid era.

and V. Padayachee (eds), *(D)urban Vortex: A South African City in Transition*, Durban: University of Natal Press, 2002.

¹⁹ The Unicity Council was introduced in 2000, after the December 2000 municipality elections. The executive committee council has full power, chaired by the mayor and under the provisions of the Municipal Systems and Municipal Structures Acts (Hall & Robbins, 2002).

²⁰ D. McDonald & J. Pape (eds), *Cost Recovery and the Crisis of service delivery in South Africa*, Pretoria: Human Science Research Council, 2002, p.4.

²¹ Following Beall, I use the concept of ‘social resources’ as opposed to ‘social capital’ in order to explain more dynamic and holistic societal relations that are not necessarily founded on transaction cost calculations (J. Beall, ‘From social networks to public action in urban governance: where does benefit accrue?’ *Journal of International Development*, 13 (2001) pp.1015-1021). These include alliances, networks, and associations, formal and informal organisations that people rely on for survival. See also J. Beall, J. & N. Kanji, ‘Households, Livelihoods and Urban Poverty’, *Theme Paper Three, ESCOR Commissioned Research on Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty*, International Development Department, University of Birmingham, 1999; and J. I. Guyer, ‘Household and community in African Studies’, *African Studies Review*, 24 (1981), pp.87-137.

Political Parties

While at the provincial level, tensions are still rife between the ANC and the IFP, at township level a more cooperative relationship exists between the two major political parties. The political violence that marred the lives of township dwellers in the 1980s and 1990s has disappeared and political affiliation is no longer used as a primary identity. The local branches of the two parties have tried to work together with community members. As one representative of a political party commented:

The two parties are working together for the good of the community. We lost many of our members because of political violence and the community was falling apart. We realised that working together was the only solution to have a peaceful township. Besides, at national level, our leaders were doing the same thing.²²

New democratic structures were set up with the intention and expectation of fostering cooperation between political parties and the community. The assumption was that councillors, warders, and political representatives would be closer to the community and communicate directly with the people. Indeed some level of communication and cooperation has been achieved. This was especially true when the community perceived local government initiatives to be responsive to their needs and concerns. The local government, working very closely with the community, implemented one recent initiative, to re-build houses destroyed during the years of political violence. It is through this initiative that employment was created for local residents, and original homeowners returned to their houses. Political tensions have erupted as a result of this housing initiative, with some residents expressing concern and dissatisfaction about the initiative, stating that only ANC members are benefiting. However, an optimistic view was expressed by one woman, whose house was burnt down and husband killed because they were affiliated to IFP:

My family has been homeless for the last 10 years. My children lost their father and home. I voted in 1994 because the ANC promised to rebuild my house. This did not happen. I voted again in 1999 and I patiently waited. My house is now being rebuilt and I am happy, especially because I will not be a burden to anyone any more.²³

The relationship between the local government and local residents is not always smooth and does not go unchallenged. Community members often raised the issue of political accountability as a main source of conflict. The community has also become sceptical of local government's cost recovery measures and community groups have been established to challenge the government's privatisation policies. Local community leaders belonging to different political parties have become agents of local government and a source of information especially regarding welfare benefits. Those who need to access welfare grants go to their trusted political leaders in the community for information. The local council office also fills this function, but it is often to community leaders' houses that people go for advice. It is through such routes that trust between residents and leaders is gradually being restored.

²² Interview 22, 20 August 2002, 26 August 2002, 23 October 2002, 30 October 2002, 7 November 2002, 23 November 2002.

²³ Interview 12, 15 August 2002, 19 August 2002, 21 August 2002, 10 September 2002, 12 September 2002, 18 October 2002, 21 October 2002, 28 October 2002, 20 November 2002.

Given the history of political violence, therefore, there is less reliance on political parties, since these are still held largely responsible for the present ills of the community. Nevertheless, community level political leaders are regaining influence, as the only source of information around welfare issues. The decentralisation of power and new democratic local government structures, such as the ward participatory system,²⁴ has made this even more possible. The role of political parties has significantly shifted towards individual advice-based services, signalling a specific and new community-focused trajectory. Individual assistance rather than collective action has come to characterise political relationships, and of course this creates the space for political patronage.

Trade Unions

Everyone interviewed was very resentful of trade unions, saying how they had “sold us to employers”. Others also mentioned how trade unions had “lost their power and commitment to their members”. As one retrenched woman, a former trade union member of ten years standing, angrily remarked:

I was only useful to the trade union when I was employed and could pay my monthly dues. However once I was unemployed because of factory closure, the union did not want anything to do with me. I paid my subscription fee every month for ten years; the trade union did not help me get my retrenchment package. Five years later, I still do not have the retrenchment package.²⁵

The nature of trade unions has always been to recruit permanent workers who will be able to pay their monthly dues. It was also easier to organise these workers since they were registered and were under one roof. The trade unions’ commitment to the workers was mostly limited to the workplace. From 1983 onwards, workplace issues were extended to include community issues. Many trade union officials played a significant role in political mobilisation of communities, especially since political organisations such as the ANC were banned. This kind of political unionism became important in linking workplace struggles for higher wages and against racial discrimination to broader community struggles for democracy, and indeed to peace negotiations in the township.

Nevertheless, since the late 1990s trade unions have played a less significant role in communities such as Mpumalanga Township. The only option left for those workers who were left without any adequate retrenchment packages was to approach independent and often corrupt lawyers. A classic example was that of retrenched workers from Hebox Textile, a clothing and textile factory in Hammarsdale. Hebox Textile closed its factory doors in 1990, retrenching all of its workers with its owners claiming bankruptcy. At the time of its closure, trade unions and management promised to pay retrenchment packages to all workers but this never happened.

Numerous individual attempts were made to recover the money, but these were unsuccessful. An independent lawyer offered to help, approaching a group of workers estimated at two hundred in number. Each individual contributed R200 to the lawyer for the case. Several months later, the lawyer disappeared with the money. This was also the case with the second and third lawyer. In 2002, the group employed the services of a fourth lawyer, who is taking

²⁴ The Municipal Structures Act (1998) of South Africa makes provision for the ward participatory system of municipal government, which allows for the establishment of ward committees to facilitate community participation in matters of local government and local concern to be addressed by established ward committees.

²⁵ Interview 10, 27 July 2002, 20 August, 15 October 2002, 16 September 2002, 7 November 2002.

the case to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA)). Workers claim that Hebox Textile opened another factory in the area using a different name. The story of Hebox Textile is one of many examples that shows the declining role and influence of trade unions, given the high unemployment rate and increasing number of casual workers. The decline of the unions has given rise to a crisis of representation in relation to work-based issues, which in the context of casualisation and home-based work, are often domestic and community level issues as well.

The fragile stability of families and kinship networks

Faced with economic hardship, lack of trust and no effective representation, poor people have retreated into the relative safety of the household.²⁶ During the apartheid era, the poor and working class family was under enormous strain, and this socially embedded institution was severely destabilised. In the post-apartheid era the possibility exists of building the institution on stronger foundations.

During the apartheid era, family and kinship networks in South Africa were historically divided between town and country by the migrant labour system, the pass laws and the establishment of homelands. Urban-rural linkages were encouraged by labour migration and remittances.²⁷ In post-apartheid South Africa, where the urban rural divide is no longer encouraged by legislation, urban-rural linkages persist. However, the nature of such linkages has significantly shifted, especially with rising unemployment and poverty.

Family and kinship networks coalesce around access to economic resources and assets. These economic resources are mainly in the form of state grants such as pensions and child and disability grants.²⁸ Those with access to state grants are pensioners, women with children under the age of seven and the physically disabled, including those who have AIDS.²⁹ Retrenchments and a high unemployment rate in Mpumalanga have brought a shift away from wage labour as the main source of household income, and all households identified in the research depended to some significant degree on state grants. In fact, the majority of households in the community, and indeed in South Africa at large, depend solely on state grants. However, as is argued below, access to state grants is not always easy, and allocation can be severely undermined by intra-household dynamics.

Households with access to income through state grants tend to attract poorer family members. This affects the composition and structure of already poor households, increasing density levels and dependency ratios, and explains the persistence of extended rather than nuclear families in Mpumalanga. Elizabeth Francis has identified this process as “clustering” in her

²⁶ A process of retreating into the household is also identified in a study of Zimbabwe by Allast Mwanza, *Social Policy in an economy under stress: A case of Zimbabwe*, Harare: Southern Africa Regional Policy Institute, 1999. In Russia in the 1990s, Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina argue that people retreat back to their own resources, intensifying their production and elevating women’s previous role as organiser and executor of the domestic economy. A process described in Russia as “gendered involution”, a retreat to a primitive domestic economy and a “defensive strategy of minimalist survival” (M. Burawoy, P. Krotov & T. Lytkina, ‘Involution and Destitution: Russia’s Gendered Transition to Capitalism’, *Ethnography*, 1 (1999), pp.1136-1151).

²⁷ J. Nattrass, ‘Migrant labour in KwaZulu Natal’, *Development Studies Unit Working Paper*, University of Natal, 1984; J. May, *Poverty and inequality in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Praxis Publishing, 1998; C. Murray, *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981.

²⁸ May (1998).

²⁹ Monthly social grants vary; for old age pension is R640, disability grant R640, child grant is R140. Government is proposing to increase the age limit for children grants to 14 years.

work on North West Province. This differs from what she calls “shutting down”, when poor households isolate themselves to alleviate their poverty and income insecurity.³⁰ In Mpumalanga, where people are able to get information on government policies and access state grants, ‘shutting down’ is often not an option, as even more destitute relatives use kinship networks to survive.

Rural-urban linkages are still noteworthy and a connection with a rural homestead remains important to the residents of Mpumalanga. In the past in South Africa, urban-rural linkages were economically-based, with remittances and rural goods and artefacts moving back and forth.³¹ Today, growing unemployment has made this economic exchange difficult, and it is now almost absent.³² Hence, the nature of such linkages has changed. When residents of Mpumalanga make visits to the rural areas, they are more ceremonial in character. For example, almost everyone interviewed went back at least once a year to the rural areas for burials and to visit cemeteries as part of their customs or annual rituals. In the past people used rural areas as a place of escape from the violence. Today, in the face of victimisation or fear of victimisation, they use rural areas as a ‘hide away’ or as final resting places for those dying of AIDS.

The stigma attached to AIDS has challenged notions of social cohesion, and has seriously undermined efforts to deal with AIDS and help those infected and affected by it. A mother in the community, whose daughter was dying from the disease, elaborated on her experience:

Lindiwe has been living with the evil disease for the past four years. Her daughter passed away when she was only 6 months old. Her only sources of support are myself, the church, and an AIDS organisation she joined two years ago. It saddens me to see how the community is not being supportive of my family and many other families in the Mpumalanga. Even our neighbours are not talking to us anymore. All her friends have turned their back against her. At the end of the month, I am taking her home, where I was born- Eshowe. My aunt will nurse her where she might recover or will die peacefully and with dignity.³³

In contexts such as this, families become sites of greatest stability. However, families and households can also be fragmented and challenged through their livelihood activities and the pressure put on them as a result of poverty and unemployment. The research revealed evidence of high levels of inter-personal and domestic violence. A number of vulnerable household members, mostly women in patriarchal families, saw themselves as worse off as a result of declining livelihood opportunities, which gave rise to specific intra-household dynamics and relations based on power and abuse. A retrenched mother of four described her own difficult household relations:

I was retrenched in 1998, the same year that my husband passed away. My children and I then moved back to my family’s house because of problems at my

³⁰ E. Francis, *Making a Living, Rural Livelihoods in Africa*, London: Routledge, 2001; and *Rural livelihoods, Institutions and Vulnerability in South Africa*, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, London, 2000.

³¹ See B. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng, Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991; J. May, ‘Migrant labour in the Transkei: Causes and consequence at the village level’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 6:1 (1987); and Murray (1981).

³² J. Sharp & A. Speigel, ‘Vulnerability to impoverishment in South African rural areas: the erosion of kinship and neighbourhood as social resources’, *Africa*, 55:2 (1985), pp.67-85.

³³ Interview 10, 29 November 2002.

in-laws' house. I was accused of killing my own husband. However, things were also not easy for me at my mother's house. My brother was always drunk and often beat me up and chased me out of the house.³⁴

Interviewees often cited as a problem the abuse of alcohol, usually by unemployed figures in the household, as a source of strife and a contributory factor to the depletion of income. The majority of these people tended to be male, yet were nevertheless considered 'heads of households' and key decision makers as to how household incomes should be allocated.³⁵ However, it is not only men who are blamed for squandering money. The interviews showed that young women who receive child grants on behalf of their children are also accused by their parents of spending this money on themselves, especially on cell phones, clothes, and frequent visits to the salon to change their hairstyles. Unequal bargaining power,³⁶ which often surrounds the allocation and distribution of income in many households, serves to undermine the potential benefits that family and kinship networks have in reducing individual and household insecurities such as income, housing and food.³⁷

Nevertheless, in the context of high levels of poverty, family and kinship networks remain central. As opposed to exploitation in workplaces, which serves to mobilise and unite people, poverty does not often become a common and binding medium for solidarity. It is often a source of shame and, together with solutions to it, is confined to the private realm of the household. People have indirectly found solidarity against poverty through mobilisation around goods of collective consumption and common issues of distress such as water and electricity cut-offs. These issues tend to become politicised and are then actively taken up.

Facing up to the faultlines: the new face of community organisations

The new face of community organisation in Mpumalanga sees much more prominence on the part of church organisations and burial societies. The importance of these two community organisations relates in no small part to the fact that they assist the community in dealing with social and survival issues. However, their efforts at collective action towards reducing poverty are undermined by poverty itself, the community's lack of tolerance for other religions, the absence of reciprocity, and institutional and individual burial services that undermine collective community-level initiatives.

³⁴ Interview 2, 10 August 2002, 15 August 2002, 16 September, 29 November 2002.

³⁵ Similarly, Kabeer, drawing on the examples of Brazil, Philippines and Kenya, concludes, "The gender of the person owning wealth or earning income appears to have a systematic effect on patterns of resource allocation within the household" (N. Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: gender hierarchies in development thought*, London & Delhi: Verso & Publications, 1994a, p.103).

³⁶ According to Nancy Folbre, bargaining power within households also has to be taken into consideration when talking about household inequalities (*Who pays for the kids? Gender and the structure of constraints*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994). As opposed to altruistic models (G. Becker, 'A theory of the allocation of time', *Economic Journal*, 80:200 (1965), pp.493-517), bargaining models of the household accommodate diversity in decision making behaviour, do not rule out altruism as the basis of decisions, and accommodate the idea of gender asymmetry as a product of structural rather than purely individual inequalities in power, privilege and resources. See A. Sen, *Resources, values and development*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

³⁷ Rosenzweig comes to a similar conclusion in a research study conducted in India and the Philippines (M. R. Rosenzweig, 'Program interventions, intra-household distribution and the welfare of individuals: modeling household behaviour', *World Development*, 14: 2 (1986), pp.233-43).

Church Organisations

Community organisations such as churches are responding to the community's social and material survival issues, but also continue as sources of emotional and spiritual support for many community members. Church organisations, such as the Methodists, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, have adopted a new strategy of 'healing, community building and teaching', especially around the issues of HIV and AIDS. While other conventional churches have opted not to talk of the disease, churches in this community decided to 'break the silence' and educate their congregation. Even though their role has been seen as minimal, it continues to give hope where none exists.

The major community support given by church organisations has been through women's organisations within the churches, such as *Umanyano*,³⁸ a women's group at the Methodist Church. These organisations include older women who do things for each other, such as house visits to care and pray for the sick, and visiting homes where there is a funeral to offer comfort and support for the bereaved family.

However, these church organisations have been criticised for not taking into consideration the economic status of their members when it comes to church contributions. The decline in disposable income, therefore, has undermined collective action. One old woman, who had not contributed to the church for the past two years, expressed her fears of dying:

I have not been paying my dues precisely because I do not have money. I am a pensioner and have my children and grandchildren to feed. I am a sickly old woman and my day is near. When I finally close my eyes, I will not be buried in church like all Christians should but my funeral service will be held here at home. We all want a proper Christian burial.³⁹

In recent years, the township has also been experiencing a growth of other religious groupings, such as Muslims and Evangelicals. The 'Universal Church' is one example of these newly formed evangelic churches growing in the township, and indeed the whole province and country. It attracts, and is popular, amongst the youth. Its sermons are viewed by its members as less traditional and often relate the bible to reality as experienced by the people.

While the Muslim religion is widespread amongst the Indian community in South Africa, it remains uncommon in the Black community, especially in this township. Nevertheless, the benefits for the poor who join such faith-based organisations range from free funeral costs to schooling for children. The general community often shuns the minority of those who take up this religion as a way of life, and as a result, community members and households where Islam is practiced are often isolated from other community members and activities.

Burial societies and stokvels

High unemployment and declining individual and household income have affected the sustainability of *stokvels*⁴⁰ and burial societies as economic mechanisms to reduce bulk expenditure on the part of household members. These initiatives have declined in

³⁸ A Xhosa word meaning working together.

³⁹ Interview 6, 28 July 2002.

⁴⁰ A revolving saving and credit scheme common in South Africa in the black community. Members of such a scheme contribute a fixed monthly fee and give it to one individual who then reciprocates during the following months to other group members. The money has often been used to buy things that are out of reach under normal circumstances.

membership, with many people simply finding it impossible to make monetary contributions since they are unemployed. There have also been private burial societies such as those provided by Standard Bank and First National Bank. However, these have not benefited the many people who have lost their jobs and therefore cannot make their monthly debit orders.

Instead, practices of in-kind help have emerged, based on the principle of reciprocity. This is often expressed in the local language (Zulu) – “*izandla ziya gezana*” (one hand washes another), the idea of helping each other in times of need. Contributions are in the form of cooking and baking, and lending the bereaved family dishes and pots during funerals. Yet, because of the long distance to the local cemetery and the high cost of buses, monetary contributions are still highly appreciated. Therefore, those families that can afford to do so make small money donations. Contributions vary depending on how much and what people can contribute, thus making burial societies less formal than they were in the past. Even though these initiatives are informal, community members often know which households can afford and which ones cannot, or which ones have a good record in helping other households, especially when there is a funeral. So households that are known for helping others often get more support from the community when they are in need, as compared to households which are not often helpful. Who helps and who does not often results in little conflicts in the community or between neighbours.

Consolidating democracy out of conflict⁴¹

Despite the difficult plights and deepening poverty in which people find themselves, as well as the pressures on household resources and family and community ties, there is an emerging civic engagement evident in Mpumalanga. This is largely in response to the crisis of service delivery and South Africa’s ineffective HIV/AIDS treatment policy, both of which have given rise to social movements at the national scale and which are leading people in communities everywhere to rally together to challenge local and national government and their ‘anti-poor’ policies. Mpumalanga Township is no exception. This conflict between the locals and the local government rather than creating a crisis, has made possible the growth of new organisational forms. Efforts by structures such as the Durban Metro to change payment systems for water and electricity and to compel people to pay for services, have been met with intense resistance by local communities led by their party aligned community leaders. The Mpumalanga Concerned Citizens Group and the Treatment Action Campaign have both taken root in the township and are respectively organizing apace in response to service delivery issues and the paltry response by government to the HIV and AIDS crisis. Both organisations have made great progress in consolidating local democracy by citizens in their engagement with metropolitan and national government.

The Mpumalanga Concerned Group

Tapping into already existing networks and institutions, a new alliance was formed in 2000, the Mpumalanga Concerned Group (MCG). Its main concern was with the installation of water meters in the township and thus the introduction of a different system of water payment. The argument was that the people of Mpumalanga were poor and could not afford high water

⁴¹ Democratic consolidation is defined broadly to include citizens engaged with government through various collective action activities. See also R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: civic traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell & S. Valenzuela (eds), *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: the New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992; M. Bratton & Van de Walle, *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

rates. They proposed that each household pay R10 a month, as “many households could only afford that amount”. The local government rejected their suggestion and there were community marches and the disconnection of water pipes and meters.⁴² The police were called-in and a number of people were injured and arrested. As one community leader recalled:

It was not long ago, just a few months ago. We took matters into our own hands. The community was tired of being taken for granted. We wanted what was rightfully ours and what we were promised during elections: free water for everyone. How can the ANC blame us for demanding our basic right?⁴³

The MCG was led by prominent political party leaders within the IFP who argued that they were moving away from “basic politics” to more “serious issues” that affected the community. Indeed, people tended to agree with such statements. Interestingly, both IFP and ANC followers and members supported such common community responses. These initiatives have coincided and are compatible with challenges around the issue of accountability, including on the part of voters loyal to the ruling party. In the words of an old woman in the community:

I remain an ANC member and will not keep quiet when I think it is not being accountable to its members, those who voted for it. I support initiatives that aim at making my situation better, no matter which political leader is involved. It is the issues that I support not the political party, the IFP.⁴⁴

While the MCG was able to raise awareness in the community and give the community space to challenge government initiatives that people thought were not beneficial to them, it also linked their struggle to the struggle of other communities across the country, particularly in the other metropolitan areas of Cape Town and Soweto. However, once the immediate crisis was over, this hopeful initiative fizzled out and failed to concretise its efforts. As an example of collective action in response to a crisis situation of affordability over services, the MCG was a short-term solution that lacked sustainability. However, as Beall has pointed out in other contexts, to be effective community level organisations do not need to be sustained.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is sometimes a sensible organisational response to a particular social or political context not to remain formally constituted. While this may well be the case for Mpumalanga, where emergent forms of collective action are undoubtedly evident, key leaders of the MCG have not helped the rooting of local democracy by unhelpfully, if understandably, leaving community politics to work for the government.

The Treatment Action Campaign

Another organisation that has emerged in post-apartheid South Africa in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis is the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). The TAC was formed on 10 December 1998, International Human Rights Day, with the aim of training, teaching and campaigning on issues related to the treatment of HIV/AIDS. The organisation does not have an official membership list but has offices and volunteers and supporters in three provinces, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape. Its main objectives are to: ensure access to affordable and quality treatment for people with HIV/AIDS, prevent and eliminate new HIV infections and improve the affordability and quality of health-care access for all. Conversely,

⁴² *The Mercury*, 11 April, 2001.

⁴³ Interview 18, 11 September 2002. 14 October 2002.

⁴⁴ Interview 15, 6 November 2002.

⁴⁵ Beall (2001).

the organisation has also taken up broader issues that are inevitably linked to good health. Their message is that “nutrition is a basic right, but so is access to life-saving medicines”.⁴⁶ Consequently, much of the confrontation between local communities and different tiers of government has been around issues of access to basic medication for those who are infected.

Through numerous public protests, presentations to parliament and specific campaigns, the TAC’s aims and objectives have been expressed, with varying degrees of success and failure.⁴⁷ Unlike many initiatives that have emerged post-1994, the TAC has played a major role in poor communities dealing with the epidemic, and is well known and widely supported in Mpumalanga. Nevertheless, the continued stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and its link to death has led many individuals and households to shy away from the organisation. Indeed those who are active in the organisation in the township tend to be mainly young men and women. Nevertheless, the TAC has sustained its efforts and has made remarkable inroads particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, which is one of the first provinces rolling out the delivery of anti-viral drugs to HIV-infected pregnant women.

Conclusion

The cost of liberalisation, both socially and economically, has been immense, especially for many poor households and communities, pushing them even closer to the brink of collapse. Their inability to reproduce themselves is a consequence not just of retrenchments and unemployment but also of broader economic policies pursued by governments in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism. The commodifications and privatisation of essential services, and the conversion of citizens into consumers, spells disaster for the poor majority.

As such, the challenges faced by this post-apartheid community are both enormous and indicative of those living in many similar urban and peri-urban communities elsewhere in South Africa: the legacy of apartheid geography and history; the long-term impact of political violence in the recent past; a pervasive lack of trust, particularly of politicians; a lack of leadership and effective representation rooted in the community; structural unemployment and deepening poverty; and the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the community and family. The effects of poverty and the lack of virtually any disposable income have resulted in contradictory effects on collective citizen action. They have either weakened collective action, for example through the imperative of church collections keeping people away from customary sources of succour and support; or they have strengthened it, as in the case of informal burial societies and self-help initiatives based on reciprocity. The people of Mpumalanga Township have not surrendered to social, economic and political hardship, but rather have engaged in a range of livelihood strategies and reciprocal activities to survive them. On the one hand, this makes for a slow and fragile process of consolidating democracy; but on the other, it represents a promising socio-political trajectory for this beleaguered community in post-apartheid South Africa, and perhaps one that holds the seeds of effective and meaningful governance in the future.

⁴⁶ ‘Equal Treatment’, *TAC Newsletter*, 11 (2003).

⁴⁷ These initiatives include the recent Civil Disobedience Campaign, which was limited and withdrawn after a few days. Other campaigns were a mother-to-child-transmission campaign, a campaign against patent abuse and profiteering, a campaign against pharmaceutical companies and the United States’ Medicines and Related Substances Control Act of 1997, an Act that threatened to impose economic sanctions on South Africa, should the government reduce prices of essential medicine.

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

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Research Objectives

- 1 We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- 2 We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- 3 We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- 4 We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



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