

The Informal Housing Crisis in Cape Town and South Africa

Honors Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction

The nation of South Africa, the most prosperous and developed country on the African continent, is experiencing an urban housing crisis. In every large city across the 'Rainbow Nation' there are increasing numbers of residents living in informal housing. Informal housing, also known as shack or squatter housing, is technically defined as occupying land without legally recognized tenure. Accordingly, the origin of many of the settlements was through what is known in South Africa as 'land invasion.' The majority of this land is publicly owned.

This is only part of the story. Shack housing generally does not comply with local building codes, potentially placing the residents at risk of a building collapse. Construction materials vary from corrugated iron and wood in better constructed houses to such rudimentary ones as cardboard and even mud. Typically shacks are without running water, sewer or electricity. Safety and privacy are almost non-existent for shack dwellers. Crime is rampant, personal space scarce and large scale shack fires and forced evictions are common.

The South African government addresses economic and housing inequality in its publication *A New Housing Policy and Strategy for South Africa* published in 1994. This report admits that "In South Africa, the effect of previous racially-based policies has left the distribution of income remains substantially skewed (sic)." Section 3.1, *Demographic Profile of South Africa (1995)*, describes the situation at hand: "South Africa has a rapidly increasing and urbanizing society but population growth will result in a numerically stable rural population. Coupled to this is a large existing and increasing housing backlog, due to very low rates of formal housing provision."¹ It is the very low rates of formal housing provision that have led

¹ <http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1994/housing.htm#2.1>

South African urban migrants to seek other lodging options. The vast majority of new migrants to cities lack access to desirable formal housing and are forced to dwell in shacks, either in someone's backyard – so called 'backyard shacks' – or in semi-organized shantytowns. 'Informal' developments are often unrecognized by government bodies; as such, the residents maintain a tenuous tenure over their homes.

Black South Africans have experienced the housing shortage burden far more than other racial groups. Relegated to a legacy of marginalized, predominantly rural housing,² Blacks (or 'Africans' as they will be here on referred to) have sought greater economic opportunities. These opportunities are primarily in large urban centers. The low rates of formal housing provision in cities have meant that there have been only formal structures for a select group of African in-migrants. The remaining migrants are forced to eke out shelter as best they can. In many cases, this manifests itself through informal dwellings.

The province of the Western Cape and particularly its largest city Cape Town, have experienced extremely high population growth rates over the past fifteen years. Indeed, since 2000 the Western Cape has experienced the highest growth rate of any province in South Africa. Couple this with a severe housing shortage, existing as far back as 1994, and you have a dire housing situation for in-migrating and, particularly low-income residents. Statistics show that Africans living in the Western Cape are more likely to live in informal housing than is the case in any other province. In her State of the Province address given on February 18th 2011, Western

² During apartheid the best agricultural land was reserved for whites. If there were African settlements found to be on 'prime' rural land they were simply re-located to marginal locales.

Cape Premier and former mayor of Cape Town Helen Zille admitted “expanding access to well-located housing...is one of the great challenges we face in this province.”³

This raises the question as to why the formal market has not responded to the increased demand for housing in the Western Cape and its largest city, Cape Town. This paper will focus on comparing and contrasting the Western Cape with other provinces in South Africa, in an attempt to determine what makes the situation there so unique. In multiple cases, Cape Town will be compared to other large South African metropolitan areas to further demonstrate its heightened problems. The thesis for this paper will focus on trying to answer this question by using quantitative and qualitative research sources.

Recent historical context is crucial to understanding how the problem originated, and as such that will be explored briefly. The rural to urban migration of the formerly marginalized ‘African’ population group will be explored. Three main reasons will be concluded for the preponderance of informal housing in the Western Cape and Cape Town. These include high rates of in-migration, a lack of well-located and buildable land and the stratified socio-economic make-up of the Cape Town metropolitan area. Finally, some recommendations for further research and action that could possibly be taken will be offered.

The Magnitude of Shack Dwelling in South Africa

The quantitative analysis for this project will be carried out by compiling various cross-tabulations for housing characteristics against certain demographic, social and economic indicators. The statistical data were compiled from materials in three government surveys, collected across a ten year period between 1997 and 2007. There were roughly five years

³ Complete transcript of the speech available at Helen Zille’s Facebook fan page: www.facebook.com/HelenZille

between each survey. The data were compiled by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), a branch of the South African federal government. Statistics South Africa recognizes four “Population Groups”⁴: Black (referred to in this project as African), Coloured, Indian/Asian & White. The Black (African) population group represents a majority in South Africa. Data gathered during the 2001 Census show that Africans represent approximately seventy nine percent of the total South African population. In contrast, Coloreds represent about nine percent and Whites roughly ten percent, with the Indian/Asian category filling out the last three percent.

StatsSA compiles its comprehensive demographic “Community Survey” at least every six months, but the variables for which data are collected often vary. Due to this, compiling cross-tabulations comparing different points in time provides data consistency challenges. Sample sizes also vary across surveys. Larger samples lead to increased precision when calculating unknown parameters, while smaller samples increase the chances for standard errors.⁵ As such, Community Surveys from 2000, 2001 & 2002 were combined for the purposes of creating a larger, more reliable sample of respondents.

Issues also arose across surveys when some measure of physical location was sought other than province of origin or of residence. The South African government abandoned their old local spatial classification system – magisterial districts – late in the nineteen nineties. In their place, new ‘municipalities’ were constructed, totally independent of the old districts. However, this does not always add up easily to existing, well-defined metropolitan areas since ‘municipalities’ were designed to include large surrounding rural areas. Most of the data for this

⁴ Designated as “Racial Groups” in previous years and political regimes

⁵ This can be backed up by mathematical methods such as the central line theorem or the law of large numbers

research are taken from the Community Survey files and these are readily accessible through the website statssa.gov.za.

In the 2007 Community Survey, StatsSA defined eleven unique “dwelling types” that would refer to the specific housing arrangements of each respondent.⁶ Two of the housing categories used were classed as informal:

- “Informal Dwelling/Shack in Backyard”
- “Informal Dwelling/Shack NOT in Backyard, e.g. in an Informal Settlement”

According to the 2007 Community Survey, 77.9% of the respondents to the “Type of Main Dwelling” question were of the “Black” population group. This included all surveyed South Africans regardless of physical setting (therefore including urban and rural South Africans). For context, 9.5% of those surveyed were “Colored” and 10.4% were considered “White”. The key housing categories considered for purposes of this study were: the two previously mentioned categories of informal housing, and for comparative purposes, “Housing or Brick Structure on a Separate Stand or Yard” which represents the primary form of housing in developed societies. Examples of these different housing types are provided on the next two pages with Figures 1, 2 and 3.

⁶ In the earlier (1997, 2000-2) Community Survey’s there was ten housing categories overall. The category “Worker’s Hostel” was added for the 2007 Survey. It did not have a profound effect on the data across the board though.



Figure 1: Example of Informal Housing in Shantytown
(Crossroads, Western Cape, South Africa)



Figure 2: Example of Informal Backyard Shacks
(Soweto, Gauteng, South Africa)



Figure 3: Example of Formal Housing
(Glen Valley, Western Cape, South Africa) ⁷

Table 1 (below), calculated using Community Survey 2007 data, illustrates the percentage of respective population groups residing in the key housing categories at that time.⁸ The disparities are apparent immediately. Only slightly more than one in two of the ‘African’ population group lives in the desirable “Brick” category. In contrast, almost four in five White and Colored South Africans live in brick dwellings.⁹ In total 17.4% of all Africans surveyed lived in ‘informal housing’, considerably higher than Coloreds with 6.8% and Whites with only 0.4%. Given the demographic preponderance of Africans in the population of South Africa, this means that somewhere in excess of 95% of all shack dwellers are African. While there are certainly members of other groups that find themselves in unfortunate living conditions, given

⁷ All housing examples courtesy of GoogleMaps street view

⁸ The ‘key housing categories’ do not include ALL housing classifications given in the Community Survey. Therefore, one hundred percent of dwellings among population groups are not represented.

⁹ The remaining ‘White’ South Africans live in Flats (9.0%) and Semi-Detached Housing (7.8%) with marginal proportions in other categories. The remaining Africans live in Traditional Housing (17.2%), Workers Hostels (3.7%) and Flats (3.0%) with marginal amounts in other categories.

their numerical dominance in the country, the overwhelming majority of South African shack dwellers should therefore be recognized as Africans.

Population Group	Brick	Backyard	Shack
African	53.4%	5.5%	11.9%
Coloured	78.1%	3.2%	3.6%
White	79.2%	0.1%	0.3%
SA Total	58.8%	4.6%	9.6%

Table 1: Key Housing Categories by Population Group

South Africa is a relatively urbanized country. In 1995, the Johannesburg-based Urban Foundation estimated that fifty-seven percent (57%) of South Africans lived in urban areas¹⁰. The overwhelming internal rural to urban migration that occurred following the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994 means that that number is now considerably higher. Estimates vary between sixty and seventy percent of South Africans as now living in urban areas.¹¹ Informal housing was, and continues to be, a legacy of the mass migration into cities and towns by formerly rural South Africans. As the number of migrants has outstripped the formal housing supply in urban areas, the overflow has been forced into informal housing.

Using Community Survey data it can be determined that the percentage of South Africans living in informal housing (individual backyard shacks or larger scale shantytowns) has not widely fluctuated across time. In 1997, only three years after the first election of an African majority government, 14.4% of all South Africans lived in informal housing. That number was

¹⁰ <http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/44.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.servicepublication.co.za/index.php/magazine/housing/288-rampant-urbanisation-drives-housing-shortage>

reduced five years later to 11.9% but by the 2007 survey the number had once again risen to 14.3%. It is clear, therefore, that despite a concerted and focused effort by the central government, the proportion of all South African residents in informal housing has remained relatively constant, at least over that ten year period spanning 1997-2007.

In summation, from part one of this report it has become obvious that South Africa is experiencing a widespread housing crisis. Many of its citizens are residing in informal housing. In addition, it has been quantitatively determined that it is Africans who reside in more than nineteen out of twenty South African shack houses. Accordingly, issues of informal housing primarily affect ‘African’ South Africans, also the majority population group. In addition, although the problem is not restricted to urban areas, a rural to urban migration and overall high urbanization rate has seen the issue manifested in larger South African population centers. Taking these considerations into account, the following sections of this report will address the housing conditions of the African population group living in urban areas. Housing conditions in the three largest and most influential South African metropolitan areas will also be examined.¹²



Figure 4: Provinces of South Africa

¹² Map courtesy of: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_South_Africa_with_English_labels.svg

The Exceptionality of the Western Cape

Examination of the separate provinces uncovers some telling statistics with regards to the housing of urban Africans in informal housing across South Africa.

Province	1997	2000-2	2007 ¹³
Western Cape	53.8%	45.0%	38.5%
Free State	35.9%	26.7%	19.5%
<i>South Africa</i>	<i>27.0%</i>	<i>22.4%</i>	<i>23.5%</i>
Gauteng	26.2%	23.6%	30.9%
North West	24.3%	13.4%	32.7%
Kwa-Zulu Natal	22.4%	22.6%	19.7%
Eastern Cape	21.6%	21.2%	16.3%
Northern Cape	21.3%	13.0%	N/A
Mpumalanga	16.8%	24.6%	10.5%
Limpopo	11.4%	10.6%	5.7%

Table 2: Percent of Urban Africans in Informal Housing by Province

The province of the Western Cape exhibits markedly higher levels of African shack dwelling in urban areas across all years surveyed, but particularly in the 'nineties. In the nineteen ninety seven (1997) Community Survey, Western Cape urban Africans were far more likely than Africans in any other province to be found living in informal housing. In the most recent

¹³ For the 2007 Community Survey there was no rural/urban designation provided. An 'urban' designation was therefore calculated using total populations of municipalities. Municipalities with over 250,000 residents were determined to be 'urban' while those with less were 'rural'. This is somewhat unreliable though as large tracts of many municipalities are clearly 'rural' in character. That is, they are not urbanized. This problem provides an example of the difficulties when working with inconsistent data.

Community Survey (2007) the Western Cape still clearly outstripped second ranked North West province in terms of the percent of Africans living in shacks.¹⁴

Much of the housing problem in the Western Cape, however, is concentrated in the city of Cape Town, which holds approximately two-thirds of the province’s total population. Cape Town is overwhelmingly the destination of choice for incoming migrants to the province of the Western Cape. Accordingly, rates of shack dwelling have consistently been higher than in the two other major metropolitan areas of Durban and Johannesburg, even while the informal housing gap has diminished over time.

Metro Area	1997	2007
Cape Town, WC	62.8%	38.5%
Durban, KZN	31.2%	25.4%
Johannesburg, GT	19.5%	26.4%

Table 3: Africans in Informal Housing by Major Metropolitan Area

Clearly, Cape Town has a remarkable proportion of Africans in shacks; the very high reading (62.8% of Africans in the metropolitan area live in informal houses) for the ‘ninety-seven survey is truly an anomaly. This reading is almost ten percentage points higher than for the whole province (see Table 2). The reduction in percentages, suggest that policies have clearly been implemented to reduce the proportion of informal housing in the province. Despite this reduction, Cape Town still far outpaces Johannesburg and Durban in terms of Africans living in informal housing and undoubtedly its housing ‘situation’ is far from being totally normalized in comparison with those other metropolitan areas. Moreover, the reduction in rates of Africans

¹⁴ This is made all the more remarkable when one considers the large influx of refugees from Zimbabwe to the North West province in recent years.

shack dwellers comes on the heels of an overall increase in the proportion of informal housing in the province, as demonstrated in the table below.

Province	1997	2000-2	2007
Western Cape	11.9%	11.7%	14.3%

Table 4: Informal Dwellings as a Percent of all Housing Units, Western Cape (Total Population)

One key behind this is a rapid population increase in the Western Cape. According to StatsSA estimates, the Western Cape added 1.3 million residents between the years of 1997 and 2007. From this, it can be determined that one in four Western Cape residents in 2007 were new residents:¹⁵ that is, they have lived in the province for less than ten years. In addition, the proportion of the total population in the Western Cape that is African has increased sharply in the past ten years. In the most recent Community Survey the percentage of Africans leapt to 30.1% (up from 20.9% in the 1996 government census) of the total surveyed population. This has caused a considerable demographic transition in a province that has historically harbored Africans as a racial minority. This suggests that the Western Cape, and specifically Cape Town, has emerged as an attractive location to Africans seeking to relocate for a variety of reasons. Table 5 demonstrates changes in population group proportions over the examined ten year period.

¹⁵ New residents, since 1997, include: newly born children and any person having migrated, internally or externally, into the Western Cape

Provinces ¹⁶	Africans				Coloreds			White		
	1996	2001	2007	<i>CHNG</i>	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
Western Cape	20.9%	26.7%	30.1%	9.2%	54.2%	53.9%	50.2%	20.8%	18.4%	18.4%
Northern Cape	44.4%	35.7%	39.8%	-4.6%	43.1%	51.6%	50.0%	11.0%	12.4%	10.0%
Gauteng	71.4%	73.8%	75.2%	3.8%	3.7%	3.8%	3.7%	22.0%	19.9%	18.4%
Kwa-Zulu Natal	82.1%	84.9%	86.0%	3.9%	1.4%	1.5%	1.4%	6.5%	5.1%	4.4%
Free State	84.4%	88.0%	87.1%	2.7%	3.0%	3.1%	3.0%	12.0%	8.8%	9.6%
Eastern Cape	86.1%	87.5%	87.6%	1.5%	7.6%	7.4%	7.5%	5.4%	4.7%	4.7%
North West	89.2%	91.5%	90.8%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	8.4%	6.7%	7.2%
Mpumalanga	90.5%	92.4%	92.0%	1.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%	7.9%	6.5%	6.8%
Limpopo	96.3%	97.2%	97.5%	1.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	2.8%	2.4%	2.2%
South Africa	76.7%	79.0%	79.0%	2.3%	8.9%	8.9%	9.0%	10.9%	9.6%	9.5%

Table 5: Population Groups as a Percent of Total Population over Time

Some Possible Explanations

Before concluding that the reason for the Western Cape's peculiarity is a particularly high rate of urbanization, other possible explanations should be explored. One knows, for example, that wealthier people are more able to afford formal housing structures than the poor. So could it be that, compared with the other provinces, African urban dwellers in the Western Cape are notably poorer? Despite its inflated numbers of shack dwellers, statistics show, however, that Western Cape shack dwelling residents are not exceptionally poor or

¹⁶ Table replicated from: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0301/P0301.pdf>

underemployed, at least when compared to those in other South African provinces. In fact on the contrary, these respondents performed quite well when measured against informal dwellers from other regions.

Province	More Wealthy	Less Wealthy
North West	25.0%	75.0%
Western Cape	23.4%	76.6%
Free State	19.6%	80.4%
Kwa-Zulu Natal	19.1%	80.9%
<i>South Africa</i>	<i>18.3%</i>	<i>81.7%</i>
Gauteng	17.7%	82.3%
Limpopo	12.0%	88.0%
Eastern Cape	11.4%	88.6%
Mpumalanga	10.4%	89.6%

Table 6: African Shack-Dwellers by Relative Wealth and by Province (2007)

Metropolitan Area	More Wealthy	Less Wealthy
Cape Town, WC	23.4%	76.6%
Durban, KZN	19.6%	80.4%
Johannesburg, GT	19.2%	80.8%

Table 7: African Shack-Dwellers by Relative Wealth and by Major Metropolitan Area (2007)

To measure ability to purchase formal housing, a first approach was to calculate a crude scale of material wealth using 2007 survey data.¹⁷ Material wealth was measured in terms of the ownership of five key household items.¹⁸ Each respondent was given a designated 'relative wealth ranking' scaled from zero through five. Zero (0) would demonstrate the ownership of no given household items while five (5) would indicate that all were owned. To better simplify comparison, respondents were then grouped into two categories: More Wealthy (four and five on the scale) and Less Wealthy (scaled three and under).

As the tables clearly demonstrate, among urban Africans the Western Cape and Cape Town shack dwellers actually exhibit somewhat higher levels of relative material wealth than is the case in most other South African provinces and major metropolitan areas. Therefore, it can be argued that the preponderance of informal housing in the Western Cape is probably not contingent on the relative poverty or low material wealth levels of its shack dwellers. In fact the higher levels of material wealth should indicate a pronounced ability of residents to accumulate wealth in the form of formal housing. The question must be asked as to why these residents have such difficulties obtaining stable access to formal housing.

These conclusions are further corroborated by an examination of the employment status of urban Africans. The 'formal' labor market generally only represents a percentage of the total economic activity in developing countries like South Africa. These formal jobs, much like formal housing, are recognized by the government through the payment of taxes and subsequently provided benefits. To supplement the mainstream formal labor market, a thriving informal labor market exists in South Africa. For example, many street vendors, domestic

¹⁷ 2007 Community Survey data was most reliable here due to its significantly larger sample size when compared to other years

¹⁸ These household items included: Computer, Television, Cellular Telephone, Refrigerator and Radio

workers and shoe shiners are often not officially recognized and therefore find themselves categorized in the ‘informal’ labor market.¹⁹ These jobs are often practiced outside of official rules and regulations, frequently profit margins or incomes are very low and job security, much like shack housing, is tenuous. Accordingly those in formal employment are more likely to be able to afford formal housing than those in informal employment. So could it be that the Western Cape and Cape Town are characterized by an unusually large proportion in informal work? Again using 2007 survey data the following tables were calculated.

Province	Formal Work	Informal Work
North West	70.6%	29.4%
Limpopo	65.1%	34.9%
Western Cape	63.6%	36.4%
<i>South Africa</i>	<i>61.5%</i>	<i>38.5%</i>
Mpumalanga	61.4%	38.6%
Gauteng	61.0%	39.0%
Kwa-Zulu Natal	59.2%	40.8%
Free State	55.8%	44.2%
Northern Cape	55.1%	44.9%
Eastern Cape	52.9%	47.1%

Table 8: Employment Sector by Province (2007) for African Shack Dwellers

¹⁹ “Spaza” Shops, small stores often run out of one’s residence, are very popular in South Africa. Historically these have been informal undertakings, but the central government has moved to formalize them in recent times.

Metropolitan Area	Formal Work	Informal Work
Cape Town, WC	63.6%	36.4%
Durban, KZN	60.1%	39.9%
Johannesburg, GT	59.6%	40.4%

Table 9: Employment Sector by Major Metropolitan Area (2007) for African Shack Dwellers

The results support the earlier conclusions based on an examination of differential wealth levels. We cannot conclude therefore that urban Africans dwelling in shacks in the Western Cape or in Cape Town are poorer than those elsewhere; in fact to the contrary. Certainly the Western Cape labor market for shack dwellers is markedly ahead of other parts of the former Cape Province and the Free State, another province with high rates for shack dwelling. Cape Town ranks several percentage points ahead of the two other major metropolitan areas Durban and Johannesburg.

Metropolitan Area	Relative Wealth		Employment Sector	
	More Wealthy	Less Wealthy	Formal	Informal
Cape Town	21.3%	51.3%	36.8%	44.1%
Durban	11.7%	35.4%	21.5%	30.8%
Johannesburg	10.8%	39.8%	21.4%	34.2%

Table 10: Percent Africans Dwelling in Shacks, by Economic Category (2007)

To further illustrate differing economic circumstances, the percent of Africans residing in informal housing in each metropolitan area was calculated, while holding relative wealth and employment constant. This was intended to demonstrate the different housing situations in

economically comparable circumstances across the three key metropolitan areas. It was felt that this was an effective measure, as all respondents would reside in a highly urbanized area.²⁰

From Table 10, it can be determined that a ‘More Wealthy’ African in Cape Town is around twice as likely to reside in a shack, compared to those from Durban or Johannesburg. A notable disparity also occurs with respect to the Formal / Informal distinction. Assuming that ‘Formal’ work is more permanent than ‘Informal’ work, it seems remarkable that 36.8% of formal job holders should reside in tenuous shack housing. This clearly indicates a lack of abundant formal housing, as it must be assumed that most of these residents are of relatively stable income.

Lastly, taking only ‘More Wealthy’ Africans holding ‘Formal’ employment in the major metropolitan areas, the percent living in informal housing was calculated. These were the Africans determined most likely to have the resources to access high quality, and formalized, housing. Again, Africans with greater economic resources were around twice as likely to still reside in shacks in Cape Town.

Metropolitan Area	Informal Housing
Cape Town	17.3%
Durban	9.3%
Johannesburg	8.6%

Table 11: Percent ‘More Wealthy’ and Formally Employed Africans in Informal Housing

²⁰ The percentages shown will demonstrate the percent living informally versus living formally, ie 20% in ‘More Wealthy’ means 20% of more wealthy Africans reside in shacks and 80% reside in a type of formal housing

From the tables above, it can be definitively concluded that Western Cape shack dwellers possess above average material wealth and a relatively high rates of formal work. These key ‘quality of life’ indicators should demonstrate an upwardly mobile socio-economic class at the lower levels of South African consumption. Bluntly, it appears that shack dwellers are better off in the Western Cape than in other parts of South Africa. The question to be asked is why the relative wealth and employment has not transformed into a larger percent living in formal housing? Furthermore, as Table 10 shows, while relative wealth and employment status do indeed make a difference to housing outcomes, so too does metropolitan area. So what are the circumstances that have given rise to this situation? To examine this question first requires a brief overview of the historical context of the Cape Province and Cape Town.



Figure 5: Western Cape Province, South Africa ²¹

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Western_Cape_with_towns_and_roads.svg

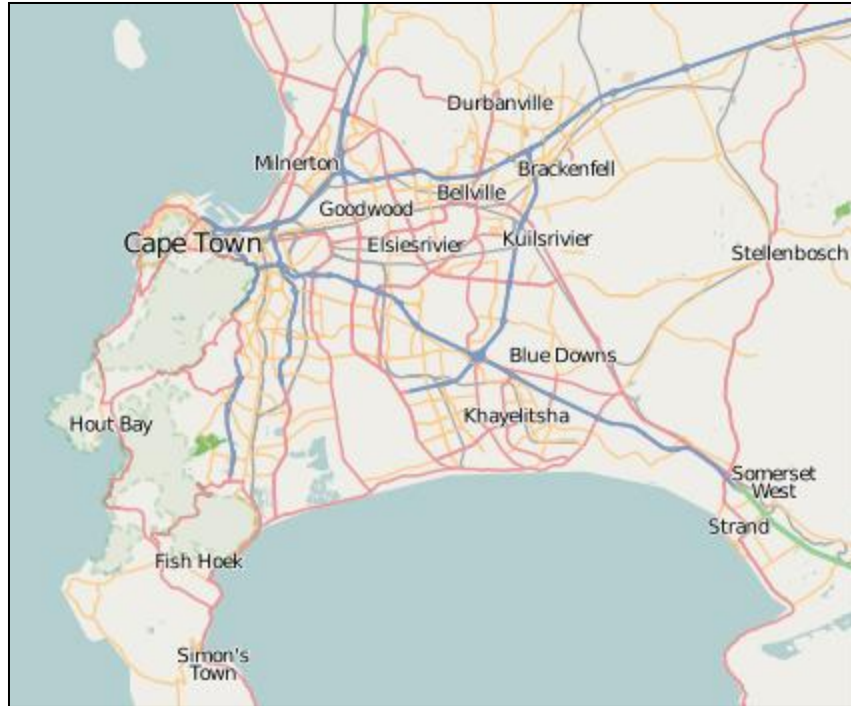


Figure 6: Cape Town Metropolitan Area, Western Cape, South Africa 22

Western Cape and Cape Town: A Historical Perspective

The province of the Western Cape lies at the southwestern tip of the African continent. It is a portion of the former Cape Province. According to the United Nations Development Programme's *South Africa Human Development Report 2003*, the Western Cape is the most developed province in the nation, comfortably ahead of Gauteng. While a great portion of the land in the Western Cape is rural and sparsely populated, around two-thirds of the total population resides in the Cape Town metropolitan area. Other notable population centers are the port city of George, rapidly growing Somerset West and the popular tourist and wine-producing town of Stellenbosch.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:OpenStreetMap_Cape_Town_small.svg

The city of Cape Town is a modern, relatively affluent metropolis. Cape Town enjoys a thriving economy based around its strategically placed harbor, manufacturing, and a growing tourist and service industry. Foreign trade is crucial to the economy of Cape Town and the Western Cape. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, Cape Town has the sixty second largest gross domestic product of any defined “urban area” in the world, ahead of such cities in developed countries as Athens and Vancouver.

During the apartheid era, the western part of the Cape Province, including all of what is now the Western Cape, was a “Colored Labor Preference Area”. Africans were only permitted entry to the Western Cape, therefore, conditional upon pre-arranged employment. In addition, employers (often seeking cheap labor) were forced to show that no Colored person could fill such jobs. The Eiselen Line, demarcated in 1954, provided a legal racial boundary disallowing the movement of Africans into the western parts of the then Cape Province.²³ This led to the forcible removal and exclusion of Africans from areas around Cape Town. Africans were relegated to ‘homelands’ far away from western Cape economic development and effectively left to create and maintain their own community institutions and infrastructure.²⁴

These homelands were located in the eastern part of the Cape Province and were designated primarily for African residency.²⁵ The Transkei and the Ciskei were allotted for the ethnic Xhosa in marginal, overwhelmingly rural portions of the province. According to John Western there was a “vast scale of poverty, malnutrition and land degradation” in the Transkei and the Ciskei. The two Xhosa homelands were also hotbeds of political movements, both

²³ According to Cornie Groewald’s piece *Western Cape: an overview* the inland eastern border of the Western Cape closely follows the original Eiselen Line

²⁴ A great deal of this information is taken from John Western’s *Africa is Coming to the Cape*

²⁵ But unlike ‘White’ areas the homelands were not mutually exclusive. A small percentage of homeland residents were White or Colored.

declaring their independence throughout their histories. The politically dominant African National Congress (ANC) traces its early roots back to Transkei.

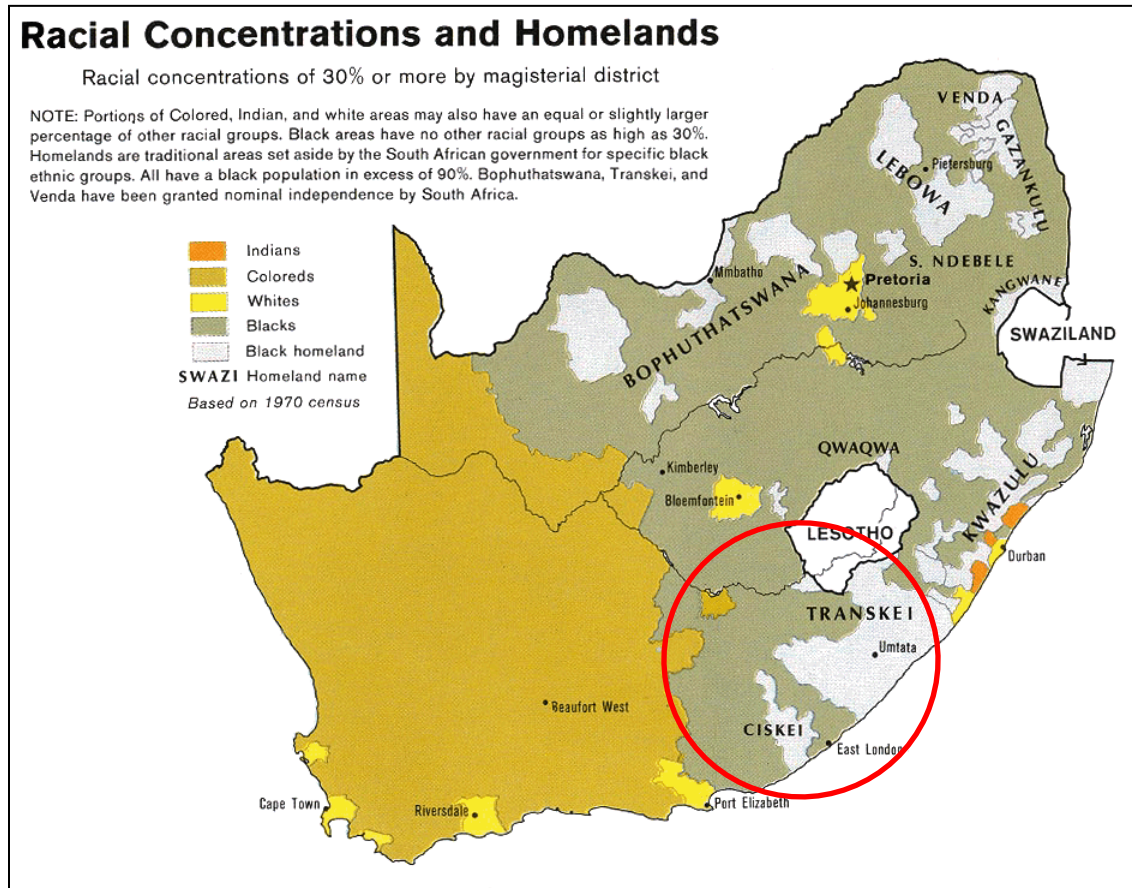


Figure 7: Former South African Homelands and Racial Concentrations (1970)

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By the mid-1980s a series of factors came together to reverse this exclusion and so bring about an influx of Africans into the western parts of Cape Province and metropolitan Cape Town.

- Firstly, international political pressures surrounding the highly restrictive Pass Laws,²⁷ an earmark of the apartheid regime, were increasing. The laws were repealed

²⁶ Map courtesy of: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:South_Africa_racial_map,_1979.gif

²⁷ Africans needed "Passes" to allow them entry into White parts of South Africa

in 1986, allowing Africans relatively free access to the 'white' cities of South Africa for the first time in many decades. The restrictive Eiselen Line was also abolished with this decision.

- Secondly, the demand for labor in Cape Town grew considerably as the city's economy expanded rapidly. Without the restrictive practices of the Pass Laws, employers were keen to take advantage of a pool of unskilled but inexpensive labor.
- Lastly, land in the eastern Cape homelands had become so degraded that conditions were deplorable. Even subsistence agriculture had become unreliable, as the overpopulated homelands had demanded unsustainable crop yields on poor quality soils.

As a result of these factors, Cape Town's total metropolitan population doubled between 1980 and 1996. The township of Khayelitsha was officially designated in 1985, with city officials using the area effectively as a holding camp for incoming migrants. Khayelitsha was previously an isolated, barren, sandy portion of the Cape Flats. The land was soon overrun with new migrants seeking financial opportunities and stable access to food and clean water. Modern Khayelitsha is now a sprawling, semi-informal township widely lacking acceptable services.

Another more centrally located informal township, known as Crossroads, was fraught with conflicting fortunes in the nineteen eighties. Crossroads was Cape Town's second township when it was settled in 1975. Riots often broke out throughout the 'eighties as shacks were frequently bulldozed and residents were forcibly relocated to more peripheral townships like Khayelitsha.²⁸ Despite its contentious history, Crossroads still remains a designated informal settlement. After more than thirty years of struggling, residents (often second and third

²⁸ http://www.capetown.at/heritage/history/apart_influx_shanty_art.htm

generation Capetonians) are desperate to rectify their housing situations but they are often reluctant to leave their homes.

The growth of Cape Town in the past thirty years has been accompanied by a massive shortage of formal housing within the city. According to the *Five Year Integrated Housing Plan (2009-10 – 2013/14)* produced by the City of Cape Town, four hundred thousand families “are currently without adequate shelter.”²⁹ This release (released in 2007 and revised in 2009-10) admits that “the plan...cannot immediately redress the City’s current housing backlog.” Residents seeking formal housing are requested to place their names on the “waiting list,” although this does not guarantee prompt construction of formal housing. Some Cape Town residents have been on the waiting list for more than twenty years. With such abysmal housing prospects, it should be noted that the City of Cape Town appears to be in direct conflict with a crucial portion of the South African Constitution. As Chapter Two, Section Twenty-Six reads:

“1. Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.”

Tracing back to the 1997 data, it can be noted just how serious the situation was for new migrants at the time. Table 12 below demonstrates the percentage of each defined group that was seen to be living in informal housing at the time. As the table clearly shows, the situation in Cape Town for Africans bears no resemblance to the housing of Africans in Johannesburg and Durban. It is quite remarkable that 91.3% of all Africans who should be seen as recent migrants to Cape Town, working informally lived in shacks in 1997. The number for the other major metropolitan areas was barely one third of this amount at that time. Overall, the lack of quality, formal

²⁹<http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/Housing/Documents/Publications/HOUSING%20FIVE%20YEAR%20PLAN%2009%202010.pdf>

housing for Africans in Cape Town is more than apparent through data, but the question remains as to why this prevails. The next section of this paper will attempt to arrive at some conclusions.

Period of Migration Employment Sector x Metropolitan Area	Arrived Pre-1990		Arrived Post-1990	
	Formal Workers	Informal Workers	Formal Workers	Informal Workers
Cape Town	40.0%	73.1%	67.2%	91.3%
Durban	29.5%	57.1%	27.4%	33.3%
Johannesburg	14.0%	23.3%	23.7%	31.8%

Table 12: Recent and Non-Recent Migrants, Percent Living in Shacks (1997)

Understanding Cape Town's Housing Crisis

It can be qualitatively argued that the housing crisis in the Cape Town area is the outcome of a combination of three key factors. These factors have conspired to create a shortage of formal housing that has forced residents (particularly Africans) to resort to living in informal residencies. The three identified factors are:

- Extremely high rates of urbanization that occurred (and are still occurring) in Cape Town following the repeal of the Pass Laws. High rates of rural to urban migration have further driven a massive population increase in the metropolitan area. The population of the Cape Town metropolitan area has tripled in the past twenty-five years. High rates of urbanization have consequences for both in-coming migrants and city officials trying to acceptably house new residents.
- A pronounced lack of buildable land has made the construction of new government subsidized housing difficult. The sandy terrain and undulating (somewhat mountainous) topography surrounding Cape Town have resulted in a scarcity of land

that has not already seen development. In addition, this scarcity has driven Cape Town's raw land prices higher than any other South African city. The city government has been reluctant to use well-located, high priced land for low density, subsidized housing. And thirdly,

- The development and maintenance of apartheid-like segregated neighborhoods based on socio-economic status and 'population groups'. Through this Cape Town has become the most unequal city in South Africa in terms of wealth distribution. Well-to-do Capetonian neighborhoods are reluctant to permit subsidized housing to be constructed within their jurisdictions.

A detailed explanation of each issue is included below:

The Rapid Urbanization of Cape Town and its Consequences

Part of this issue was touched on earlier in the section "Western Cape & Cape Town: A Historical Perspective." To recap, following the abolition of the Eiselen Line and the repeal of the Pass Laws in 1986, Cape Town became a prime destination for Africans seeking to relocate from the former homelands. In Munyaradzi Makoni's recent study of service provision in Cape Town he recognized that "(economic) growth is the magnet that continues to attract people of all colors, both skilled and unskilled, to Cape Town."³⁰ Makoni admits that "spiraling population growth is a constant concern" to city officials and that the city's total population was likely to top four million in the next few years. Meanwhile the United Nations Habitat Report *The State of African Cities (2010)* estimates that Cape Town's population will comfortably eclipse six million in the next ten to fifteen years. The steady and constant population growth leaves city officials

³⁰ <http://www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp#art1>

little time or opportunity to deliver adequate numbers of quality formal housing units. Meanwhile the much-maligned “housing waiting list” continues to grow, as the “rural poor” continue migrating to Cape Town from Western and Eastern Cape provinces.³¹

Poorer residents’ frustrations and impatience towards waiting for formal housing has resulted in a unique, albeit illegal, trend in Cape Town. When government subsidized Reconstruction and Development Program Houses (RDP homes) are built it often takes a period of time for rightful owners to take possession and subsequently move in.³² Desperate, under-housed families, also seeking steady housing, recognize that such brand-new housing sits vacant and decide to illegally occupy the homes. These so-called “door kickers” present a difficult political problem to city officials because the squatters, and accompanying non-governmental organizations, naturally believe they hold an equal right to the houses.³³

Perhaps partially in response, the Cape Town city government has developed a controversial anti-land invasion unit. The unit is specially designed to legally remove informal residents from high value public land. Much like the enforcement of the Pass Laws in the ‘eighties, this unit has attracted negative international press. The case of the “Symphony Way Settlers” was heavily publicized in Western newspapers in the lead up to the 2010 Soccer World Cup. These residents were originally self-described ‘door kickers’ who had been evicted from newly built RDP homes. In response, the residents informally occupied the median of Symphony Way, a vital thoroughfare in far eastern metropolitan Cape Town. After losing a drawn out, eighteen-month constitutional legal battle against the anti-eviction unit, the settlers were once

³¹ http://www.shf.org.za/downloads/Trends_WC.pdf

³² The Redevelopment and Development Program was created by Nelson Mandela’s government in 1994. The program provides subsidized houses for all South African citizens designated to be making less than particular income per annum. The subsidy can only be used once in a South Africans life time.

³³ John Western speaks at length about these problems in *Africa is Coming to the Cape*

again removed from their homes. This time, the residents were moved into the Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area (known colloquially as Blikkiesdorp; Afrikaans for Tin Town). Blikkiesdorp, a conglomeration of tin shacks measuring three by six meters wide, is located far away from central city amenities and mass transit options. It is effectively operated as a government constructed shantytown; the area is officially designated as an “Informal Settlement.” Apartheid-era riot vans with police control the movement of residents. Conditions in Blikkiesdorp have been unfavorably compared to concentration camps by residents.³⁴



Figure 8: Satellite Map of Blikkiesdorp, Western Cape, South Africa

(This TRA is set back approximately three hundred feet away from the nearest road with Cape Town International Airport bordering immediately west. There is only one entrance, on the southeast corner and it is guarded day and night.

Residents must abide by a 10pm curfew or risk arrest.)

³⁴ http://www.iolproperty.co.za/roller/news/entry/mfulenin_families_to_move_into, <http://antieviction.org.za/2010/04/20/blikkiesdorp-its-a-concentration-camp/> and the short documentary *Tin Town* by Barefoot Workshops Inc. were used heavily to comprehend the situation in Blikkiesdorp



Figure 9: Street level view of Blikkiesdorp (all dwellings are approximately 200/ft²)

This situation is a well-publicized microcosm of the lengths that the Cape Town city government has been forced to go to in order to house its residents. The construction of a government sanctioned and controlled informal settlement raises many ethical questions. The fact that many residents were clearly more satisfied in their original dwellings should not be discarded. The Blikkiesdorp residents were relocated to a peripheral location, on relatively low value land, bordering the airport. Local government officials point to the lack of unused but well located land as a reason for the poor physical location of settlements like Blikkiesdorp.

The Lack of Buildable Land

Cape Town does not have the best physical location from the standpoint of an expanding metropolis. Mountain ranges to the east and west limit available sites for the construction of homes. Furthermore, in the southeastern part of the metropolitan area overwhelmingly sandy soils make foundation construction difficult and expensive for formal homes. Coastlines hem urban development to the west and south. High value agricultural land, northeast towards

Stellenbosch and south of the ‘City Bowl’, is too expensive for local governments to acquire. This combination of geographies makes for limited growth and expansion opportunities in the metropolitan region. Informal settlements increasingly sprout in dangerous or marginal locations.³⁵

The current ruling Democratic Alliance (DA) party points to these constraints as the main reasons the housing backlog cannot be successfully addressed. DA mayoral candidate Patricia de Lille recently admitted that “we are running out of land for housing, particularly in the southern parts and Hout Bay.”³⁶ In her latest State of the Province address Western Cape Premier Helen Zille explicitly pointed to the fact that “much more land” is required for the purposes of upgrading existing informal settlements. According to Professor Vanessa Watson, from the University of Cape Town, “(new) land is more difficult to get a hold of in Cape Town...so densities continue to climb in existing settlements.”³⁷ As densities climb in these settlements, the danger of widespread shack-fires and disease increase. Although approximately ten thousand hectares of Greenfield land has been identified within the metropolitan area, it is estimated that ten times that is needed. The relatively low density of the RDP public housing model does not mesh with Cape Town’s pronounced lack of land (an example of this low-density model is demonstrated in Figure 10 at the end of this section).

One proposed solution to this lack of land has been to construct higher density publicly owned housing developments. The *Five Year Integrated Housing Plan 2009/10 – 2013/14* report suggests well-located pockets within the urban core could be used to create more dense housing. The *Social Housing Trends* report from March 2010 suggests an increased emphasis on “medium

³⁵ A great example is the settlement of Imizamo Yethu that developed up the side of a mountain close to Hout Bay

³⁶ <http://www.capetimes.co.za/i-d-be-a-mayor-for-all-ehrenreich-1.1056586>

³⁷ Taken from personal correspondence with Prof. Watson

density housing in good locations.” The key for local officials remains finding well-located land that is not highly contested by residents keen to maintain their property values and supposed neighborhood aesthetic.



Figure 10: Relatively Low Density RDP Homes (Soweto, Gauteng, South Africa)

A Socially and Economically Separated City

The Development Action Group (DAG) is a non-governmental organization in that works to “eliminate poverty and help build integrated urban neighborhoods in South Africa.”³⁸ DAG writer and activist Ms. Anzabeth Tonkin’s report *City’s new housing plan entrenches old divides* paints a particularly critical picture of the social landscape in Cape Town. “In Cape Town,” the report describes, “class and racial divides are still as tangible and functional as 15 years ago.” Ms. Tonkin’s report points to the social polarization of Cape Town and the separation of socio-

³⁸ Taken from DAG’s mission statement on their website: <http://www.dag.org.za/>

economic groups based around the placement of neighborhoods and their bounding physical obstacles.³⁹

After describing that suburban identities are constructed, protected and reinforced in particular ways (for instance ‘colored and poor’ or ‘white and wealthy’), Ms. Tonkin admits that the city government is set on maintaining these discourses. She notices that all of the new, medium-density subsidized developments are slated for construction in “black and colored” communities. The report claims that higher density subsidized homes in poorer areas represent verticalization of existing ghettos and low-income housing. Ms. Tonkin explains that although the city will have indeed provided formal homes it has done very little to improve the prospects of residents.⁴⁰

While Ms. Tonkin’s comments point to the social stratification of Cape Town along racial and class lines, it needs to be clarified that not all Africans in Cape Town are poor and not all whites are wealthy. Rather there is a set of discourses that comes with the implementation of public housing that surrounds the asset accumulation interests of existing landowners. The point is that certain neighborhoods of Cape Town have been allocated identities within local mindsets. For instance, while researching the relatively new suburb of Delft (northeast of the ‘City Bowl’) it was clearly stated that there were nine townships within the community. Six in the north were populated by Colored residents and three in the south were populated by Africans. It was also stated that Delft was for “poor” residents. A profile for the suburb had henceforth been constructed. Ms. Tonkin’s comments should point out that all future developments are planned for poorer “black and colored” areas, rather than identifying the locales on race alone.

³⁹ Highways, topographic boundaries and man-made barriers among other things

⁴⁰ The report can be found here: <http://www.dag.org.za/docs/2010/CityNewHousing5Jan2010.pdf>

To the defense of the city, middle class and affluent suburbs have been hostile to public housing projects.⁴¹ Existing residents are concerned that public housing will negatively affect the values of homes. Concerns surrounding crime and public safety are also rife. These negative attitudes of Cape Town middle classes have effectively ensured that public housing is constructed far away from the urban core.⁴²

Concluding Comments

From this research it can undoubtedly be argued that Africans are desperately under-housed in the Western Cape and in Cape Town. City officials clearly face an uphill battle to attempt to meet their constitutional obligations in terms of providing housing for all residents. Further research should be conducted before peripheral densification projects are constructed; they could be an exercise in re-enforcing difficult situations for residents. As the local economy of Cape Town continues to expand it would appear officials must find answers to the housing situation. Unfortunately the waiting list continues to grow and the housing shortage, now more than a generation old, shows no signs of a reversal.

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⁴¹ While no explicit examples could be uncovered of hostility towards public housing, many NGO reports (and even the five year housing plan) alluded to NIMBYism that had occurred in higher wealth communities. None of the reports presented a hard case of such opposition though.

⁴² http://www.hsrc.ac.za/HSRC_Review_Article-221.phtml

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