

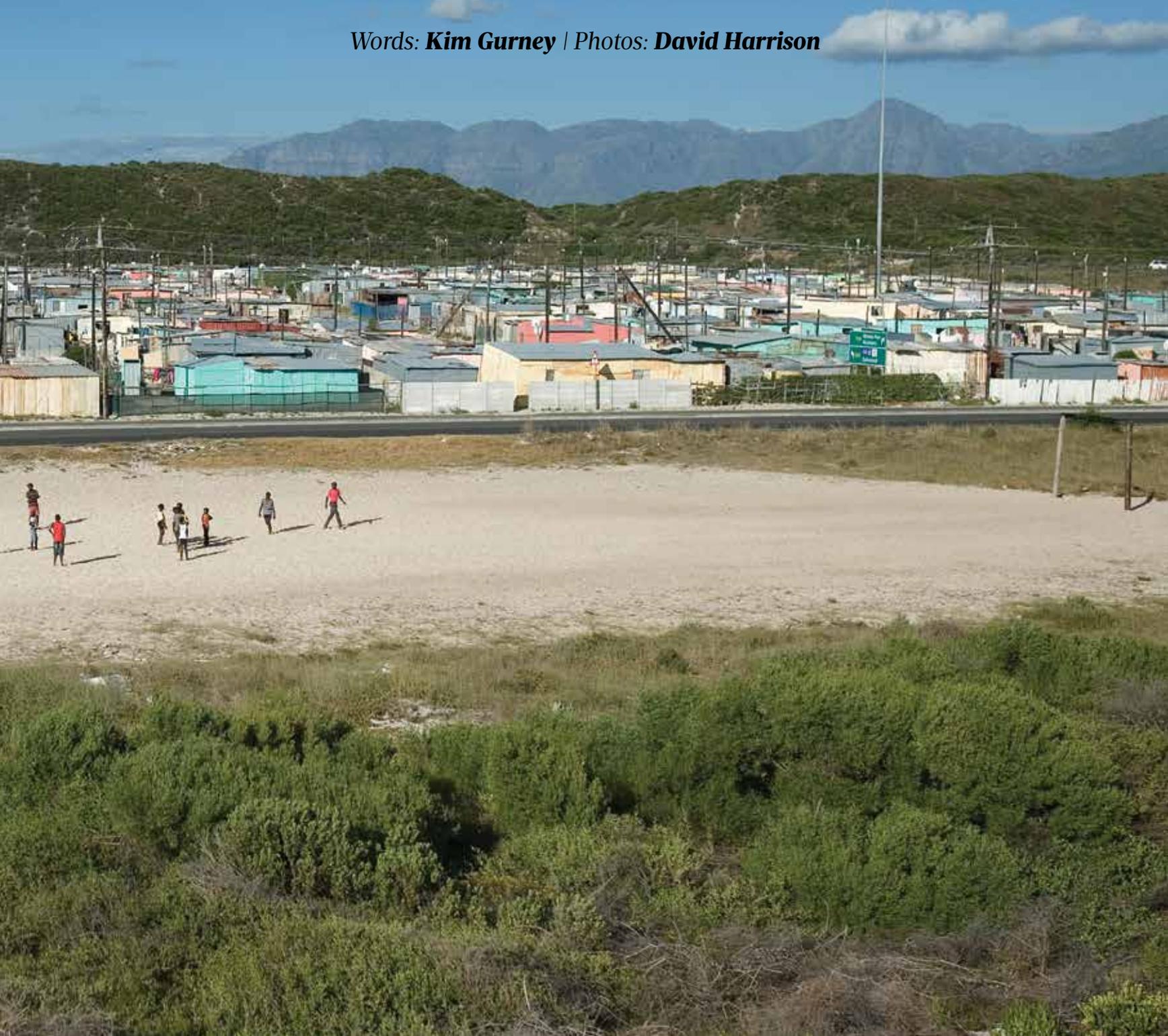


CAPE TOWN

EDGE DESIGN

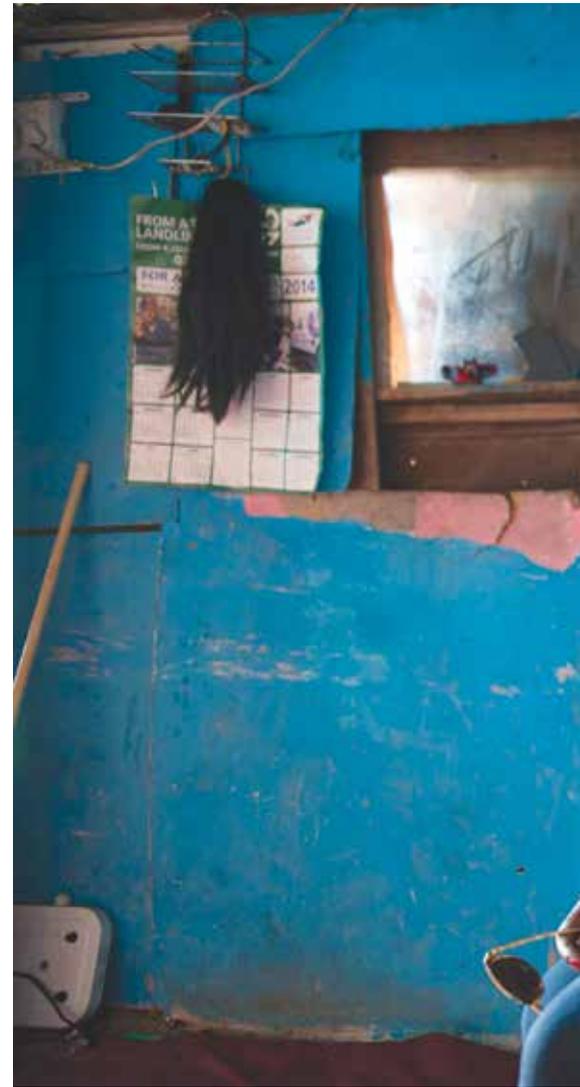
Can design avert the toilet wars in Cape Town? We explore urban form and social change by comparing two majority black Cape Town neighbourhoods: Khayelitsha, a sprawling settlement on the city's eastern periphery, and Dunoon, a post-apartheid neighbourhood located on a busy northern transport corridor. Both reveal a common ethos of self-built propositions. The citizen, it seems, is delivering the city

Words: **Kim Gurney** / Photos: **David Harrison**



The approach road to Lookout Hill in Khayelitsha, a 30-year-old township established during apartheid, is dotted with potholes that the cars ahead traverse in confident zigzags familiar with the worst. Situated about 35km outside Cape Town, Khayelitsha is home to an estimated 450 000 people (or 391 000 according to 2011 census figures). Its sidewalks teem to either side: Afro Zorro Car Wash, window frames, mattresses, bathtubs and basins, signs reading “Trailers for hire” and “Scrap for sale”, cash stores and hair salons, a man pulling an overloaded bin, a suitcase abandoned on its wheels, chemical toilets lined up under a tarpaulin, roadworks ahead with a sign: STOP/ RY GO”. Like any other South African neighbourhood in early 2014, the street poles are also festooned with electioneering posters. “Step up for Diversity” urges the ruling African National Congress (ANC). “Register to Win” says the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA). “Don’t vote, organise”, admonishes a bus shelter stencil.

That is exactly what a constellation of non-governmental organisations based in Khayelitsha have done. The Social Justice Coalition (SJC) and partners triggered a Commission of Inquiry into policing in Khayelitsha, instituted by the premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille. Its daily hearings at Lookout Hill community hall are gathering testimony around alleged inefficiencies and a breakdown in relations with the community, to make findings and ultimately national recommendations. Indeed, the complainants suggest the case is emblematic of post-apartheid realities in other townships and informal settlements, an idea replicated by their distinctive black T-shirts with white circular logo: “Safe Khayelitsha! Safe South Africa!” In contrast, the police underscores in its opening statement a rejection of systemic failures in favour of a contextual approach. This ideological seesaw infuses proceedings from the outset and also the larger anvil upon which they repeatedly turn.



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Outside the Lookout Hill community hall, a boy washes his body in the water of a blocked drain. Inside, Khayelitsha residents bear witness to their daily lives. The texture of their testimonies is a startling weave linking everyday acts, like sanitation, with vulnerability to brutal violence. The voice that brings this story home, in a quietly determined way, belongs to Nontebeko Nduna, a community activist for SJC and a mother of two. Nduna sits before the formal commission behind black-cloaked tables, sleek microphones and large contextual maps pinned to the walls in front of a packed public hall. Half the listeners wear headphones to better understand her testimony that a translator renders live from isiXhosa into English. She manages to elegantly carry off the black T-shirt of the activists' coalition with high-



area when people are going to the N2 to help themselves.”

In winter, adds Nduna, when the sun sets earlier, she carries her cellphone to light the way as well as illuminate the interior of the toilet. “So that is a thing that attracts the person to rob you because they want the cell phone you are holding.” Nduna’s recommendations to the commission include more visibility: “in town there are police riding horses ... and if we could have lights”, she adds. At one point during her testimony, Nduna stands on her chair to better point out on a map to the commissioners exactly where she is talking about. Two weeks later, she takes me there.

We are standing in a coral-coloured communal toilet in Site C. On the right are washbasins, and through an open doorway three toilets. The door to the first is broken and the flush is permanently running. The seat is missing. Graffiti on the left says “Sex me plz” and on the right is a crude pornographic drawing. There is no toilet paper and no lighting. Further along are three open showers. This communal facility opens at five in the morning and shuts at nine in the evening. During the day, says the attendant, it’s so busy there are often queues. She keeps the place as clean as possible. A woman is scrubbing her laundry in basins outside. Further along, a water tap stands in a circular concrete drum. An informal business set up across the way in a container signs itself: Bobo Bread, Handmade Belts. I am briefly thrown back to September 2011 and a visit to the Habitar Furniture Fair in Helsinki, a precursor event to the Finnish capital’s tenure as 2012 World Design Capital. An exhibition of “outhouses” caught my eye—outside toilets for second homes in the countryside. The modernist array of wood, glass and eco-friendly gimmicks included a cascade of brightly coloured flowers down a tiered flatpack model—all the better for soaking up excess rainwater—and the winning design by Yoshimasa Yamada with windows to mimic the

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Ongoing protest action has politicised the toilet, casting it as a cipher of freedom

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pinned hair, deep pink fingernails and matter-of-fact tone. Nduna lives in a shack in CT section of Taiwan informal settlement in Site C, she explains. Her family has an electricity box but no water and no toilet, so they have to use communal toilets about 10-15 minutes’ walk away. “Others use portable toilets but unfortunately we don’t have them because you need space to have a portable toilet and we don’t have space in our house to put that portable toilet,” she says. “So when the communal toilets are closed, I walk towards the N2 [highway] where I help myself.” Walking that distance, she explains, anything can happen because the communal toilets close at night and there are no lights. “So anyone can follow you and do anything. People get robbed. They get raped. There is nothing that does not happen in that

knots of trees. How such innovations would read back in the Western Cape where local politics was fraught with the issue of open toilets was a mystery back then. More so in 2014 as Cape Town assumes the World Design Capital mantle with its own tagline, “Live Design, Transform Life”, and the strategic mission to promote design as a tool for making “better cities for people and improve lives within an African context”. Ongoing protest action in the interim has further politicised the toilet, casting it as a cipher of freedom. Nduna, who has lived in Khayelitsha since 1997, is standing in the alley outside the communal toilets wearing orange and yellow drop earrings, big brown sunglasses and the same black T-shirt as before. The high-pinned hair is gone but her quietly poised demeanour and deliberate manner are unmistakable. She points down the street fronted both sides by dense dwellings to the pink building where she lives next door. There is one streetlight between and it hasn’t been working for years. At night, when the toilets are closed, she must navigate a myriad of shacks towards the N2 and find a place to relieve herself, where she becomes vulnerable to attack. “This area is one of the most dangerous,” says fellow SJC activist Luthando Tokota. Nduna nods in agreement and they both fall silent. “Let’s move on,” he suggests. We cross a busy road from shacks onto a piece of veld adjacent the N2 in the RR Section. “Do you want to cross over?” Tokota asks and, as we set foot on the grass edge, I better understand why. It is difficult to sustain a conversation in the nauseating waft. “People get robbed, they get raped, and also the accidents ... You can see the distance and all of them have to use this space,” he says. “Any questions?” In his narrow-brimmed black hat, flash buckle with an eagle insignia, and black briefcase on the back seat of my car, Tokota is a suave guide to the sanitation realities in Khayelitsha. We start with dozens of toilet innards lined up on the roadside for collection before traversing the bush, portable toilets (or “porta potties”),



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chemical toilets and different versions of flush. The latter are usually communal and padlocked, with five families officially sharing three keys per unit. New green-doored loos in RR Section provide some relief—but only for families closest, and with access to keys, says Tokota. Many are in disrepair: chemical toilets assembled without concrete bases are unstable and sited in vulnerable positions—in one instance, next to a swamp. These kinds of issues are reflected in a social audit that SJC published in 2013, which it conducted on 256 chemical toilets across four Khayelitsha areas. “People don’t want to use them, they better go to the bushes to relieve themselves. Just imagine there are heavy rains,” says Tokota pointing to the swamp. As if on cue, I narrowly avoid stepping in excrement, parked like a judgment delivered right next to the unstable toilet. “And at night it is also a risk,” adds Nduna. “You can’t see those things [toilets]. You can come inside here and anyone can grab you and do whatever they try to do. It’s not a good place.” Nduna’s very personal story about sanitation was only part of her testimony to the commission. She also gave evidence about a niece knocked

over and dragged by a police car (the case remains unsolved), and closed with an anecdote about vigilantism. The picture she painted was harrowing, although she adopted a fatalistic tone in the narration: “Why would our family be any special or different to any other family whose case is incomplete?” After delivering her testimony, she broke down and silently wept, folding her head in her hands. Nduna confirms speaking to the commission was an emotional experience but worth it to make the stories known. “At least something comes out of it,” she says. “I think it will be helpful. There are so many things that were not known but now are out. Everything is out there now, everybody knows about it.” The general hope among complainants is that any recommendations may also be helpful elsewhere. As Tokota says: “Here in Khayelitsha, the problem that we are facing is the problem that people in Gugulethu are facing. But there, for example, in Crossroads, there are no NGOs like SJC. So at least Khayelitsha has got these NGOs who can expose these kinds of issues.” While that may be so, the police during the commission adopted a bad-apple defence. During Nduna’s proceedings, for instance, legal counsel

for the police, Norman Arendse, said: “If we can get the case numbers and any other particulars ... so the miscreants can be brought to book and be disciplined.” This case-by-case approach is consistent with the SAPS official opening statement: “The test of whether or not these complaints collectively indicate general incompetence or a breakdown in community relations must be contextual, and objective. In other words, we cannot use the standards of policing found in Constantia or Camps Bay or Rondebosch [more privileged suburbs in Cape Town] to be the same as those [of] Khayelitsha. We will therefore submit that there is no systemic failure of policing in Khayelitsha if one takes into account the social and economic conditions of the people of Khayelitsha.” This includes police resources. A key statistic emerges in the testimony of Dr Gilbert Lawrence, who heads up the Department of Community Safety in the Western Cape government. He cites the ratio of police per person in Khayelitsha as 1:1 675—it is as high as 1:1 702 in Harare Section. West across the city, in the Atlantic suburb of Camps Bay, the ratio is 1:38. According to Glenn Schooling, a retired policeman and former deputy provincial commissioner of operations who also testified at the commission, the problem with places like Khayelitsha and Nyanga is numbers. “As long as you have 200 to 300 dockets given to a detective you will never have a positive result,” he said. “We can do whatever we like, it’s not going to work.” Management is also an issue: “We need the gatekeepers to be there to do their job properly and to take pride in the work they do.”

Over the course of the commission, the police accepted some serious problems while sticking to a case-by-case approach. Social activist Zackie Achmat for one was not impressed. Testifying as director of Ndifuna Ukwazi, one of the complainants, he said of the police: “It’s not a case of rotten apples, the whole orchard is rotten.” He nonetheless conceded the need to “find

those good apples and work with them”. In his affidavit, Achmat also put a different spin on the security issue. He wrote: “Most of my comrades and colleagues feel unsafe in their homes, on the street, on public transport, in schools, and elsewhere. Their lives are blighted by crime, which sometimes involves extreme violence.” Achmat also condemned as “morally indefensible and legally untenable” the fact that a minority can buy the constitutional right to be free from violence through private security while the majority is denied it.

While navigating the streets from the communal toilet block back to Lookout Hill, the registration plate on a motor vehicle hoisted for self-repairs in a garage offered its own concise testimony: “Black Man Always A Suspect.”

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The idea with this more technical politics is to address systemic challenges and the politics of the barricades is not enough

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I am seated in a sea of white faces, including my own, at the University of Cape Town’s annual Summer School lectures to hear a talk entitled “The Politics of Poo”. The distorted demographics will later elicit pointed criticism and an apt quotation from Frantz Fanon, delivered from the back row, regarding the absence of the very people who are the subject of discussion. Steven Robins, a professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at University of Stellenbosch, kicks off a series of erudite lectures, starting with “A Very Brief History of Shit” before turning to the poo-flinging of recent Cape Town protests. The city’s highways, the international airport near Khayelitsha and the steps of the provincial legislature in the city centre have been the most high-profile targets of activists throwing faeces in public places to highlight sanitation issues. Robins, a lean sprightly man with owl-like glasses, makes heavy blows to the media hype and anxious public responses to the topic by making intriguing connections that put the topic in a broader sociopolitical context, starting with an historical recap. He reels back to Dutch colonial administrator Jan van Riebeeck and the first environmental law, promulgated three years after the white settlement of South Africa in 1652: the law proscribed the dumping of human waste in rivers, followed by the privatisation of waste. Robins also discusses the “sanitation syndrome” in the colonies in the 1900s and evictions around the bubonic plague, all by way of contextualising the contemporary so-called “toilet wars” in the Western Cape.

“I was interested in trying to understand why these [media] images were having such a powerful political effect,” he tells the audience about his own motivation researching the topic. “I wondered why, with this focus on the spectacle of the open toilet, which was a problem. What was out of focus was the everyday practice whereby people had to relieve themselves along the



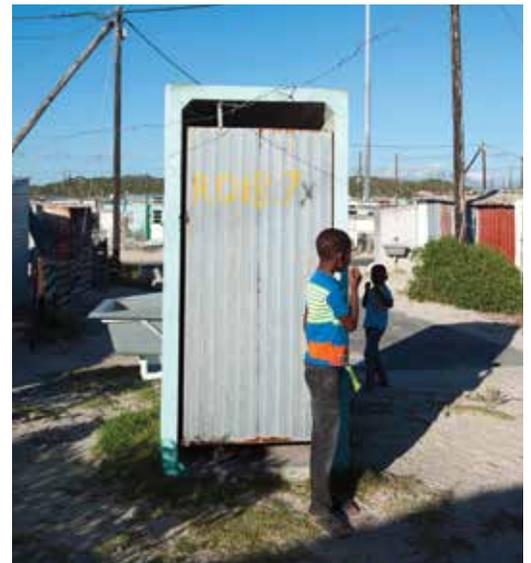
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Opening spread Youngsters play a game of football on an open plot of land opposite Enkanini, a large informal settlement in Khayelitsha

01. Nontebeko Nduna, Khayelitsha resident and community activist with the Social Justice Coalition, at her home in Site C, Khayelitsha

02. Luthando Tokota of the Social Justice Coalition during a walkthrough of BM section, Khayelitsha

03. Griffiths Mxenge, a suburb in Khayelitsha, is named after an anti-apartheid activist murdered in 1981 by police operatives

04. Communal flushing toilets in Dunoon

05. Learners take a break in the courtyard of Inkwenkwezi Secondary School, Dunoon

06. Flushing toilet in Silvertown, Khayelitsha

07. View of Inkwenkwezi Secondary School from Usasaza Street, Dunoon

08. Small business enterprise on Usasaza Street, Dunoon

09. Somali trader Mohammed Khalid outside his grocery store (or spaza shop locally) in Dunoon

10. Members of the public at Lookout Hill community hall on Spine Road, Khayelitsha, host venue for the Khayelitsha Commission, an independent enquiry into allegations of inefficiency of Khayelitsha-based members of the South African Police Service

highway.” The open toilet issue, he says, became a way of crystallising the politics and resonating as a sign of indignation. “It’s not just about the closed toilet. It comes to stand in for ... what it means to be a citizen—because the open toilet is a symbol of the violation of dignity that the middle classes understand [as] defecation ought to be a private thing ... It suggested the limits of democracy. It symbolised the expectations of modern citizenship hadn’t been fulfilled yet.” Sanitation issues could also be understood as a proxy: “It’s a broader question about the way the economy works.”

He also started considering what it was about the portable toilets that people rejected and concluded it was something about the location of the technology and social complications with site-specificity. “Engineers would argue about cutting-edge technologies but it’s about how it’s used in situations and particular contexts. So the challenge was to go beyond the outrage.”

Robins says a cluster of social movements behind this issue are now working to generate their own statistics in what amounts to a new kind of technical politics in the context of grassroots mobilisation. They hark back to anti-apartheid legacies but are connected to other global influences—such as Arjun Appadurai’s notions of globalisation from below—and operate in multiple spaces from the street to shebeens, courts, trade unions and cyberspace. “The barricades may be effective up to a point but it’s not enough,” says Robins. “You need highly politically savvy activists who understand the constitutional gaps for social mobilisation. What is required is a more tactical engagement with the state. You lobby, take it to the courts, and then to the streets—the experiments with activism in this country are extraordinary.”

The cauldron of this political experiment and the site to best understand it is Khayelitsha, adds Robins—partly because of its links with HIV/ Aids activism and the line of continuity between. The idea with this more

technical politics is to address systemic challenges and the politics of the barricades is not enough, he says. The SJC campaign to politicise the issue of sanitation thus began from an everyday reality. The strategy, Robins tells his audience, included queuing for toilets in better resourced areas; collecting personal testimonies of daily violence; preparing a social audit; challenging outsourcing and governance issues to promote public engagement with public budgets; engaging around service delivery agreements; and promoting access to the Information Act in what amounts to “patient, slow activism”.

Patience may be required, as the urgency of the debate seems missed by some in the audience. During a question session afterwards, one member of the predominantly grey-haired audience offers this solution to privacy issues: “They make lovely things in the township. The Japanese make beautiful screens. Why can’t that be part of it?”

Ibrahim Francis, a fast-talking activist with shaven head and beard, is holding up a large protest banner on a hot afternoon in early February in the Cape Town city centre. “Poo-protest means democracy stinks” reads his placard. While ANC protestors adjacent are protesting for better toilets from the headquarters of the opposition-led province, he says the debate should get beyond party politics. Francis is neither a fan of the ANC nor DA, which runs the Western Cape province government. The people are the victims because of dishonest leadership and we have to rethink the whole idea, he says. “We have to be honest with one another because the whole system stinks.”

Francis has come to the city centre today to say as much in bold capital letters. He positions himself adjacent a public demonstration at the provincial legislature as the ANC delivers a memorandum to the province’s premier and DA leader, Helen Zille, about housing, land and sanitation. Party leaders declare demands from the legislature steps flanked by a line

of stony-faced police. “Down with no houses for the people! Down with water cuts! Down with electricity rises!” This call is topped by a crescendo: “We want land! We want change!”

The Secretary of the South African National Civics Organisation takes the microphone: “Down with Helen Zille, down! Down with the Western Cape administration, down!” The protestors echo his bracing words. “We are the citizens who fought for the freedoms of this country and cannot stand for the reversals of the gains. Away with Helen Zille, away! We cannot allow a republic within a republic!” A printed banner in the crowd of hundreds states: “Land for Gold and Shops but not for Houses”. A hand-painted sign adds: “We Need Houses/ Where is our Bill of Rights”. Zille, who was invited by activists to sit on a portable toilet in the townships, emerges to accept the memorandum and stands wedged between the protest speakers. The official memorandum includes land for housing and cultural purposes, eradicating the bucket and portable toilet systems, relocating and upgrading informal settlements and withdrawing all eviction notices. The final exhortation is to register for the forthcoming elections: “It is only through the vote that the halls of Jericho can fall,” proclaims a speaker. Music cranks up from a van stationed alongside. “Zuma! Zuma! Zuma!” goes the refrain. The procession departs, singing the president’s praises down Wale Street.

Dunoon is at the heart of Cape Town’s post-apartheid urbanisation story. Established around 2000 as part of a roll-out of government-subsidised (RDP) housing, this peripheral neighbourhood offers a compelling counterpoint to Khayelitsha, created 30 years ago on the back of forced evictions during apartheid. The most significant difference, says Heinrich Wolff, a Cape Town architect who has done extensive work in this community, is that Dunoon is well located relative to job opportu-

nities. It is meshed off the N7 on the route to Malmesbury between industrial, agricultural, residential and coastal nodes. He compares Dunoon to the northern Johannesburg township of Alexandra, adjacent Sandton and Marlboro: a relatively small township with very big commercial areas around it that makes walking to work feasible.

According to 2011 census data, 41% of people in Dunoon live in formal dwellings, 68% have access to piped water, 74% to a flush toilet connected to a sewerage system, 97% have refuse removed weekly and 78% use electricity for lighting. However, 15.3% still use the bucket toilet system. Dunoon’s residential buildings are the most striking feature when walking around the neighbourhood. They comprise a resourceful mix that range from shacks to the thriftily made, government-issue single-storey brick and tin-roof RDP houses with all manner of space modifications, finding their apogee in multilevel flat blocks designed for maximum rental income.

It was the latter structures that caught Wolff’s eye when he designed a secondary school in the area—something about the scale of these “funny buildings”, as he puts it when we meet at his Cape Town architectural studio, Wolff Architects, which he runs with his wife, Ilze. This kind of curiosity, paired with pacy energy and intellectual generosity, seem to shape his practice. The first flat block he explored had 22 new houses built on the original footprint of an RDP house. While the upper level was still being completed, renters lived downstairs. “They were making bucketloads of money from renting apartments at R700 [each]. I did the math and realised this was a goldmine,” enthuses Wolff. “I started looking around and realised Dunoon was full of these things.”

When I first visit the area on a Sunday, about a dozen men are building a two-storey construction of grey vibrocrete (a cement product). A few days later, the same site stands empty awaiting the return of its weekend workforce. This self-build ethos is

evident throughout Dunoon with numerous houses in various stages of rebuilding or modification. One example was a perfectly visible RDP house sitting fully intact inside the concrete frame of a new larger house still in progress—it arched overhead like an aspirational sheath.

Wolff’s 2010 research found this trend for residents to demolish RDP houses and build rentable flat blocks instead was a thriving business. The conversions, Wolff says, essentially share the same economy of backyard shacks, a widespread phenomenon across South Africa, but is more formalised and with rentals 2.5 times higher. In Dunoon, it is not uncommon to have up to six shacks in a typical RDP house: two in the front, and four in the back with 600mm passages. At R300–R400 per space, that amounts to R2400 monthly rental. Specifically, Wolff calculated the m² rental income at 2010 rates was equivalent to a penthouse apartment in the city centre, or upmarket Bantry Bay for the more expensive Dunoon units. Services and amenities are inferior and the number of people living in the same space would be five times higher but the input costs for the developers are also much lower.

The fact that people were speculating on land was not in itself groundbreaking, Wolff explains. It is the extent of job opportunities around Dunoon that makes the scenario compelling. “Within about three kilometres walking distance there are umpteen jobs. If you live in Dunoon, you don’t have to pay for transport to get to a job. So theoretically, it’s just very desirable,” he says. This triggers the RDP conversions and ultimately suggests that “housing is not about what a house is but what it does. Here, you can see what well-located housing does.”

These private interventions have public policy implications. For one, they demonstrate the absolute inflexibility of RDP housing. “People said the RDP house was a hindrance and they just broke it up,” says Wolff. “That means that the investment of the state and the people of South

Africa in South Africa and its cities is reduced to zero—a house cost of R100 000 is reduced to zero. So all that is left is the site and the service, the most valuable thing—it’s an interesting clue.”

Further, the Dunoon builders are effectively commercial small-scale developers answering a rental housing need on well-located land and thereby increasing national housing stock. This in turn arguably allows for more organic city growth rather than a top-down city planning

agenda. Wolff concludes: “This idea that the citizens can be the authors of the city, like it has been for millennia, and that through a basic desire for people to make money and prosper the city could grow, housing could be provided, and so on, and that it could be done to a real profit, is really good news.”

This kind of talk also cues deeper notions around freedom. Wolff quotes Indian economist Amartya Sen, that freedom is linked not only to the vote but access to other fac-

tors like education, healthcare and personal safety. Dunoon increasingly offers more of these kinds of services. Because it is small, city authorities can arguably act on it more effectively than Mitchell’s Plain or Khayelitsha, hence its rapid densification. Wolff argues that the Dunoon flat blocks contribute to the development of broader freedoms, through location, informal residential zoning, security of tenure for the RDP house owners, and diversification of housing options.

Wolff really drives this point home when he speaks about xenophobia. Dunoon has been a flashpoint for attacks against foreigners; it was reportedly amongst the first sites of xenophobic violence in the Western Cape as attacks against foreigners in Johannesburg in May 2008 spilled over nationally. According to UCT researcher Adam Cooper, writing in a paper published in 2009, 20–30 shops in Dunoon, most of them owned by local Somali shopkeepers, were looted; 23 people were arrested; and almost all foreign nationals (270) evacuated.

Wolff strikes an emotional chord as he recounts a fortified space that protects a trader from attack. “When you see the odds at which people have to survive in a place like that you realise, ‘Okay, well, this makes it possible for a Somali man to trade.’ In spite of all indications [that] he should get out of here, he continues and his livelihood continues and his life is fine and he is building a life in South Africa. There are various scales of this, some more serious than others. But just knowing that when you come home, your couch and TV are there—that is what makes freedom for people. That is what makes better housing for people. And this is being provided by better, more formal, structures.”

Wolff makes a deeply compelling case. There is another element to it, which becomes evident walking around Dunoon with Gresham Chibwaz, a Malawian national who has lived



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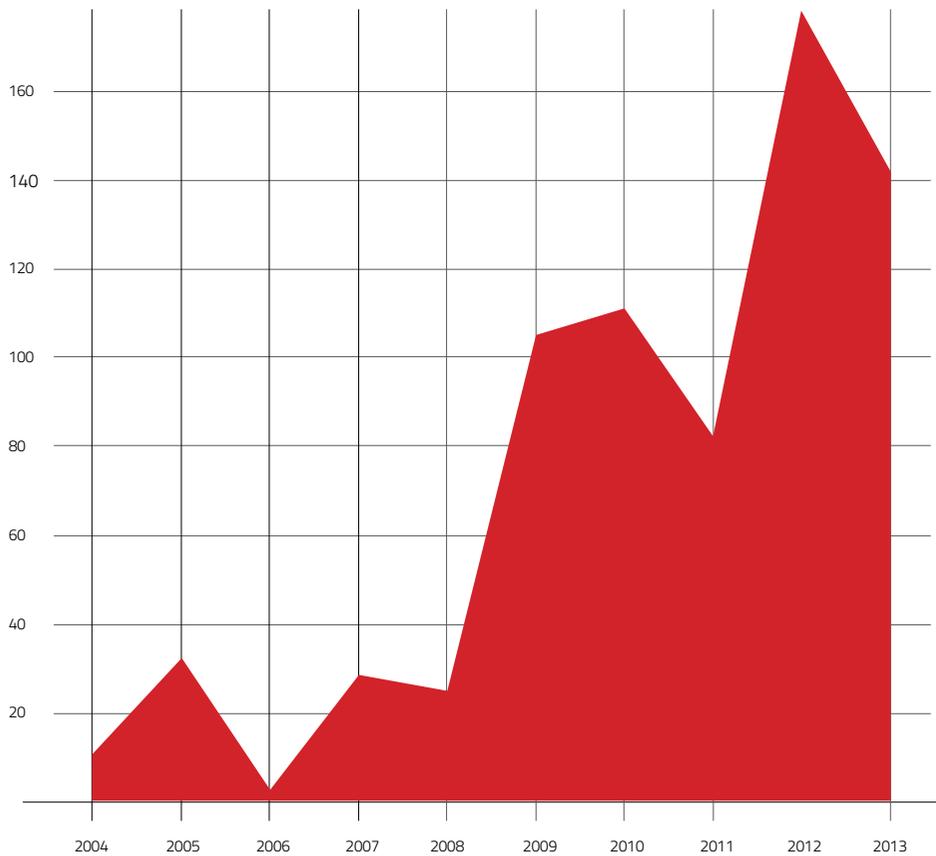


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We cannot use the standards of policing found in Constantia or Camps Bay or Rondebosch in Khayelitsha, argue the South African Police Service

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MAJOR SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS BY YEAR

Source: Municipal IQ Municipal Hotspots Monitor, 4 February 2014

in Dunoon since 2007. “We are a lot of different people—from Somalia, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa. It’s a combination of people living in a community, so I tend to learn lots of things,” says Chibwaz. A man with closely cropped hair, black reflective shades and distinctive lilt in his voice, Chibwaz has also noticed lots of changes in the buildings in his neighbourhood. When he first came to Dunoon, there were only shacks and RDP houses; now there are many RDP conversions, he says. He takes me around to have a closer look. We meet at Dunoon’s work-in-progress MyCiti bus stop, which connects with the city’s rapid bus transport link. Located adjacent a busy taxi rank, I park on its other side, at a local shopping centre that has recently added a supermarket, banking and other conveniences for residents. I wait for Chibwaz on a public bench and strike up conversation with a vegetable trader who sells three days

a week from the side of the main thoroughfare running past Dunoon. His biggest issue is resupply—he doesn’t have his own transport. As he explains this frustration, his competitor next door unpacks new produce off an open-backed lorry. Chibwaz greets me and we start our walking tour at his first South African home, an RDP house with a silver shack in its front yard. We pass a house modified into something more comfortable. Further along, another is nearly complete with a renovation. Smart aluminium window frames are the final touch. About 50 metres on, the sight of a defunct bus as added accommodation in the front yard arrests my eye. We pass a variety of barbershops, a sign to an Educare crèche, and two women carrying chickens by their feet. The streets are neat and clean, the wind is constantly blowing.

Location, Chibwaz agrees, is the most important thing: “People do like to stay in this area: it’s near the factories and the places where they work, and lots of people come and fetch the guys for work outside Shoprite.” For domestic workers the nearby formerly white suburbs of Table View and Blouberg are also just one taxi ride away, he adds. Each house in Dunoon is seemingly distinctive: one has large circular windows; another has a front shack in black and brown stripes that could conceivably feature in a design magazine. The flat block conversions stand out like sore thumbs on the low-rise skyline; their finishes are notably high-end. Were it not for the small shacks to either side at one of the most ambitious examples, I could easily imagine myself standing in neighbouring Table View or Parklands. Flat conversions are clearly answering a need, but Chibwaz thinks RDP houses were a helpful government intervention because they redressed an original lack. He says: “After that, then people did something better ... Now, other people are building their own houses the way they feel.” Available land and resources, he says, allow them to adapt and modify the dwellings. Chibwaz explains it as incremental progress when fortune favours:

“So you are staying in a *hokkie* [small makeshift shed], then they build [an] RDP house much bigger than a *hokkie*. Then you tend to improve when you’ve got something else. You think, ‘I must design this way’ or ‘I must do this’. But as the time passed by, people got different thoughts and feelings. Maybe you think, ‘It’s a bit funny there’ or ‘No, I must add another room’.” On cue, we pass a conversion that has been turned into a shop, and another that is being built on a grand multistory scale.

Chibwaz is reluctant to talk politics. He does however state that he does not think a xenophobic strand is reemerging in Dunoon. This reasoning basically circles back to where we began: Wolff’s “funny buildings”. Chibwaz says: “In these buildings, you will find that these people are lending [renting]. A lot of them have foreigners. They are the ones that they are lending those places. So they manage to get R750, R850 or R1 000 a room ... A lot of citizens don’t want to pay like that.” He points out that landlords, who as RDP title holders are generally “citizens”, would be reluctant to lose their income stream: “It’s like they are demolishing your business, you know.” Further, he thinks things are much better now that people have recognised they live in a community where cooperation rather than identity is the key. “Whether someone is a citizen or a foreigner, or just from Joburg,” offers Chibwaz, “they are here.”

Twisting, dreadlocks, dye, S-curls, blowouts and braiding or just a straight haircut for R10 at a salon set up in a shipping container suggests this diversity is well catered for. But Dunoon residents also have their personal worries. Dr Mpungu, a sangoma, offers on his signboard cures for a range of problems: from marriage (listed as number one) to ghosts in the home and promotion at work. As we reach the end of our journey, a man is bending over some signage on top of his container unit with a paintbrush. He is putting the finishing touches to Unisex Hair Salon, which, the work-in-progress board offers, is

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People do like to stay in this area: it’s near the factories and the places where they work ...

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the “Best in Town”.

Dunoon’s get-ahead spirit is reflected in its one and only high school. A notice on the administration block’s window says: “All learners must speak English only.” They must speak it into a circular hole that measures about 10cm across. Behind this weird feature bustles the administration staff of a fairly unusual institution, Inkwenkwezi Secondary School. Built in 2007, it accommodates about 1225 learners. Last year it achieved a matric pass rate of 89%, more than doubling its achievement in 2004.

Two distinctive architectural features flank the administration block. On the left, a multifunctional courtyard offers a 360-degree purview of all the classrooms and a white prefab signed in its window “The White House”. This yard is purposefully designed so the principal, Tembi Kutu, can spend less time chasing kids to class and more time in his office. Down the passage is a beautiful and impressive vaulted hall that looks absolutely nothing like conventional school halls. That is partly the point, according to its architect, Heinrich Wolff. It was designed in 2007 to accommodate a multiplicity of uses that extend to the community, which helps the school generate an income from events like weddings and church services.

Another distinctive feature is more obvious from the outside: the school’s signage, which takes its cue from the environment. This is a deliberate attempt to see how architec-

ture can integrate and show respect towards the preexisting world; it also echoes Wolff’s idea that, in settings like Dunoon, formal architecture should be subservient to the preexisting architecture. His attitude can be condensed into a single word: modesty. In Dunoon, Wolff found that the local non-residential structures, most of which were identical, had very different functions, a fact indicated only through signage. “If that is the device through which public architecture is registered, we should continue that, to build on the traditions people have,” says Wolff. Born in Roodepoort, west of Johannesburg, and trained as an architect at the University of Cape Town, Wolff believes in a proactive role for design in the city’s future. “The apartheid city was designed,” he states. “So if that catastrophe could have been originated out of a design intention like separate development, if design can cause such consternation, certainly design must be able to improve it ... If we give up hope that our generation could do the opposite, we are in real trouble. Our generation has got to turn the city around, to try make improvements and adjustments and peoples’ lives.”

While the school is well signed, the entrance door is unclear. On arrival, I follow a man who is here for recycling; we enter through a back passage into that vaulted hall. Piles of books for pulping are waiting at the elevated stage end. Chairs, boards, desks and teaching equipment are clumped in varied states of readiness for a new year. On the left wall is signage missing its final integer: “We Salute the Class of 201-”. The bell rings and some learners in mustard yellow shirts and black stockings, white shirts and striped ties take to the adjacent passage.

Phinda Siyo, a departmental head who teaches grades 11 and 12, is engrossed in marking papers on a circular table in the library. This smart new resource centre offers internet and films in addition to rows of neatly catalogued books. Siyo, who has an openly engaged air, comes from a family of educators:

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The idea that citizens can be the authors of the city, like it has been for millennia, is really good news, says architect Heinrich Wolff

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two of his brothers teach and another two are principals. Less expect- edly, he was formerly a professional footballer who played for Santos but cut his football career short for teaching and came to Inkwenkwezi from Khayelitsha. Siyo plays down his footballing with a good-natured laugh: “I didn’t really make it big in the football world,” he says. “I had to focus on teaching because I was already teaching. Either you are full-time in the one thing or the other.” He says Inkwenkwezi definitely has something different about it, which is reflected in the fact that the children feel part of the school environment. “They find it a place to be and spend their time beyond school—they are not always in a hurry to leave this place, they enjoy being here despite the challenges we have,” says Siyo. “From the community’s perspective it’s an important space. It has a lot of meaning for the children and the parents here.” In part, what distinguishes the school seems a mirror of Dunoon: a population largely drawn from “elsewhere”. Inkwenkwezi has a number of learners who come from different areas, like Langa or Gugulethu, different provinces, including the Eastern

Cape, and other countries such as Zimbabwe. One of the consequences of this diversity is that learners do not come from settled communities where they have progressed through a school system that is familiar to them. This can translate into particular challenges and manifest in disciplinary problems. Ultimately, though, the learners are all part of the school community and these challenges are dealt with in-house through mechanisms like feeding schemes and after-school care. Harder to control is the drift of problems from outside. Like schools in the more settled parts of Khayelitsha, Inkwenkwezi is a microcosm of its community. “We’ve had situations we’ve had to deal with that clearly come from outside, whether it’s conflict that carries over into the school or children who are very disadvantaged,” admits Siyo. “But we can cater because everyone feels they are part of the school. So really the school is the centre of everything especially for the children.” Those children, adds Siyo, are a new generation and they want to get ahead in a new way. It is reflected in their ideas about their futures. “They have different aspirations now. It’s not like they still want to have those traditional careers, which is quite good.” Teachers have had to respond in kind, learning from and adapting to schoolchildren who are “no longer interested in the same old things”. “They are a generation on their own,” remarks Siyo.

There is interdependency between learning, social fabric, public space management, quality of life and construction on a very localised level. True to all communities, this idea has however been made explicit in an ongoing project and social experiment taking place in Khayelitsha. Established in 2005, the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) project is a collaborative initiative of the City of Cape Town that identifies crime hotspots—typically they are derelict, unused or poorly lit and serviced areas—and intervenes

in these spaces by renegotiating their use. One example is in Monwabisi Park, a large informal settlement of about 25 000 people on a sand dune in Khayelitsha. The project here brings together early childhood development and a community participation model that aims to cut across party political lines.

It is Valentine’s Day on the day that I visit, the wind is up and sun is blazing. The bright glare is almost unbearable. The board of the Ford Foundation is also visiting, taking a view of several organisations active in the area. Instead of standing on a hot and windy Khayelitsha dune, I could have taken a train ride into Kayamandi, a township near Stellenbosch, along the famed Cape wine route. An email sent to me earlier invited me to take a stake in Cape Town’s world design capital status by designing a romantic getaway on one of Metrorail’s trains, and receive an evening of township entertainment, food and fun in Kayamandi.

“Here, you and your partner will experience a culturally authentic musical with a chorus of energetic local talent not only entertaining guests but also inviting you in the storytelling adventure,” offered the emailed invite. “Come hear, see, smell and taste the flavours of South African stories, music and food blended together with the warmth and passion of South African hospitality. If you can beat this much fun, love and laughter then let me know.”

Five days before Valentine’s Day, however, news reports told of frustrated Kayamandi residents breaking down the election booth set up for the final day of voter registration. During the same week, Municipal IQ, a data and intelligence firm, released statistics indicating that the country saw a protest almost every second day in 2013 (see sidebar). Their data is collected from media reports and identifies a protest as staged by community members against a municipality about issues that are the responsibility of local government. Kevin Allan, managing director of Municipal IQ, says in a statement that municipal managers

should ensure city development is as inclusive as possible to cope with urbanisation trajectories.

They will also, it seems, have to think differently about design to accommodate the sharp end of this phenomenon. VPUU, for one, takes a community participatory approach built around an understanding of safety as a public good. At Monwabisi, the core of the project is a safe house created from modular shipping container units where the community can meet and hold a variety of functions. There is also a football field with dune for grass alongside the safe house and other multipurpose spaces.

A steep path along a sandy walkway leads through tightly nestled shacks to a water point (or “Emthonjeni”) about ten minutes’ walk away. This is basically an upgraded public space where adults can socialise while collecting water from a communal tap and children can safely play in lieu of a formalised crèche. Khumbuzile Mqeteba, who has taken care of the area on a daily basis for the past three years, is standing in the brightly swept front yard of his dwelling. He says there was nothing there before but open space, whereas now children play here regularly and the community appreciates the facility. The project’s impact can only be measured in terms of perception surveys but water taps have reportedly raised penetration from 60–70% coverage to 95% over a series of months. Back at the modular containers, there is also a safe toilet, an important feature given the inadequate sanitation inside the settlement itself. Positioned near access roads rather than houses, accessing the toilets often means a long walk for residents. Michael Krause, director of VPUU, is talking about sanitation issues as we approach the project in his car. “If you had to walk now, you are isolated,” he says, gesturing behind him to the shacks alongside to underscore the reality of how opportunistic crime and sanitation are intertwined. “So if you had to go [to the toilet] here, basically somebody can hide behind, and no-

body hears you—it’s very easy.”

Krause says toilet blocks are often crime hotspots and VPUU is encouraging the City of Cape Town to bring toilets in closer to the people. Part of the problem is the high rate of dysfunctional toilets. VPUU suggest the city over-provides in response in their coverage calculations to compensate for this high toilet failure rate, with an even spatial distribution. “It’s a simple low-cost intervention that will actually save money to the city,” says Krause. He adds as an afterthought: “It would be a nice exercise to actually work out the cost to society of a non-functioning toilet.”

It’s a busy week for Krause, an urban designer who completed his Masters degree in spatial planning at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. Besides the Ford Foundation delegation, on the day before I visited Monwabisi with him, VPUU gave evidence at the Khayelitsha commission. In response, commissioner Vusi Pikoli said it was the first time he had heard of a project that seriously looked at implementing the National Crime Prevention Strategy. Speaking to me at Monwabisi, Krause conceded that there are many objectors to the project, who for various reasons feel threatened, but the community stands firm in its support. He believes the police are not approaching the problems as systemic, but rather following individual agendas. “Our approach is the opposite,” he says, referring to the nested issues the commission raises. “It’s not so easy in black and white, which is what we try to give in our evidence. All of us have got room for improvement and we can only win that if it’s a collective effort.”

The commission will hear closing arguments from legal representatives at the end of May 2014 before making its findings on whether there is a systemic case to answer. Its transcripts of public hearings from over 60 people, however, offer a compelling urban narrative of post-apartheid South Africa that helps cast abstract notions of democracy into concrete form.

Every time I leave Khayelitsha for

the N2 highway home, the last view of this neighbourhood, seemingly cast adrift on the outskirts of central Cape Town’s global allure, is a bold graffiti passage by Faith 47. This slim single mother, wearing long blonde plaits under a peak cap, in 2010 sprayed on a bridge an excerpt from the Freedom Charter, composed in 1955 to articulate aspirations and desires around the struggle against apartheid. “Today,” writes Faith 47 in a video entry documenting the stencil’s creation, “it is becoming increasingly evident that many of these changes have only been made on a superficial level.” Her artwork reflects back in my rearview mirror. It reads: “The People Shall Share in the Country’s Wealth.”*

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