Informal Trading and a Right to the City in the Khayelitsha CBD: insights from the field

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Introduction

Informal trading, in South African and Capetonian post-apartheid policy documents, is officially defined as “the trading of goods and services in the informal sector by persons/enterprises who are not registered or incorporated in terms of the corporate laws of South Africa” (City of Cape Town, 2013). In contrast with this official definition, in practice, informal trading is a loose and more innovative term, generally given to any small business that does not exist in a formal building structure nor adheres to formal economic structures, unlike formal registered traders. This practice was deemed illegal under South Africa’s apartheid regime and prohibited from city streets. Over the last decade, however, it has increasingly been acknowledged and recognized in South African urban policy and development agendas as an important livelihood source for the urban poor and historically disadvantaged individuals and communities, and the notion of informality has been incorporated in public documents as an acknowledgement of the international developmental discourse on the value of informality. Today, informal trading remains a daily reality in South African cities—it is a source of livelihood in today’s context of extreme unemployment, and it is an accessible and affordable source of basic goods. In the post-Apartheid context of redressing unequal development in South African cities and townships, the “City recognizes the key role that informal trading plays in poverty alleviation, income generation and entrepreneurial development” (City of Cape Town, 2013). However, the practice of informal trading in public space (referred to as street trading in this paper) often sits in tension with urban planning and regeneration.
projects—meaning that informal traders are forced to renegotiate their existence in these spaces of transition.

2 In Cape Town, local government has therefore placed value on ‘progressive’ urban projects that include informal trading into urban regeneration and modernization policies, a result of informal trading policies shifting from an historically repressive stance, towards a more regulatory approach. The translation of this policy into practice is the source of much of the tension described above, and will be a major focus of this paper.

3 The KCBD (Khayelitsha Central Business District), situated in Cape Town’s largest and predominantly African township, Khayelitsha, is currently undergoing extensive urban regeneration, and is therefore in a state of transition. Several urban regeneration projects have and are taking place—reorganizing the space and shifting the role and responsibilities of the state, traders (both formal and informal) and various actors involved in these developments.

4 Consequently, this reorganization produces tensions, and the everyday realities of these tensions cause informal traders to respond in various ways—redefining their actions, physically and symbolically. In this research I use insights from the field to explore and understand the ways in which these tensions and responses shape and are reshaped by traders’ experiences and actions. This research seeks to understand the ways in which informal traders in the KCBD experience the space, and how they navigate and renegotiate their existence in such conditions of urban transition, inventing for themselves an “actual right to the city” (see editorial of this special issue).

5 Following the intentional direction of this research, this case study pivots on two axes: the physical and the symbolic. On the one hand, we have a physical space being subjected to urban regeneration—resulting in the spatial reordering of the KCBD, where state and non-state actors invite traders to participate in the reordering of the KCBD, in an attempt to regulate the space and provide ‘opportunities’ for traders. This is where the tensions arise. On the other hand, and largely in response to the tensions that arise through the physical, we have traders waiting for development plans to materialize, but inventing and reinventing spaces for themselves in the meantime through individual negotiation, encroachments and innovation as well as collective action in an attempt to assert a space and a place for themselves and their businesses in the KCBD. Although, most significant here is the observation that embedded in the spaces and relationships across both axes, is the true architecture of this complex and varied space: the everyday experiences of uncertainty, confusion and waiting. The traders indeed navigate between two archetypal statuses: the status of regularized trader (a person who is registered with the City, and who has been delivered a permit to trade in a designated area by the local authority); the status of informal traders (those who work without such a permit and on a land that has not been zoned for trading purpose). They often find themselves evolving in the grey spaces of everyday changing informal arrangements with the state, characterized by a high degree of uncertainty (Roy, 2005).

6 This paper will firstly engage with the physical and organizational architecture of the KCBD informal trading area—contextualising where street trading is situated in this space, amidst: urban regeneration projects, regulations, various actors, management systems and development plans—and the tensions that exist within and between these. It will then immerse into uncovering the elements that knit together the true fabric of this space: the everyday experiences, ordinary practices and agency of informal traders in
this space, as they sit somewhere between urban regeneration, waiting for the state and reinventing a space and a place. Presented through an ethnographic journey, the symbolic realities of confusion, uncertainty and fragmentation of traders in the KCBD will be exposed. This will allow us to see how the KCBD informal trading area is both a physical and a symbolic space—simultaneously reordered and reinvented through everyday experiences and practices.

Methodology

The research practice of this paper was qualitative in nature and took on a principally ethnographic approach, as I tried to immerse myself into the field of study, attempting to gain an insider’s perspective of the trading space and to favor the traders’ point of view on the dynamics at stake through urban regeneration. What one can expect from such an approach, and hence from this article, is thick and fine-grained empirical qualitative data that unveils pockets of everyday understanding and experiences in the study area, by placing value on individual narratives and understandings to better cast light on larger urban issues.

This kind of research could not have been done without my research assistant and now friend, Lufefe, a local self-employed business owner of Espinacha Innovations (spinach-based health foods) and former informal trader. Lufefe was not only a wonderful translator, but also a voice of local insight and knowledge. The fieldwork component spanned three weeks and included direct observation and regular interviews with 4 traders we identified as key informants.

Our first key informant was Vuyo (‘Rasta’), a trader and the Secretary of the Trader’s Committee (KSITA, the Khayelitsha Station Informal Trader’s Association) who we organized a meeting and site visit with. On this site visit, Rasta took us to several of his friends’ stalls to conduct further interviews. This snowballing methodology fueled on his good reputation on the trading Committee, and in conversation with Lufefe, the pair added great insights into the responses we received from traders, by elaborating on and questioning comments made by other traders. In total, 24 qualitative interviews were conducted, notwithstanding countless casual conversations with various traders. Of these, 17 were with informal traders, 1 with a Khayelitsha Community Trust (KCT) Mall Manager, 1 with Katharine Miszewski a city planner from the City of Cape Town, and 1 with my chief informant, Lufefe. The interviews and discussions conducted with the traders were semi-structured.

Lufefe and I decided that taking photographs would complement the interviews. Lufefe used my camera to photograph what we discussed together was relevant and would complement our findings. This aligns with the ‘Collaborative Photography’ method described in Hall (2009), in which images are informant-produced and both the analysis and meaning of those images is subject to both the researcher and the informant—encouraging self-reflexivity (Crang, 2005; Hoggart et al, 2014) on the researcher’s part. Lastly, I used the notion of ‘Participatory Research’ (PR), described in Pain (2004), to engage some informants in the research process, creating a ‘participatory map’ (Figure 2) – which involved illustrating a map of the area using only the local knowledge shared with me by Lufefe and Rasta, to better understand the geography of the larger trading space.
An obvious limitation to this ethnographic approach would be that such a focus on interviewing traders may have limited my understanding of the City’s role and perspective on various issues (the content and the crafting of policy documents, the negotiation of the PPP structure...), however, the intention and therefore value of the fieldwork was to produce bottom-up research—to focus on the traders’ perspectives, giving them a voice. Moreover the KCBD case study does not reflect all the dynamics at stake in the metropolitan area as far as street trading are concerned. But it speaks well to such broader urban contexts where centrality, urban regeneration and shop-window strategies linked to “modernization” agendas are impacting strongly on street trading.

1. An Actual Right to the City: traders inventing spaces in a context of urban regeneration

1.1. The contradictions of regulating informal trading in Cape Town

There is a rich literature on the practice of street trading and its regulation in a variety of South African cities (Nesvag, 2000; Motala, 2002; Skinner, 1999 and Bantubonse, 2008, Bénit-Gbaffou 2016, Pezzano 2016), which allows us to conceptualise the shifting ideals around governance of informal trading from the Apartheid to the post-Apartheid, as well as the post-colonial (see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2003) context. Looking at different African cities, Steck et al (2013) argue that the governance of street trading often reiterates historical (neocolonial) processes of regulation and constraint. Street trading is continually targeted as an undesirable disorderly practice in cities, whilst public authorities praise it for its local economic developmental potential (Steck et al, 2013)—a contradiction we need to engage and study on the ground. All too often informal trading policies, which aim to harness the socio-economic developmental potential of street trading, sit in tension with local agendas (built on urban policies) that aim to modernize South African cities (Steck et al, 2013). This often results in urban planning for such modernization projects contradicting plans to promote local economic development for informal trading.

In Cape Town, Dierwechter (2004) explores this contradiction through what he describes as: ‘dreams’—an imagined geography of planning arranged on the sustainable post-apartheid city; ‘bricks’—a material geography of marketplace nodes for the developmental transformation of informal trading; and, ‘bodies’—a socioeconomic geography of survival found in the practice of street traders, whom local officials imagine as ‘pre-entrepreneurs’ (Dierwechter, 2004). This kind of thinking aligns with a rich literature around post-colonial studies, more specifically with ideas of subalternity, agency of the poor, and their ability to produce urban space through their everyday practices (Simone, 2004), sometimes “quietly encroaching” (Bayat, 2010) on urban space in contradiction with the modernist vision of the state. In this research, this kind of thinking aids in reframing how we conceptualize street traders as social figures, texturizing pre-conceived notions of informality, marginalization and exclusion. In this research I use Dierwechter’s (2004) three lenses as a conceptual language to situate the context in which KCBD traders find themselves, exploring the ways in which planning ‘dreams’ for urban regeneration in the KCBD might materialize (‘bricks’) in ways that sit in tension with informal trading development, and ultimately, how street traders
At the intersection between planning ‘dreams’ and the ‘bricks’ of informality, emerges a key concept Steck et al (2013) call a ‘neoliberal reordering of space’—describing how, as state authorities reshape their modalities of action through political, institutional and geographic reorganization, so too the public (informal traders in this case) are required to redefine their actions. Steck et al (2013:158) argue that in Cape Town this ‘neoliberal reordering of space’ reinforces the power of the economic elite by excluding traders through seemingly inclusive, participatory structures. Morange (2013:2), drawing on Foucauldian ideas, describes such a compromised space as displaying ‘technologies of power,’ with ‘technologies of self’ demonstrated in response. In the informal trading context, these ‘technologies’ give us a conceptual language to understand firstly, the way powerful actors govern and reorder trading spaces, in ways that often seem ‘participatory’ in the hope of producing certain desired effects; and secondly, the consequent actions/strategies of traders (‘technologies of self’) in response to this.

A concept which I think is not central, but is useful to this research in terms of capturing the agency of street traders, described by Paltrinieri and used by Morange & Fol (2014:18)—is a concept which suggests that the emergence of self-made individual entrepreneurs, which in this case would be street traders, brings into being a ‘neoliberal subject’:

“A figure of the self-made individual entrepreneur... who constructs himself by constantly assessing his capacities in order to improve and increase them, making his life itself a permanent test of his human capital.”

By examining the interplay and contestations in and between these technologies, we can reflect on the ways in which planners and developers’ ‘dreams’ materialize into ‘bricks’ and are engaged with, and often contested or reworked by ‘bodies’—in this case, street traders struggling to build livelihoods and small businesses in an informal context. Yet, as Dierwechter (2004) prompts us to consider, how does the trader as a ‘neoliberal subject’ take into account the ‘dreams’ and ‘bricks’, the practices and spaces through which their social and economic survival is molded? Therefore, imagining the KCBD as a ‘neoliberally reordered space’ reproducing ‘neoliberal subjects’ only gets us so far. Drawing on Morange (2013) and Dierwechter (2004), I explore the ways in which street traders (‘bodies’) respond to and engage with, even remake, urban regeneration agendas (‘dreams’ and ‘bricks’) in the KCBD. I focus particularly on the ways in which trader’s often side-step plans and formal channels to create alternative spaces of management and participation, and how these experiences enable and disable the ways they invent themselves, as entrepreneurs. This focus emphasizes traders’ everyday experiences and actions, foreshadowing a discussion on how traders might claim an actual right to the city. I use these notions as a conceptual language for analyzing these practices and debates.

The actual right to the city concept aligns with a rich, extensive and exciting literature on the right to the city, including key authors such as Harvey (2008; 2012), Mitchell (2003), Ballard (2014), Merrifield (2013), Marcuse (2009), Meyer (2009), Mottiari (2013) and the seminal, Lefebvre (1968; 2009). In summation, this body of work calls for the democratization of cities from below, to redefine participation and reclaim political or economic rights. Much of this work is conceptual, however and very few work actually draw on everyday practices and account for these practices and for the framing of an actual right to the city through everyday urban life. Claiming an actual right to the city is...
however by no means straightforward in the informal trading context of the KCBD, it involves waiting: for proper stalls and service delivery, but working and hustling in the meanwhile; and navigating: spaces, regulations, land ownership issues, and management systems that constantly seem opaque.

1.2. Refocusing the attention to agency, ordinary everyday practices, uncertainty and the politics of waiting

Much of the informal trading literature in Africa is located in debates on urban governance in a context of ‘societal disengagement’ caused by extensive informalisation and democratic transition (Lindell, 2004; 2008). However, there is a lack of attention given to informal trading as an everyday, ordinary practice in which traders renegotiate their existence in South African cities more specifically, in today’s post-colonial context of regulation and urban regeneration. Popke & Ballard (2003) are an exception, investigating street trading in Durban as a reaction to urban spatial change, revealing how street trading in its encroachment of urban spaces reflects traders’ agency to create opportunities to improve their livelihoods. They are concerned with the ways in which street trading and its regulation reorders and reinvents city spaces.

My research builds on and adds value to this body of literature by focusing on how street traders have experienced and responded to these transformations and reinvented spaces for themselves in the KCBD. This approach allows me to use the everyday, ordinary practice of street trading to reflect not only on governance and regulation, but also on the politics produced within this public space. My purpose is to see how traders experience, negotiate and create individual and collective agency in symbolic ways, as well as the politics produced through these practices as they wait for development all the while attempting to improve their livelihoods and grow businesses in KCBD.

Waiting can also produce politics. Whilst waiting for development, traders make choices in their everyday practices and respond to underdevelopment and spatial reordering in nuanced and inherently political ways. Jeffrey’s (2010) work on waiting—what his informants, young men stuck between education and employment, call ‘timepass’—in India helps us think through this nuanced and political notion of ‘waiting.’ He demonstrates that the state of young men’s ‘waiting’ in India might look passive, but is ridden with both politics and agency.

Oldfield & Greyling (2015:1102) build on this concept by arguing that waiting “shapes a politics of quiet encroachment in the meanwhile” – a “micro-politics” that is located in the “grey spaces of informality.” The concept of “grey space” was defined by Yiftachel (2009: 243), with reference to urban planning practices in Israel/Palestine, as “the practice of indefinitely positioning populations between the ‘lightness’ of legality, safety and full membership, and the ‘darkness’ of eviction, destruction and death”. It is a very
useful concept for the context of informal trading in Khayelitsha, as it helps us analyze the experience of waiting for development, drawing attention to the ways in which traders respond to waiting in the short-term by encroaching and reshaping trading spaces, whilst waiting in the longer term for promised development to materialize. It points at the uncertain nature of their relationship to the state and of their unstable position between formal and informal situations that should be conceived as the two poles of a continuum rather as fixed positions.

23 This self-creation of agency in response to uneven development and inequality, is what Bayat (2010) terms ‘the quiet encroachment of the ordinary.’ Furthermore, Ballard (2004) emphasizes ‘the poor’ are not passive recipients of development, nor are they passive victims of practices that have caused their marginalization. Therefore, too strong a focus on the ‘abject’ situation of ‘the poor’ (Harvey 2012)– in this case informal traders–may conceal the “dynamism, resilience, creativity and resistance of resource-deprived people” (Ballard, 2014: 2) as they respond to a space transitioning through urban regeneration—a notion that speaks to the vernacular phrase ‘Vukuzenzele’ traders use, which means ‘wake up and do it.’

24 In sum, this literature helps analyze street trading as a spatially complex practice that becomes deeply political in spaces of reordering and transition, where urban regeneration sits in tension with traders’ practices, who, whilst waiting for development plans to materialize, are clearly not always passive- as they negotiate, and reinvent spaces in an attempt to secure their livelihoods.

2. Understanding the organizational structure of informal trading in a time of urban transition: an ethnographic journey through the fragmented KCBD

25 As large numbers of people move between the KCT Mall, the Khayelitsha Station and Ntlazane Road (see Figure 1) the trading area is absolutely alive with the sweet sound of African jazz music blaring from a fruit stall’s speakers, the mouth-watering aroma of Rasta’s toasted peanuts, the chugging of incoming trains and the constant buzz of chitter-chatter between traders, customers and train-users passing by. The everyday hustle and bustle of the informal trading space is certainly what brings the KCBD to life, however, when immersing yourself into the fabric and dynamics of this space, one is made to feel both enlivened, by the positive vibrant atmosphere, yet utterly disheartened by the poor state of the trading environment. Informal traders, through both their physical presence and daily trading practices, are seen to claim various spaces and assert themselves in this vibrant area in myriad, meaningful ways that essentially define and redefine this transitioning public space.

26 However, the informal trading area in the KCBD is anything but an homogenous space simply characterized by poor regulation and underdevelopment—it is a complex and dynamic mix of traders and spaces. Throughout this research, it became increasingly clear that the KCBD is a highly fragmented space, made up of various spaces that have different degrees of formalization, management, organization and trading activity. This heterogeneity is not only evident in the diversity of people trading and the items being traded, but also in the multiple zones of informal trading that exist across the KCBD which, in response to not being subject to enforced policies, have taken on two different
kinds of socio-organizational structures in an attempt to create order: spaces owned and regulated by state-related or private actors; and spaces regulated by the traders themselves—“self-management.”

2.1. Managing informal trading in KCBD: a governance in transition

The construction of the Khayelitsha CBD (see Figure 1) began circa 2004, as part of the Mayor’s Urban Regeneration Program (MURP), which is a citywide development programme that seeks to redress historical underdevelopment, especially in townships. With an unemployment rate of 73% (Beyond Our Borders, 2015) informal trading has become a dominant livelihood strategy in Khayelitsha, especially in the transitioning KCBD, which serves as a hub for shopping and transport.

In 2005, the VPUU (Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading) was launched in KCBD: it is a private-public project functioning as an agent of City of Cape Town, funded by the German development bank (KfW). KfW Development Bank is a private promotional bank specialised in the promotion of development programmes in Germany and worldwide; it is very active in South Africa where it has provided funding for several programmes on energy-climate change, the prevention of violence, and HIV Aids. Partnering with the City of Cape Town, VPUU are given authority to carry out functions on the City’s behalf—specialising in urban management, community delivery services, community mobilisation, spatial planning and public safety. Katharine Miszweski explains that VPUU have a service level agreement (they provide certain services on the City’s behalf) with the City to manage the Khwezi-Crescent area, however, City of Cape Town are responsible for maintenance and transformation of physical space.

At the same time, between 2000-2009 local law enforcement were actively regulating informal trading in the area, removing traders without permits; however, from about 2009 this ceased as the City’s revised Informal Trading Policy and By-Law (City of Cape Town, 2013) shifted from a regulatory to a more developmental discourse.
Following this, in 2011 the KCBD Informal Trading Plan (ITP) was drafted, to develop part of the area for informal traders. However, the ITP has still not progressed past the first of four implementation stages, despite several audits. These 4 stages include: planning, trader registration, bay allocation, and installing a permit fee structure. If implemented, the ITP would: provide traders with security of tenure by giving them designated trading spaces (using a permit and fee system); facilitate improvements to the trading infrastructure; and enhance safety and security in the area. The second stage had begun, however it was never completed. In our interview, City of Cape Town’s Katharine Miszewski admitted, “At present [...] there is no process that demonstrates who is or is not legitimately allowed to trade in the area”—which leaves traders straddling unclear boundaries of legitimacy on a daily basis.

Several years later and despite multiple upgrading projects around the KCBD, the informal trading space remains largely unregulated by local government and strikingly underdeveloped—a space where these formerly ‘illegal’ traders are tolerated rather than encouraged, as Donaldson & du Plessis (2013) argue. All of the above situates the KCBD in a developmental and policy context, which in addition to the multiple interconnected actors in this space: informal traders, formal traders in the KCT Mall, ‘semi-formal’ traders who operate in grey spaces in Precinct 2, City of Cape Town (City of Cape Town), VPUU (Violence Prevention and Urban Upgrading), PRASA (Passenger Rail Agency South Africa), KCT (Khayelitsha Community Trust), local Law Enforcement and private land owners—make the KCBD a fascinating site to reflect on the fragmented nature of the management of informal trading around the KCBD that reflects contrasting levels of formalization.
In the following section I will describe the geography of the trading area through a narrative of my ethnographic journey (from A to F, see figure 2) through what I consider to be 3 distinct spaces: the taxi rank/mall; the self-managed edges, the dysfunctional VPUU programme. This section also seeks to introduce the reader to various actors, whose stories paint both a structural and experiential picture of trading in the KCBD over time.

2.2. Allocated Trading Spaces: From the Taxi Rank, through KCT Mall and up to the Khayelitsha Station

In the Mall-Trading Zone at KCT Mall we meet Julius, the KCT Mall maintenance and security manager, who strolls around the trading tables, greeting and chatting to the traders. Julius tells us that the Mall is private property, but the managers wanted to try and accommodate some of the informal traders, even though “this is a temporary situation until there are proper stall structures put up for them.” I ask Julius why the Mall has done this for the informal traders and he says:

“KCT is for the people of Khayelitsha... We brought Khayelitsha this far, and we want to take it further. We firmly believe in creating economic opportunity where we can.”

Figure 2: Illustrated Participatory Map showing the spatial organization of the KCBD trading area

In terms of future plans, Julius says the managers are currently planning to “to sort out covers for the stalls” because when the weather is bad the traders cannot trade here.

Noluthando, a trader, says things are definitely better now that she is trading here, because two years ago the Station became too overcrowded so PRASA chased traders away from the Station:
“The Red Ants’ came and chased us”—they broke down tents and physically forced the traders to leave. “Metrorail [PRASA] left us no space to sell,” and so Noluthando spent the past year and a half at home, struggling, until she approached the manager of the mall who said she could have a trading space here.

By allowing and allocating traders a free space to trade in the Mall, and allowing them to have their own committee, KCT have given the traders an opportunity to trade in a cleaner, safer and regulated environment, which, centered in the Mall, receives considerable passing trade.

At the Khayelitsha Station we meet Rasta, a trader well respected for his lengthy local presence, political insights and valued position as Secretary of KSITA. Sitting in his old ticket box-like stall at the Station, scooping his infamous toasted peanuts into small packets to sell, Rasta tells us that he has been trading here for 13 years, trying to become a successful businessman. He explains that by sourcing this stall, he has “brought development” to himself, otherwise he would be sitting here in the wind and the cold like he used to, suffering with “sinus and backaches.” Rasta tells us how things have really changed over the years: Before 2005 (when the Mall was built), Law Enforcement did not let anyone trade at the Station: “They used to chase us out and kick us and beat us, sometimes chase us with dogs. I can’t tell you how many times they confiscated my stuff.”

However, the traders would keep coming back by the masses, overcrowding the area: “This place was like a shantytown until 2013, when PRASA moved people away,” adds Rasta.

Upon confronting PRASA about these removals, they said the Station was too overcrowded, however, after much negotiation PRASA agreed to accommodate a few traders that had been trading there a long time. They allocated 16 traders to 1.2 x 1.5m trading spaces—the rest of the traders were forced to relocate to the station’s peripheries. Not all traders are afforded ‘official’ allocated trading spaces, regardless; the informal traders discussed in the next section have their own management systems.

2.3. Self-managed Spaces: Khwezi-Crescent and Mall-Side Traders on the Edge

The self-managed trading zones of the KCBD are the largest of the trading spaces (in both size and number of traders), and exist alongside these ‘allocated’ trading zones on land whose ownership is an issue of uncertainty. These self-managed trading spaces in Khwezi-Crescent and on the edge of the Mall are where traders essentially encroach on pockets of private land and land that is to be developed as part of the City of Cape Town’s ITP. Surrounded by garbage and struggling to shelter themselves from the harsh winter winds, the Mall-side traders find themselves tightly clustered between the Station and the edge of the Mall.

Here, we meet Mama Vuyiswa and her friend Eunice, who sits with Mama in her stall because her own stall is poorly sheltered and unbearably cold—“We are friends dealing with struggles together,” says Mama. Eunice and Mama have been trading here for 3 and 10 years, respectively. They explain that people trading on the other side of the rail were removed by PRASA about 5 years ago and flocked to the Mall-side, which was saturated with rubbish.
When asked about trading facilities they said the municipality has given them nothing, not even a bin for their rubbish—they have to pay people out of their own pocket to dispose of their rubbish. Also, there is only one toilet (inside the mall) so if one wants water, one must go there. These women express that all they want is basic things, like dustbins and water. They realise that having a proper stall is definitely a long term dream, emphasising that the main problem is definitely the municipality, and that they continue to be treated as ‘intruders’ and ‘invaders’ of this space. The women said they would be very happy if they got proper sheltered stalls and they would be “willing to pay if there's opportunity,” however, they don’t want to be removed or relocated to stalls elsewhere because they have been here for years and their customers know them here: “the municipality must bring the facilities here,” says Eunice.

Clearly, basic services are not provided to these trading spaces, and as such traders’ businesses are suffering, whilst the continual neglect and poor treatment has caused them to feel like intruders.

Moving on to Khwezi-Crescent: From traders slaughtering chickens and selling them whole, to rows of shipping containers housing everything from dreadlock saloons to restaurants, this is certainly the largest and most vibrant of the trading zones. Alive with about 100 traders, African jazz music and the bellows of bargaining, it is here where the lack of basic services is the most visible, and also where we see several features of traders’ innovative attempts to create a better trading environment for themselves.

Here we meet Bonakele, a wise elderly man who sells fruit out of his car in the Container Park area (see figure 2). Bonakele has been trading here for 6 years but has lived in Khayelitsha far longer, and provided a fantastic chronology of spatio-temporal change in the KCBD. He notes that people only started trading there informally from 2000, but would get chased away because they did not have permits. So it was only really in 2010, when the FIFA World Cup started, that people began trading here. In terms of managing trader influx, Bonakele says "In the 1990’s, law enforcement chased people away, now the Committee [KSITA] chases people away," however, he says most of the time those displaced just come back or try their luck on the other side. The KSITA has this authority because they are a trader-led group that seeks to reduce tensions and conflict between traders by protecting and allocating spaces, in an attempt to create some kind of order.

2.4. Precinct 2: the costs and displacements of VPUU’s ‘inclusive’ development

Standing in stark contrast to the vastly underdeveloped Khwezi-Crescent, Precinct 2, built and managed by VPUU, is a very modern-looking red building with a surveillance tower that overlooks the area (see photo 1); offering informal traders a semi-formal small ‘shop,’ fitted with a closable garage-like door, plumbing and pre-paid electricity. The gist of Precinct 2’s development is that over 5 years ago, traders were forced off this land\(^1\) by VPUU, and promised that formalized stalls would be built for them as part of this development. The reality today is that rental for these small shops is R1000 per month—which the majority of traders have expressed they cannot afford (the highest portion of the population, 30%, earn less than R1600 per month, City of Cape Town, 2013) and the ones who do trade there are struggling to make ends meet.
Figure 3: Photograph taken from the Northern corner of Precinct 2, showing the surveillance tower and the Department of Coffee

47 Observably, we saw about 8 traders actively using these shops, leaving many of them empty (there are ±20 shops), and as will be revealed later, some are used just for storage.

48 VPUU manage Precinct 1 & 2, not the rest of the informal trading area, so the area is essentially rendered “lawless,” says Miszewski, as it is not under the official control of the City given that the City’s Informal Trading Policy has not been implemented. Rasta explains that when VPUU came to the KCBD in 2009/2010, the traders did not understand what they were really about and found their projects really expensive:

“It is very strange that these private people own the lands” because “This is Khayelitsha. There is no private land, it belongs to everyone!” exclaims Rasta […]

“They are asking for R1000 per month: Informal traders can’t afford that… We need development, but not like that… The idea is good, the action is bad… Their informal trader project failed dismally—they shifted their focus to bank and business. Rasta boldly adds that the law is on the VPPU’s side and that they have become “capitalist and then imperialist—they just divide and conquer.”

49 Lufefe and Rasta agree that the VPUU buildings were “all about property development like any other”—that they were never really focused on developing informal traders, especially considering the location of Precinct 2 is isolated from the rest of the trading area—with traders complaining there is not enough passing trade.

50 Vuyile is one of the young owners of Department of Coffee, Khayelitsha’s first artisan coffee shop and espresso bar, in Precinct 2. He says the German Bank that funds VPUU is not directly involved: “they are running it from far away” and that VPUU are very difficult landlords, mostly because they are very difficult to communicate with, “They don’t visit, they just email”. Ultimately, Vuyile thinks: “It’s ridiculous that they can try and make money out of poverty—R1000 for this? No man!” Adding that although their
business is doing well compared to other people: “even for us, R2000 [rent] a month is killing our business.”

51 Gody, a Nigerian man has been trading in one of VPUU’s shops (see Photo 2) since 2010, selling all kinds of electronics. From 2007-2010 Gody used to trade by the Station but got chased away by PRASA, and moved here because he thought it would be a more stable business opportunity. He admits it has been very tough to pay rent, because “there is tough competition from the guys selling similar stuff informally near the station.” Gody says what is so difficult as a businessman is that:

“You know you deserve something like this [a shop] but it really isn’t easy— the structure doesn’t bring more people- they [VPUU] don’t do anything to attract people to the area, there is not as much passing trade as by the station.”

52 From these narratives it is clear that there is a great deal of tension between the traders and VPUU who are supposed to be working on behalf of the City of Cape Town—leaving the traders feeling let down by the City as VPUU’s developments ‘for them’ thus far have not benefitted the majority.

53 From such responses, it can be argued that the developmental interventions and managerial attempts by VPUU in the KCBD may have stemmed from inclusive intentions—attempting to build a more formal, safer trading environment with better facilities; however, it seems that Precinct 2 was quite poorly received by the larger trading community, whose reality is that they were displaced from and then excluded from this space, and in being displaced, some have resorted to encroaching on private land.

54 Precinct 2 is not only a physical development built on land that traders feel is rightfully theirs, but also, we see that modes of governance begin to shift as VPUU are given certain regulatory responsibilities in the area by the City of Cape Town—such as managing the container park and steering the implementation of the ITP. This case reiterates the argument that urban regeneration plans sit in tension with, even contradict, informal trading policies.

55 This reveals that attempts to create inclusion through neoliberal development have unfortunately excluded the majority by not truly considering their development needs—resonating with Morange’s (2013) argument that ‘exclusionary spaces’ are formed by ‘soft control through participation’ and that influential actors assert ‘technologies of power’ over the traders. Here Steck et al’s (2013) observation in Cape Town is also reiterated, as powerful public-private participation structures and growth coalitions (the City of Cape Town-VPUU partnership) have developed in the KCBD. Steck et al’s (2013) argument that their actions ultimately bring a business agenda into offering traders a ‘right to the city’ can be reckoned with here, as traders feel that VPUU are “trying to make money out of poverty” (Rasta).

56 However, what is most important to reflect on here is not this neoliberal business agenda, but rather how traders have responded to such developments in the KCBD—by side-stepping, negotiating and creating alternative spaces of action, through which they claim an actual right to the city.
3. Vukuzenzele: Self-managing, quietly encroaching and reclaiming an actual right to the city in a context of confusion and uncertainty

From the above we see that in the KCBD there are regulations and there is management, there are state actors and there are private actors, there are plans and there are policies—but in practice these are not always clear. Confusion and uncertainty characterizes much of the response from informal traders in the KCBD—which brings us to the narrative below.

3.1. The uncertainties of land ownership, service delivery and promised development: Still Waiting for Development

When asking traders what they knew about future development plans for them in the KCBD, every single one of them expressed some form of uncertainty or confusion; saying they have been waiting for years for government to provide them with proper sheltered stalls and basic services. By not having the opportunity to access such services, many feel dislocated—‘intruders’ in a space developing rapidly around them. It was also found that much uncertainty lies in who actually owns which pieces of land, as well as confusion around who is responsible for developing and managing the various trading zones and when, as several actors are said to have proposed different trading developments over time. This reflects both expectation and uncertainty regarding services, landownership and development—linking back to issues of governance. Some traders are so frustrated by the City’s perpetual planning and numerous audits, that two traders actually refused to speak to us, saying "People have been coming here and writing and writing and writing but nothing ever happens". Blessing, a dreadlock saloon owner, says, “The government must provide! We are just waiting.”

Rasta ascribes this continued underdevelopment to his observation that:

“...They [the state] don’t even know the challenges, they don’t come and see these places themselves and see what’s happening...What we need is proper development, we don’t mind paying. We know that water and electricity is a crisis in South Africa-we can’t get it for free... We all want to take South Africa forward- by any means.”

This quote shows that informal traders, like Rasta, are willing to pay for the services they receive and do not expect a hand-out. They recognize themselves as entrepreneurs who want to and can contribute to local economic development, if given the chance.

The City of Cape Town’s 2013 revised trading policy is directed at implementing such developments, hence, the ITP (December 2011) for the area made provision for about sixty 2mx2m trading stalls that were to be allocated to selected traders in Khwezi-Crescent. However, as mentioned earlier, this ITP is nowhere close to fruition: only a waiting list was drafted after several audits were undertaken. Traders who had been trading the longest were given preference, most of whom are part of KSITA and/or the Committee—as the City recognises these traders as more ‘legitimate’ (Katharine, 2015). Those who are on the City’s waiting list for an allocated stall are uncertain as to when and
if they will actually receive these stalls, and those who are not on the list are uncertain as to what the development plans are or how they fit into this:

“The progress is too slow, we’ve been waiting for six years... They [the municipality] came here and promised [development for the traders] and now nothing” says Nqabisa Precious Yedwa.

Mr “Big Fish”, a Xhosa trader who does not believe in relying on the state to provide, said: “I noticed they [many traders] are just waiting, trying to prepare themselves, but they’re not sure if it will go in their favour.” By this, Big Fish implies that there is both submission and agency (a category he puts himself in) in the way that different traders wait—both experiences are, albeit, ridden with uncertainty.

Furthermore, many traders experience uncertainty with regards to security of tenure: Bonakele explains, “Over the years, VPUU have been moving us from this side to that side to this side.” Percy, a dreadlock saloon owner, reiterates this—explaining that approximately 6 years ago their containers were moved to the other side of Khwezi-Crescent. He says they did not know “the plans” and because they do not own the containers they were quite confused by all the moving around. Both of the above allude to actual physical dislocation. When asking Bonakele about trading permits, he explains that the traders have asked local Law Enforcement if they need trading permits from local government, because they believe a permit system would be better so that the space would be properly regulated. However, when traders asked where they could get permits, local officials said they did not know and that “they must go to Cape Town” and ask, because sending traders to the provincial government seems to be the only way these officials know how to deal with a problem that is actually occurring at the municipal level—reproducing further uncertainties.

Waiting and uncertainty shapes the policy context for informal trading in the KCBD more generally. Katharine Miszewski and her MURP 'operations and maintenance of facilities' team (largely in partnership with VPUU) were actively engaging with the trading community and VPPU around the implementation of the ITP, until mid-2014. Katharine reveals that the main reason the City has not implemented the ITP is because it would require building onto the private land (see figure 2) and as a state body, they are not prepared to do anything that would benefit private landowners." Katharine’s dream was for the City to then buy the land’ from these private owners. However this proposition was turned down by the City who claimed they did not have the resources to buy the land, hence the discontinuation of the ITP.

Rasta confirms that the main issue KSITA is currently facing is the land. VPPU told them that the plots [on which some of the traders are trading] are sold to private people—this means that traders can be kicked off this land at any time, and feel constrained by the fact that they do not know whom to approach regarding purchasing this land so that they can acquire security of tenure to trade here permanently.

“It’s every Jack and Jill’s land. We don’t know who to trust,” says Rasta. Traders feel as though it should be given to them to trade on, as they were here first: “The traders feel it is emotionally their land,” says Katharine.

In the meanwhile, they live with this uncertainty, which often demoralizes traders thus negatively impacting their livelihoods. Bonakele explains, quite annoyed, that people are always saying: “These grounds belong to such and such a person”—admitting that there is definitely confusion as they are never sure which is private land and which is municipal land. Nqabisa, an elderly Xhosa woman who trades on the private land near Bonakele,
informs us that the land just below the train station is currently being fought for (see photo 3). She says there are currently lawyers involved, as issues of ownership and land-use run rife, adding that the traders need land for their businesses and are willing to buy it collectively: “we have the means,” she says. However, they do not know who owns this private land and accessing this information has proven difficult, as their communication channels are weak. They also report that there is competition from private developers scouting the area for opportunities.

Confusion is also reproduced when traders become aware of development plans rumored by non-state actors. Bonakele informs us that PRASA said they would bring development to the traders, but did not want people trading on the Station. The plan was to build a new bridge from the Container Park to the Station, and to place the traders in stalls under the bridge. He adds that VPUU have also been making promises to develop around the Station and make stalls for the traders, “but they never say what year, what date, what time—it’s always ‘in the pipeline’.” Rasta mentions several times “PRASA and Coca Cola’s plan,” saying “it was perfect!”—he loved their design and organisation of proposed stalls, but when PRASA announced they wanted to do this development, City of Cape Town said no because of their own plans for the land. Rasta, frustrated, adds:

“We could have bought the land if we were told it was available...They’re sending us from pillar to post every time.”

Figure 4: Photograph taken from the Container Park, showing Precinct 2 in the background, the fenced-off private market land in the mid-ground, and the contested ‘Chinese-owned’ land (see footnote 5) in the foreground. Nqabisa’s stall is along the fence just to the left of the photograph.

I ask Advocate, an elderly man who has a restaurant in one of the red caravans, what he knows about the development plans for the area. He says that:

“There is supposed to be someone coming to tell us what’s happening—we don’t know...Everybody is doing his own thing...Tomorrow the government can come here and remove us [...] We [informal traders] are like the plants in the bush, nobody recognizes us”.

From these narratives it is clear that underlying this uncertainty and confusion is fear—of removal to an undesirable space, the need to uproot and rebuild businesses elsewhere, or that their plight will not be recognized and addressed. This potentially curbs socio-
economic growth as traders sit awkwardly between the uncertainties of their developmental future—constantly reproduced by confusion pertaining to land ownership, shifting responsibilities and rumored development plans, and the fear of being forcibly removed from where they are trying to grow their businesses.

However, this is not always the case, as amidst these layers of uncertainty and confusion, we see a new dimension of waiting arise as traders reinvent spaces for themselves in the meanwhile whilst waiting for development plans to materialize in the long-term.

Traders are trying to make ends meet by negotiating spaces, building businesses and collectively trying to manage the influx of new traders, all the while waiting in the long-term for entrepreneurial opportunities or formal employment, dreaming of a formal development and retail context, or like Mama, just hoping for a small, cost-efficient and safe little stall that would attract customers and add value to their businesses.

3.2. Entrepreneurs: managing, negotiating and growing businesses

In this research journey I came across the phrase “Vukuzenzele”: ‘wake up and do it’ (isiXhosa), which awoke after the 2008 financial crisis as a government-led initiative to encourage South Africans to help themselves, resulting in many unemployed South Africans turning to informal trade. This vernacular reflects the ways informal traders create self-agency as they renegotiate their existence in conditions of transition and marginalisation.

3.2.1. Organization through self-management: KSITA enforcing order

The collective self-management of the KCBD by the informal trading community is largely a response to two premises: local Law Enforcement telling the traders that if they allow more people to come trade in the area, they would all be moved away and, the VPUU-City of Cape Town telling the traders that there is only space for a certain number of traders in the ITP. This has led traders to self-manage these spaces in an attempt to secure a space and place in the KCBD, and is carried out with what the traders call a “ghetto respect.”

The Khayelitsha Station Informal Traders Association (KSITA), established in 2011, is the official union of the trading community. Nqabisa tells us KSITA formed in an attempt to ensure traders had power and a spokesperson on issues such as land and development, and is now very involved in the process of information access and communication regarding such issues. Through talking to traders it became evident that the Committee is a well-respected presence, responsible for managing issues of influx, space access, conflict and general regulation. Benson, a young Zimbabwean trader, explains that whenever there is a meeting, somebody comes around and calls them: there is “a protection of the people” he says, “traders on both sides [of the railway] work together. Mr “Big Fish” says he wants to join KSITA because they found out some traders were stealing things from houses and shops nearby and selling them here, which the Committee is actively trying to prevent, for the safety and integrity of the trading community.

At the taxi rank, this management responsibility also falls on the traders, albeit, without a committee. Nokuzola says that the allocated trading spaces are working, and that if someone tries to extend their stall into someone else’s space, they remind each other that
they have territories. She says that they manage the space with a “respect system” and there have not been any conflicts thus far. A very similar situation exists at the Station where, despite giving traders allocated spaces, PRASA is not actively involved in managing the space: the traders are left to manage the space and keep the pathways clear.

3.2.2. Negotiating Spaces: Attempts to secure livelihoods and dreams to grow businesses

Walking and talking between stalls, Mr “Big Fish” and Lufefe discuss business and vision in times of hardship. “Now is the time where we come in as young minds with vision—we can’t stay informal forever,” says Lufefe. Discussing their own strategies for success, they note that there is definitely a distinction between those who are actively trying to change their businesses in the face of their circumstances, versus those who are just waiting for the state to provide. It must be noted that ‘waiting for the state to provide’ and ‘actively trying to change businesses’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive occurrences in the KCBD: many traders who are negotiating spaces are still waiting for the state (in the long term), but choose not to wait passively and instead actively try and grow their businesses without the state.

Here I will reveal a few examples of how traders exhibit agency, negotiating situations and spaces in an attempt to secure their livelihoods, as Big Fish says: “If you’re an entrepreneur, you can use anything!” We will also hear some of the dreams traders have for their businesses:

Noluthando explains that she is struggling with business, so her strategy has been to rent a shop at Precinct 2, but as a storeroom, bringing her merchandise to sell at the Mall, where they earn much more money because there are more customers. Noluthando says they cannot make a living selling at Precinct 2—“it’s too quiet.” Vuyile adds that many traders have adopted this strategy, and then have to employ people to transport their stuff to and from storage: so “it’s like a small business making more business.”

Another example, as mentioned earlier, is that of Nqabisa and of a few traders who want to buy the private land on which they are currently ‘illegally’ encroaching. Thus far, the Committee has taken action by sending a letter to the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform to inform him that the land is vacant and enquire about buying it. Although they may be consulting formal channels to achieve this, these traders are demonstrating agency in that they do not want to wait for the state and continue to encroach on these spaces, they want security of tenure.

Traders are also seen to negotiate physical spaces in innovative yet subtly encroaching ways. A small example of this is how some traders manage to access electricity: via a long overland extension cord, powered by a nearby house, running through the area (see photo 4). Blessing tells me they pay R300/month to the house across the road to use this, which allows them to use hairdryers in his saloon—an essential part of his business.
Examples of how traders negotiate space can be seen throughout the trading area in the way that traders bring their own materials to construct their stalls and pathways using ordinary, makeshift materials (see photo 5) in an attempt to better the space and shelter themselves and their customers from the elements.

The word ‘hustling’ was quite a popular term used by the traders to explain their daily practices and is clearly an important part of their daily survival but also in achieving their entrepreneurial dreams.”We are ordinary people—in order for our families to eat I must go out and hustle” says Rasta. One of these ‘hustlers’ is Mr “Big Fish”. Before he
came to trade in the area he says he did extensive on-site business research. He explained that he would stand at the station and count people (to get an idea of client numbers) and then went around to all the stalls finding out what he could sell that was needed. Mr “Big Fish” is still working towards his ice-cream shop dream. He is currently looking into pursuing it, and hopes to organize electricity or perhaps approach VPUU to rent an outside structure at Precinct 2 (see photo 5).

Much like Lufefe whose dream is “to change the health landscape of the community” through his spinach products, there are many traders who have to ‘hustle’ and ‘invent’ spaces in order to pursue their dreams. The ways in which they negotiate and assert themselves in these spaces, as they wait, now and in the future, are both physical and symbolic.

Figure 7: Photograph showing VPUU’s outside structures at Precinct 2, which costs R260/month, but are largely unoccupied as they do not have direct access to water or electricity, and traders feel this area is too quiet for business

“My dream is to see this place rebuilt and regenerated so it can be conducive to what we do,” shares Pani, an informal restaurant owner at the Caravan Park. She would love to have more of a kitchen setup with tables and chairs for customers to sit down and enjoy her cooking. Benson’s dream is to find a corner shop, he just needs to save enough money so he can buy stock bit by bit and afford the rent. For many, like Mama Vuyiswa and Eunice, the long-term dream is simply to have a simple proper stall, nothing fancy, in the KCBD. All they ask for in the interim is basic service delivery. These dreams shape street traders. Amidst the reordering spaces of the KCBD, and out of their experiences of waiting, traders aspire to reinvent spaces. Spaces in which their ordinary, everyday actions of individual and collective agency allows them to assert a place and a space in the KCBD that is otherwise not (realistically) afforded to them.

Concluding thoughts: Reordering and Inviting, Waiting and Inventing- the dreams, bricks and bodies of the KCBD

In the KCBD, we see tensions and then we see responses. These manifest both physically and symbolically. There are urban regeneration plans and there are informal trading
policies; there are regulations and there is management; there are state actors and there are private actors; there are plans and there are rights; there is inclusion and there is exclusion; there is reordering and there is reinventing. But in practice, these are not always clear; they are ridden with uncertainty, confusion and fears. At the same time, street traders are trying to make ends meet by inventing spaces: negotiating, ‘hustling,’ managing, and quietly encroaching to grow their businesses in the meanwhile, whilst ‘waiting’ in the long-term for entrepreneurial development opportunities or formal employment. The pockets of agency we see displayed through both individual and collective actions, in and between the various trading zones, reflect a ‘politics of practice’ (Ballard, 2014) and are deeply symbolic. Based on the empirical material gathered through this ethnographic journey, an innovative understanding of informal trading in this context could be suggested, given that the everyday reality is a rather textured variation of the policy definition of the economic understanding of the notion of informality.

Aligning with Ballard (2010), we see that traders, albeit ‘waiting’ for development promises, that always seem to be ‘in the pipeline’, are not necessarily passive recipients of their present marginalisation/underdevelopment, as described by Auyero and Swistun (2009). But rather, we see traders reflecting aspects of the useful concept of ‘neoliberal subjects’ as they build themselves as entrepreneurs by constantly trying to enhance their capacity to grow their businesses in the face of such exclusion and continual underdevelopment, be it through creating makeshift shelters, creating a vibrant atmosphere with African jazz music, encroaching on private land, combating crime or hustling to access information and resources via alternate channels —all of which are attempt to assert an actual right to the city.

Through the varied experiences of and responses recorded in the study area, it is clear that ‘waiting’ and agency in the KCBD is producing something far more ambiguous than ‘submission’ or ‘timepass’ (Jeffrey, 2010; Auyero et Swistun, 2009). It tells a story that is neither active nor passive, nor entirely uncertain and confusing, but rather, a story of traders ‘waiting’ in variable and textured ways that disrupt such notions, allowing us to see how waiting can be uncertain and confusing, but also, ridden with politics and agency. This nuance allows us to think about this complex space and informal trading practice in meaningful new ways. This shift in thinking from the abject situation of traders in the KCBD, to their dynamism, creativity and resilience (Harvey, 2012), is what allows us to see the overarching concept of an actual right to the city, resonate with this case study.

Furthermore, analyzing this empirical reality causes us to think critically about the afore asked question: “Can the subaltern speak?” And do the subaltern, in this case these traders, need somebody to give them a voice? In a very illuminating way, Spivak (1998) has directed our attention toward some of the dangers of such a political and epistemological posture: the assumption of a form of solidarity or homogeneity of the subaltern “group” actually; a tendency to “speak for” the subaltern; the risk to foster the tendency through culturally-based claims to reproduce a position of subordination in society.

Following this fieldwork however, it is clear from various informants as well as my informed field assistant, that that the frustration culminated in the waiting process of these traders has reached such a point that they are needing support in voicing their plight, as many channels of democracy have failed them. This is not to say that I, nor this
paper, have the power to speak successfully for them—but rather, to make known that
the subaltern are able speak for themselves, exposing in turn the diversity of their
situations and expectations. As researchers, if only we are willing to watch and listen—if
we are willing to spend time really understanding and engaging with the everyday,
ordinary actions and realities of those we consider as the “subaltern”—we may have the
privilege of creating a platform, perhaps otherwise not available, for voices to be heard
that may have been silenced by other channels.

This research is just a stepping stone in proving that the ‘subaltern’ are able to speak (and
act) for themselves, and in doing so inform better policies and practices that affect their
everyday lives. If researchers and decision-makers engage such qualitative/ethnographic
research, allowing the ‘bodies’ to inform the ‘bricks’ from the ground-up, the ‘subaltern,’
largely voiceless via formal channels of democracy, in many contexts could be given a
platform for their manifold and sometimes contradictory voices to be heard—in this case
through the testimony of both words and actions combined. Given the potential power of
voice in this empirical work, I would go as far as to suggest changes in theoretical and
conceptual approaches, especially in understanding realities of informality, urban
regeneration, local economic development, and so forth. Research needs to move towards
a more textured, everyday-reality-driven approach if we are to begin untangling tensions
and realities that exist in such contexts, and develop policy that will translate into
meaningful and tangible practice, valuing and echoing the voice of the ‘subaltern.’

Throughout this complex reality, we see Dierwechter’s (2004) notion of ‘dreams, bricks
and bodies’ resonating in the complex relationships existing between the KCBD planners,
state and non-state actors, and the informal traders. The dichotomy between the
planners’ imagined outcomes for the space (‘dreams’), the physical developments within
the space (‘bricks’) and the socio-economic everyday realities of traders on the ground
(‘bodies’) is what conceptualizes and contextualizes this space, allowing us to reflect on
the literature in meaningful new ways that texture our understanding of informal
trading.

This argument does however have its limitations: the discussed narratives of uncertainty,
confusion and waiting have been crucial in fabricating a more wholesome and meaningful
reality of the KCBD as a physically, socially and politically variable and uncertain space,
simultaneously filled with pockets of agency and hope. Ultimately, this research has
uncovered some of the often invisible, yet symbolic realities that knit together the fabric
of this visibly transitioning space—ordinary, everyday experiences of the street traders
themselves in a space of complex transition. It is here that ‘street politics’ (Bayat, 2010) is
produced, as traders pragmatically respond to a lack of governance, notions of
informality/formality are redefined and challenged, and where an actual right to the city
is fought for, or, as Rasta would say: where the poor must “Vukuzenzele”.

Informal Trading and a Right to the City in the Khayelitsha CBD: insights fro...
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NOTES

1. The only thing I think Rasta’s presence during those interviews could have limited is the trader’s true opinions of the trading Committee, however, during interviews when only Lufefe was present (a relatively neutral party) and with traders that Rasta had not introduced us to, there were still no negative comments made about the Committee.

2. I regard both Lufefe and Rasta as continuous sources of insight, as their knowledge was added to the information gathered at multiple entry points, far beyond the scopes of their official informal interviews. Lufefe was continually by my side, and I was constantly recording his comments and responses; similarly with Rasta.

3. This paper is of the ideological stance that informal traders in this context can and should be referred to as entrepreneurs. Firstly with respect to the fact that the traders referred to themselves as entrepreneurs, and secondly because they fit into the general defining characteristics of entrepreneurs: setting up a business, and taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.

4. She is referring here to Red Ant Security Relocation & Eviction Services, a company that PRASA must have hired to evict the traders from the Station.

5. Traders did not express how exactly this forced removal happened, just that they were forced to leave so that the development could take place.

6. This private land owner is reportedly a Chinese man, but there is still some uncertainty as to whether he has sold this land or not.

7. Several surveys were done by Katharine and her team in the area in an attempt to justify the proposal for the City to buy the land.

8. Perhaps this is a hidden agenda in the building of the KCBD—making land that surrounds the trading area more attractive for private investment, but simultaneously less accessible to street traders working informally.

ABSTRACTS

Informal trading is an everyday livelihood practice in South African cities. Although praised for its local economic development potential, in the post-Apartheid context, it often sits in tension with urban regeneration plans. This research examines the case of the Khayelitsha Central Business District (KCBD), just outside of Cape Town, built as part of the Mayor’s Urban Regeneration Program. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, this research explores the material and symbolic spaces and everyday practices of street trading in the KCBD—specifically, how traders negotiate their trading practices in a context of on-going development. What we see in practice is informal traders existing in a complex space—caught somewhere between exclusionary urban regeneration projects, and waiting for the state. Concurrently, traders are inventing spaces through negotiating, quietly encroaching and self-managing in an attempt to secure livelihoods and grow businesses in the meanwhile; whilst ‘waiting’ in the long-term for
physical and entrepreneurial development opportunities. By focusing on these symbolic experiences and actions of street traders in the KCBD, we can understand the often invisible, ordinary, everyday realities of the traders, through which ‘street politics’ is produced and an ‘actual’ right to the city is claimed. In this transitioning space, urban regeneration sits in tension with informal trading—a context in which these traders need to be given a voice, and where such research becomes valuable, in displaying a textured reality.

Le commerce informel est un moyen bien connu et classique de gagner sa vie dans les villes sud-africaines. Bien que, dans le contexte post-apartheid, son potentiel en matière de développement économique local soit reconnu, il se trouve aussi souvent en tension avec les politiques de régénération urbaine. Cet article examine le cas du CBD de Khayelitsha (township noir situé en périphérie immédiate de la métropole du Cap), un espace central qui a été reconfiguré dans le cadre d’un grand Projet de Régénération Urbaine directement porté par le maire du Cap. À travers un travail de terrain à caractère ethnographique, on explore le sens symbolique et matériel des pratiques quotidiennes liées au commerce de rue dans le CBD de Khayelitsha. Plus particulièrement, on étudie la manière dont les commerçants négocient leurs pratiques commerciales, dans ce contexte de redéveloppement du mall et de ses abords. On observe la manière dont les commerçants informels évoluent concrètement dans cet espace complexe, où ils se trouvent pris entre projets de régénération urbaine excluant et attente d’Etat. Dans ce contexte, les commerçants s’inventent une place à travers la négociation et l’empiètement tranquille, s’autogérant afin de sécuriser leurs moyens de subsistance et de faire prospérer leur entreprise, en même temps qu’ils « espèrent » des opportunités commerciales et des améliorations matérielles de leur environnement à long terme. Mettre l’accent sur la dimension symbolique de ces expériences et sur l’agir des commerçants dans le CBD de Khayelitsha permet de comprendre la réalité quotidienne, ordinaire et souvent invisible de ces vies commerçantes, à travers lesquelles sont produits une politique de la rue et un « droit à la ville de fait ». Dans cet espace de transition, où la régénération urbaine et le commerce de rue se trouvent en tension, il est urgent de donner la parole à ces commerçants, ce qui donne toute sa valeur à une recherche qui vise à restituer toute l’épaisseur de cette réalité.

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Keywords: informal trading, Khayelitsha, right to the city, agency, urban regeneration
Mots-clés: commerce informel, Khayelitsha, droit à la ville, agencéité, régénération urbaine

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