The Feminization of Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa

A Story Told by the Women of Bayview, Chatsworth

Saranel Benjamin
Independent Researcher

ABSTRACT

The adoption of neoliberal economic policies by South Africa as it entered into its democratic era, resulted in thousands, if not millions, of poor South Africans plummeting deeper into poverty. The same people who found themselves poor under apartheid, found themselves caught in a cycle of poverty that seemed to be worsening in democratic South Africa. With the privatization of basic services, many South Africans have found that they have no access to water, electricity, or health care and that they are now being evicted from their homes. This article tells the story of an urban community in South Africa which is home to one of the community organizations, the Bayview Flat Residents Association, that gave rise to the first wave of community struggles against evictions in post-apartheid South Africa. This community struggle and the Bayview Flat Residents Association, have been led by poor, black, urban women who continue to bear the burden of poverty.

Keywords: South Africa, feminism, activism, social movements, poverty, neoliberalism

Introduction

The day democracy dawned in South Africa, a bright light shone on a country that had spent over 300 years in darkness. At the Southern most tip of the African continent, South Africa was held prisoner to ‘the dismal socio-economic legacy of five systemic periods of white political domination and economic exploitation’ (Terreblanche, 2002: 371) that spanned 350 years. The year 1994 was seen as a turning point away from political and economic oppression to freedom and democracy for all. After the first democratic elections in 1994, millions of South Africans turned to the first democratic government to fulfil their promises of a better life for all.

The story of post-apartheid South Africa was supposed to be a happy one, filled with anecdotal accounts of how life got better for the majority of
people living in the new democracy. However, since the beginning of 2005, poor communities in urban townships all across South Africa have risen in protests. Most of the protestors have been women and youth. The protests were an angry, desperate articulation of their frustration of living in worsening poverty: their pleas were for proper housing, for water, for electricity. The government wondered why the protesters didn’t have the patience to wait for the delivery of basic services. Most had already been waiting their entire lives.

The scenario in the Western Cape is replicated in townships in Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Free State and Kwazulu-Natal. It is no different for the people living in Bayview, an impoverished community of 32,000 people, nestled in the inner recesses of a middle-to upper-income Indian township called Chatsworth. Just 20 minutes from the city centre, a community of people in Bayview live in dilapidated government-owned flats. Most have their electricity and water reconnected illegally after the state disconnected them and almost all of them live in fear of being evicted from their homes. The majority of the people living in the flats are unemployed without any possibility of getting another job. Almost all of them say that their economic situation worsened after 1996.

Part I will introduce the reader to the phenomenal women I have met and have grown to know, love and be inspired by every day and whose stories I am trying to tell with sensitivity and respect. Part II will examine the post-apartheid democratic government’s shift in economic policy and the embracing of neoliberal globalization. It will also examine the failure of the state to deliver basic services in post-apartheid South Africa due to the constraints created by neoliberal economic policy. Part III will examine the impact this has had on poor women in this township and the struggles they engage in to survive. The final part will examine the organization of poor communities into community movements, which have given strength and courage to people that are being pushed to the outer-reaches of humanity.

**Methodology**

This article was written from stories collected through ethnographic study in the community of Bayview with the assistance of women who live in the Bayview flats. The study which started out as a focus group with women from the Bayview Flat Residents Association (BFRA), has now developed into ‘The Women’s Group’ that meets once a week to talk
about ‘The Women Problem’.3 For this article, we had met as a group, once a week over a six month period, in the council flats where the women live. When these meetings were held there were at least 10 women attending. The meetings went on for over three hours and were structured around a broad theme with a few guiding and probing questions.

The BFRA is a community movement that emerged in 1999 and is located in council flats of Bayview, Chatsworth. This organization has been chosen because, in contrast with all other community movements that make up the social movements nationally, the executive has a membership of 18, with 17 of these members being women. In this research it was necessary that these women were investigated as ‘real, material subjects of their collective histories’ (Mohanty, 2003: 19).

Michael Buroway asked a basic question as he addressed the division of labour: Why do workers work?4 The prescient question, used as the basis of Sharad Chari’s (2004: 76) work in Fraternal Capital, forced Chari to answer this question through the use of ethnography. Applying the same principle to this research project, the question ‘Why do women act?’ in its simplest and basic form, required me, as the researcher to engage in a style of research that had as its central objective the desire ‘to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given ‘field’ or setting’ (Brewer, 2000: 11). At the same time, while trying to understand the experiences of the people under study, it became important ‘to tell the stories using the concepts and experiences of the people being researched rather than our own’ (Boas quoted in Pelto and Gretel, 1978: 69) so that meaning is not imposed externally on them (Brewer, 2000: 10)

In spite of the fact that the burden of day-to-day survival falls on the shoulders of the women in the household, these women have dedicated their time to this research project and have spoken candidly about their struggle to survive. They have talked about the poverty they are caught in and how things spiralled out of control after 1996 when the democratic government introduced its neoliberal macro-economic policy for the nation, and what measures they had to take (and continue to take) to make sure their families don’t go hungry. Amidst their poverty struggles they have fought off and continue to fight off a strongly patriarchal structure of the family with abusive and oppressive husbands and partners. They fight daily the struggles against a patriarchal state that has increasingly, through its austere neoliberal economic policies, feminized poverty in post-apartheid South Africa.
PART I: The Poors of Chatsworth

Chatsworth lies about 40 km outside of the central business district of Durban. It was set up in the 1950s as a township within the apartheid framework of the Group Areas Act. Through this Act ‘...thousands of Indians from all over Durban were corralled into [this] ten square kilometre precincts south of Durban’ (Desai, 2000: 13). Just as many Africans were also shepherded out of the city to the peripheries of Durban. This was all in keeping with the vow the apartheid state took to uphold racial segregation.

The townships, like Chatsworth, were where poor, black people were sent to live out their ‘sordid existence’ (Ginwala, in Desai, 2000: 19). The residents of Chatsworth were working-class people, who struggled to cope with the payment of rent, electricity, water and providing food for their families. Their payments far exceeded the monies they earned as wages. This was how life played itself out in Chatsworth under apartheid. The fear of not being able to provide food for their families was further exacerbated by the fear of being evicted from their homes. Many had their water and lights disconnected for non-payment.

Today, 55 years later, Chatsworth looks different. It is no longer the vestige of working-class poor Indian people. In fact, if you drive along the never-ending highway that runs through Chatsworth you would be forgiven for thinking that this is the home of rich, well-to-do Indians. The pockets of poverty are hidden away from the public eye, so much so that the existence of the ‘poors’ is easily denied. From the 1970s onwards, a concerted effort was made to strategically place the middle-class areas of Chatsworth in ways that would hide the ‘poors’. According to Desai, ‘[t]hese pockets of affluence served as a cover for the socio-economic degeneration’ (2000: 23) that was becoming pervasive in the hidden recesses of the township.

Inside Chatsworth is an area called Bayview. It has a total population of approximately 32,000. According to the Census 2001 results (www.statssa.gov.za), most of the households (21.5 percent) in this area had an annual household income between R38 401 and R76 800 (R3200–R6400 per month) making this area a lower to middle-income group. On either side of this indicator lie the rich and the poor: only 21 percent of the households have an income higher than R76 800. However, the majority of households (4,767 households or 58 percent) earn below R38 401 per annum. Over half of the households in Bayview are surviving on less than R3200 per month.
Of the 32,000 people living in Bayview, 40 percent have no employment. The statistics also show that in 2001, there were still over 2,000 households in the area that did not have direct access to water in their homes but were accessing water from a tap in the yard, from a community stand, spring, rain tank, river or from a water vendor. They also show that there are still 348 households that do not have access to any form of sanitation and 159 households using pit latrines. The remaining 120 households have flush septic tanks, chemical toilets or a bucket latrine. In addition there are still households that do not have access to electricity: 519 households are lit by candles. Since 1996, there has been a 63 percent increase in the number of households using candles.

As a result of these characteristics, the municipality categorizes Bayview as a lower to middle-income community in a fairly well resourced area in terms of access to basic services. Bayview is an urban township, which means that all of its households ought to have water and electricity. Yet within Bayview itself, just by looking at the data, it is transparent that there is a large number of families living in abject poverty with no electricity, in-house water and struggling to cope with unemployment. These families are most likely to be found living in the flats they rent from the government. They are crammed away on hillsides and in valleys unseen, divorced from the rest of existence.

Desai (2000: 4) describes these flats:

At the very bottom of the ridge, where a valley is formed, the semi-detached flats mutate into huge, bulky tenement blocks, containing 6 families a piece. Here the poorest of the people of Chatsworth have been put to live and die. These are the proverbial third class coaches of the apartheid train; cramped, ugly, unsafe and hidden from view.

The Institute for Black Research (IBR) conducted a socio-economic survey of the Bayview flats in June 1999. This study investigated the socio-economic living conditions of 504 households. It found that the vast majority (76 percent) of those living in the flats were living below the poverty line with 62 percent of the households surviving on R800 or less per month. The unemployment rate was 57.9 percent and 41 percent of the households survived off welfare grants.

Located in the heart of the Bayview flats is a community organization, the BFRA. It has an executive committee of 12 people elected by the community, and 11 of them are women. The BFRA was formed in June 1999 as a direct response to the spiralling poverty in the community. Faced
with the looming prospect of their needs and demands being ignored, the BFRA launched a series of challenges against the local municipality. The struggles in Bayview against evictions, relocations, water and electricity disconnections reached a high point in 2000 when a violent clash erupted between the state machinery and a community protesting the evictions. This sparked off sites of resistance all over the country giving rise to social movements in three different provinces as people organized themselves into the Concerned Citizen’s Forum (Kwazulu-Natal), Anti-Eviction Campaign (Western Cape) and the Anti-Privatisation Forum (Gauteng).

The stories narrated in this article are as told to me by the women of the BFRA. We meet once a week to talk about their lived experiences and survival strategies. Every week, a new woman joins the group and gets to tell her story. For many in the room, the chance to tell their story is a very liberating experience. Their stories have ranged from the experiences with poverty at a young age to their experiences today. They also involve the strategies they employed then to survive and how their struggles have changed today. Mingled in their experiences with poverty are their struggles with a strongly patriarchal society that is replicated in their homes. They are not perfect women: they have their moments of discrimination, backbiting, bitterness, but through it all they have remained generous, soul-searching women with dreams of someday living that better life. They are mothers, wives, sisters, activists. All are unemployed, all are living on state grants, all are struggling to put food on the table.

I have been very humbled by this experience, to sit in the homes of these women and be a witness to their extraordinary existence. It has made me excruciatingly aware of my position of privilege as a middle-class woman working in the elite space of a university. I am therefore conscious of my place in this group of women and write this essay with profound respect for how they manage their daily lives.

PART II: The Women on the Bayview Flats

‘To stand up and be a very strong woman and be very brave to actually stand up and be counted and to still take care of your family, it’s a struggle.’

At the first focus group that was held, seven women crammed into a one-bedroom flat. The session was called ‘Establishing Identities’ to ascertain
where these women were in terms of how they saw themselves. Their stories were filled with sadness, some with regret and there were also moments of joy and happiness.

Julie is 27 years old. She is currently unemployed. She moved to Bayview 16 years ago and lives with her mother, brother and sister-in-law. Julie says it has been hard for her to get a decent job. Her mum and dad worked so she had to take care of her siblings. She has taken odd jobs just to work and has worked in a clothing company and in a warehouse. Since she joined the BFRA committee she has been exposed to many training workshops such as HIV workshops, a research training programme or whatever came her way and because of this she was able to qualify for the Centre for Civil Society’s research grant. This also gave her exposure to other research work. Also after all of the training, she has come out of her shell and knows that there might just be a better job out there for her.

Queenie has been living in Bayview for the past 10 years. She has two children and is married. She is currently unemployed although she occasionally gets some work as a cook or a caterer. Her husband is an alcoholic and sometimes comes home having spent all the money on alcohol. On those days she has to make do with what they have. Her biggest struggle is putting food on the table and keeping her children in school. Joining the committee has changed her life. For her, the members of the committee are the people she confides in and talks to about her problems. She also feels that she can get away from her problems by attending the evening seminars.

Sweetie has been living in the Bayview area for the past 17 years. She has two teenage children. Her son is married and her daughter has turned 21. She also has adopted four children whom she puts through school. Sweetie is currently unemployed. She used to work in a warehouse as a quality controller but she lost her job when the company underwent retrenchments. Since then she has found it difficult to get any kind of formal employment. Instead, she sells odd things from time to time. She has endured an abusive relationship with a husband who was addicted to alcohol and drugs. He used to beat her and her two children. Sweetie is now divorced. She says that she used to be introverted opting to stay by herself and not interact with anyone. She sometimes felt suicidal. But since she joined the committee there is more for her to do. She gets to meet other people, talk about the suffering they are going through and to know that their suffering is the same as hers.
At the age of 22, Shantal is the youngest in the committee. She is a bubbly, energetic girl, filled with optimism and hope. Shantal completed her matric (Grade 12) but has not been able to get her results from the school because she had not paid her school fees as there was no money. She cannot get a job without those certificates from her school. She also cannot get into any tertiary institution without proof of completing her matric. It has been her dream to become a nurse. Shantal says she was a ‘child’ when she joined the committee and it was only afterwards that she realised that people were really suffering and that she wanted to do something about it. She says ‘when I think about myself I feel happy because I know other people are feeling happy because of us’. She says that they have been able to give water to those who had their water cut-off and have done the same with electricity. They have also been able to put people back in their homes after evictions.

Sally lost her husband five years ago. She does not work anymore because she broke her leg and has not been able to work again. She has a 21-year-old son who used to work for the municipality until he lost his job a year ago due to retrenchments. He had taken over his father’s job working for the department of parks and gardens cutting the trees. Sally was 18 when she married her husband who was 15 years older than she. She married him because her family was so poor and he had money and could take care of her and her family. For Sally the committee is a place she can talk about her problems. In the committee, the women can get together and sort out problems.

Annie studied to be a nurse. She was married and had two children. She divorced her husband because he was cheating on her. She met another man who turned out to be a drug addict. To feed his habit he forced her into prostitution, beating her relentlessly if she did not want to go out on the streets. Annie says her choices were either not having a home for her children or going out onto the streets. She is severely depressed and can hardly get through a sentence without bursting into tears. Annie was knocked over by a taxi and has suffered severe injuries. She cannot work and is therefore forced to continue prostituting, as she has no other means to survive.

Shirley is a single mother of four children. She started working when she was 15 years old. Shirley says that she came from a very poor background. She says it has been very difficult to raise her children. She worked in clothing companies until those factories started retrenching. Shirley takes on odd jobs to get by. She was married to ‘a very violent man’ who
Benjamin: Feminization of Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa

was a drug addict. His public humiliation of her reduced her to nothing, she says. But after joining the committee, Shirley has been outspoken, provocative and strong. She represents the committee at a number of national workshops. Her main objective at the moment is raising her four children.

Over the three weeks that the group met before this article was written (and we continue to meet every week) we talked about who they were in the society and what were the factors that made their lives easier or that made their lives insufferable. We also talked about poverty and the cycle they have found themselves in before and after democracy. And we talked about the strategies they were forced to adopt in order to survive.

PART III: The Logic of Poverty During Apartheid

‘I think people were more afraid of the white government.’

Apartheid South Africa was structured socially, politically and economically along racial lines. Through the creation of separate systems of operation, including the structure of the economy, larger and wider income disparities existed and functioned in a way that served to racialize the South African society. This economic disparity between the races was further entrenched systemically through political and legislative measures resulting in the black majority of the population being ghettoized, politically, socially and economically. Black townships were increasingly marginalized in terms of infrastructural development, access to basic services, educational opportunities, housing and jobs. In other words, poverty has been institutionalized and as a result South Africa has one of the highest Gini Co-efficients in the world (Saul, 2002). The translation of these measures was the development of a system that served to protect and keep secure the interests of the minority white population at the expense of the black majority who were systematically dispossessed from their land, their resources, their wealth, and their jobs.

In his historical analysis of the South African economy, Terreblanche observes that the structure of the apartheid economy created a situation that served the interest of white capital (Terreblanche, 2002). An elite group of white businesses developed a pact with the Afrikaner governments during the apartheid era that saw the structure and system of the South African economy being twisted and convoluted to serve the interest of this elite group. This system and the structure of the economy has remained unchanged in the post-apartheid era.
The old apartheid structure of the economy had a direct impact on the structure and workings of the labour market. The creation of a steady supply of cheap, unskilled labour into mining, manufacturing and farming assisted white-owned industries to develop and amass large profits. It also allowed for the creation of policies and legislation that developed the architecture for the apartheid landscape. These policies and pieces of legislation were designed to push black people onto the periphery of social, political and economic existence creating a cesspool of poverty and at the same time creating an abundant flow of wealth to a minority group.

The insidious nature of apartheid and its objective of dehumanizing black people has had an enormous impact, holistically, on the lives of black people. Also racial segregation and economic deprivation combined with patriarchy has had a staggering impact on the lives of millions of black women. For many poor black women it meant living on the periphery: economically, politically and also in the labour market. The denial of proper education through apartheid and being wrenched out of school to take care of siblings or to earn more money for their poverty-stricken families resulted in many black women being pushed into unskilled, low-paying jobs as domestic servants or in factories.

Sweetie remembers having to leave school when she was 13 years old. She says that her family had no money and she was taken out of school to earn extra money for the family. Those dark days of poverty under apartheid saw Sweetie, as a 13-year-old girl, washing clothes for middle-class women across the railway tracks that divided the rich from the poor in Chatsworth. She did this for two years until she got a job in a clothing factory. She had no qualifications, no skills, but needed the job even though the pay was bad. Sweetie remembers:

When I left school I was too young to get a job in a factory so I had to wash clothes for other people. If you had to wash clothes to make some money then you have to do it. Sometimes the ladies you washed clothes for gave you old clothes, food. (Focus Group 1, 26 May 2005)

Sally also recalls having to drop out of school at the age 12 because her family also didn’t have money and could not manage. She had no shoes or clothes to wear. She would have to wait until she was 18 to taste her first chocolate.

The differential treatment of the white and black races was pervasive in all aspects of life. From the provision of education, where people could live and where they could go, the jobs they were given access to,
the kind and amount of welfare they received right through to the provision of basic services, all were calculated and implemented in ways that would secure the interests of the white population at the expense of black communities. However, whilst McDonald acknowledges that the apartheid state, no matter how schizophrenic it was, did subsidize the delivery of basic services such as water, electricity, houses and education, black people still experienced the harshness of the state in the form of evictions and water cut-offs:

There were lots of people who were evicted at that time [during apartheid]. If you were evicted, and like I said we didn’t have a committee then, people would have to stay outside until they arranged their monies to pay to get back into their houses. It happened to my neighbour…Remember [the community] gave them a massive tent. The municipality threw all their furniture outside in their yard and they had this big tent with all their furniture under and they used to stay there. (Sweetie, Focus Group 3)

Julie remembers her family’s experience of having their electricity disconnected during the days of apartheid:

It happened to us twice and once we made it to pay it the same day. They cut it in the morning and I phoned my mother and somehow she borrowed the money and went straight to the department and paid it…so they came and connected it the same day. But there was another time we couldn’t get the money and we couldn’t pay and we had to spend the night without lights. (Julie, Focus Group 3)

The violence of state repression instilled fear in black communities. It divided communities and made people fearful of each other. Organizing people into groups that could act collectively was difficult. The building of trust within communities was not an easy task because the state machinery was all seeing, all knowing, everywhere. Families were torn apart by the persecutory nature of the state: people were hauled out of their homes in the middle of the night, tortured in prison for information. Some never returned home. Today, the non-delivery of basic services by the democratic state is met with resistance from communities in the form of illegal reconnections of disconnected water and electricity. This is a form of contemporary activism rooted within the new social movements. But back then, during the dark days of apartheid, people were terrified to reconnect their disconnected water or electricity even though it meant just lifting a switch:
I remember the guys around here saying to my mum and dad, ‘It’s just a switch!’ And that time they had wooden doors at the meter room and they could just open it. They said, ‘It’s just a switch’, and they’ll put it up for us and we’ll have lights and the next day we can go pay the lights because by then we would have the money. My mother refused and my dad refused. They said, ‘No way! No!’ Because if we put it on and someone sees…if the neighbours know that the lights are cut and then someone sees that the lights are on we will get into trouble. And we were so scared. My mother was saying, ‘they are going to lock us up’. (Julie, Focus Group 3)

People were very scared of the community then. People never had the freedom to talk. (Shirley, Focus Group 3)

The apartheid state used the strategy of divide and rule to dislocate black people into their individual identities of Coloured, Indian and African where

the inequalities of the system were distributed unevenly amongst the black population …Indian and Coloured workers also had greater and easier access to the resources necessary for enhanced mobility within the system, resulting in growing middle classes in both these groups by the 1970s. (McKinley and Veriavia, 2005: 13)

However, the social security system that was set up from the 1970s onwards to assist the development of an Indian and Coloured middle class also served as the only life line for impoverished communities. In Bayview, the women talk about life before 1994 and see those years, despite the darkness of apartheid, as golden years: a time in their lives when they could actually afford to pay for their rent, electricity and water and still be able to put food on the table:

Majority of [the community] used to pay their rental because they used to collect that big amount of grant… we could make it to pay. (Julie, Focus Group 3)

It was very hard. The only time I put my lights back on was when my first grant came through. I could manage. (Shirley, Focus Group 3)

That time [during apartheid] people could survive, could pay their rent. People had grants to help them…That time when we had the white government you could pay school fees of up to 50 cents per month. Then you got schoolbooks and stationery. And your children weren’t chased out of school because they couldn’t pay or if they didn’t have school shoes. (Sweetie, Focus Group 3)
Black people living under apartheid suffered enormously, living in fear, humiliation and poverty. They also gave their lives to the struggle to free themselves from the shackles of apartheid. This struggle was not just for political freedom and the chance to vote. It was also a struggle to right the wrongs of the past, to give to all the black people the spoils of the land so that there would not be poverty, that everyone would have a job, a roof over their heads and food on the table. That is what the African National Congress (ANC) promised the millions of oppressed black people on the eve of the very first democratic elections in 1994. And millions believed that they would deliver on the promise and so they voted in their millions securing for the ANC, a majority hold of the government.

PART IV: Neoliberalism in Post-apartheid South Africa

‘They [ANC] promised so many things to the poor just to get the vote. We voted for that better life. But now we are still waiting.’

The ANC’s 1994 national election campaign was premised on not just delivering democracy and freedom to the citizens of South Africa but it was also rooted strongly in the memory of apartheid’s denial of basic resources to black people. Riding on the crest of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) – the ANC’s proposed economic plan for the post-liberation era – the ANC promised to right the wrongs of the past and to give to the people what they had long been denied. Election posters blazing with the black, green and gold colours of the Party screamed out to the poor: ‘A better life for all!’, ‘Free basic services!’, ‘Jobs for All!’, promising to redistribute the wealth accumulated by the apartheid government, white businesses and the white population. The poor believed the rhetoric and millions voted in the ANC as the first democratic government. Today, the poor, like Julie (quoted above), claim they were duped by the ANC just so they could get into power.

As Sweetie puts it: ‘The only good thing that the black government (ANC) did was abolish apartheid.’ (Focus Group 3)

The ANC party’s decision to turn away from its former redistributive stance to one that strongly embraced neoliberalism happened early on in the transition period. The negotiated settlement of the transition talks focused more on what the macro-economic policy was going to look like and what stake in the country’s economy big business would have. According to Saul
... the relative ease of the political transition was principally guaranteed by the ANC's withdrawal from any form of genuine class struggle in the socio-economic realm and the abandonment of any economic strategy that might have been expected directly to service the immediate material requirements of the vast mass of desperately impoverished South Africans (2002: 8).

The ANC's capitulation to the charms of a market-driven economy saw the party ditch clauses in the Freedom Charter and the RDP to emerge with a macro-economic policy that was ‘a fairly standard neoliberal one’ (Habib and Padayachee, 2000: 3). The choice of a market-driven policy that will ensure maximum profit accumulation of those already rich was made by the ANC with the full knowledge that in South Africa,

the poorest 60% of household’s share of total expenditure is a mere 14%, while the richest quintile’s share is 69% and where, across the decade of the nineties, a certain narrowing of the income gap between black and white (as a growing number of blacks have edged themselves into elite circles) has been paralleled by an even greater widening of the gap between rich and poor. (Saul, 2002: 8)

Although the capitulation to big business happened early on in the transition phase, the announcement and implementation of the ANC-government’s macro-economic policy, the Growth Employment And Redistribution (GEAR) policy was only in 1996. Then president, Nelson Mandela, announced in one of the national newspapers that the new economic policy for the country had ‘not a single reference to things like nationalization, and this is not accidental. There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist ideology’ (Marais, 2001: 122).

The focus of GEAR was centrally located in the main tenets of neoliberalism as instituted globally with the main objective being to create an environment that enabled maximum private investment. Hence GEAR proposed cuts in government spending to reduce the deficit, tax concessions for big business, reduction of tariff barriers (in the clothing, textile, leather, car manufacturing industries), privatization of government assets (which included the provision of basic services), reduction in state welfare programmes and a more flexible labour market. Adelzadeh (in Marais, 2001: 163) and Saul both agree that the ANC had ‘come, full circle, back to the late apartheid government’s Normative Economic Model. For the central premise of South Africa’s economic policy now could scarcely be clearer: ask not what capital can do for South Africa but what South Africa can do for capital...’ (Saul, 2002: 12).
The ANC government’s embracing of neoliberalism and giving capital the run of the economy within the same economic structure as during apartheid did nothing for the poor black person. Instead, it facilitated the same process that had been used by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party to create an Afrikaner bourgeoisie. The only difference was that the ANC set out to create a black bourgeoisie. The Economist writes:

Though black incomes are barely a sixth of white ones, a black elite is rising on the back of government jobs and the promotion of black business. It is moving into the leafy suburbs, such as Kelvin and Sandton, and adopting the outward symbols of prestige – the BMW, swimming pool, golf handicap and black maid – that so mesmerize status-conscious whites. (cited in Saul, 2002: 15)

The push for GEAR from the ANC’s side was that GEAR could achieve economic growth, attract foreign direct investment, boost employment and increase socio-economic equality. The verdict thus far has been resoundingly negative:

GEAR has been associated with massive deindustrialization and job shedding through reduced tariffs on imports, capital flight as controls over investments are relaxed, attempts to downsize the costs and size of the public sector, and real cuts in education, health and social welfare spending. (Saul, 2002: 13)

This neoliberal economic framework adopted by the ANC government precludes the development of any form of social security system for the growing band of unemployed, informal sector workers and the poor. GEAR argues for a decline in state expenditure. An examination of the budget allocation shows that a greater decline took place in social assistance grants (pensions, old-age homes, children’s feeding schemes, the child support grant) whilst spending on defence budgets increased (Benjamin, 2001).

PART V: The Lived Experience of the Poor

‘Everyday is a struggle…You wake up in the morning and you wonder where that meal is going to come from.’

The harsh effects of the GEAR policy have been felt most by those who came into the era of democracy already poor. Most were black, working-class women, both urban and rural. GEAR has left the poor more vulnerable to increasing poverty and most workers debilitated and unemployed due to deindustrialization.
Unemployment

Despite the fact that GEAR was sold to the public on the basis that it would create jobs and thus assist in the alleviation of poverty, the neoliberal nature of the policy and its saddling up to the market has resulted in a massive haemorrhaging of low skilled and unskilled jobs. Unemployment is currently at its highest with the number of unemployed people constituting just over 40 percent of the population.

Not only are people losing their jobs, but also young people are finding it difficult to gain employment. Unemployment rates between 1993 to 2002 show a steady increase in the number of unemployed people: in 1993 the unemployment rate was 31 percent. By 2002 this had gone up to 41.8 percent (Kingdon and Knight, 2004: 4). These rates include those who have never worked before and who are looking for jobs. Within this context of growing unemployment, the larger proportion of those unemployed are women. In 1999, 56 percent of the unemployed were women (Kehler, 2001: 2).

The decimation of industries took place through the reduction of trade tariffs in industries that employed large numbers of poor semi-skilled and unskilled black women workers. For example, the clothing, textile and leather industries in which women workers are the majority, has shed 17,000 jobs in 2004 with 3,100 being lost since the beginning of 2005.18 The rate of job losses in this sector has been on an upward projection. The car component manufacturing sector loses on average about 13,000 jobs per year. And the reduction in subsidies for agriculture has caused the deterioration of this sector.

Julie’s mother works in a clothing factory. She lives every day with the fear that it may be her last day in the factory. Julie says that the factory goes on short time19 a lot recently and during those times the family has to ‘borrow [money] and then she [her mother] has to pay it back and it’s just to have a meal for that week that we are at home’.20 Most of the women in Bayview provided a steady stream of cheap labour to the clothing, textile and leather industries that are located close to Chatsworth. But this soon came to an end. The destruction of the clothing industry happened almost overnight when the GEAR policy allowed for the tariffs in the clothing, textile and leather industries to be reduced faster than the rate expected by the GATT agreement. The result was almost instantaneous:

Now that we are open for imports and exports, it has made things so difficult. Factories are closing down, people are losing their jobs left, right and centre.
There is no clothing industry anymore. Most of the big companies are closing down. ... In our area majority of the people here are working in clothing factories.21

According to Desai, ‘the downward spiral of the industry has forced many of the women of Chatsworth into unemployment’ (2002: 64). It has also rendered this sector unstable and vulnerable to the point that in order for companies to survive and for people to have a semblance of a job, women workers have been forced to be ‘flexible’ in the way they work. This space has allowed for sweatshops to flourish in the backyards of middle-and-upper class homes. Unprotected and not unionized, women retrenched from clothing factories take up jobs in these sweatshops. Julie paints a picture of the exploitation of vulnerable women desperate for a job:

They [sweatshops] make you work overtime and until late at night. If that order doesn’t go out you don’t get paid that Friday. And you are set on that Friday because you got things to do with that money … and then the following week he [owner] will pay you but he won’t pay you the full two weeks wages, he’ll pay you half of the money he owes you and he will say next week he will pay you the rest. You had to work because you needed that money. I used to get paid R30 (less than $5USD) a day but I accepted it because I needed that money...[I worked] from 7 am to 4 or 4:30 pm. Sometimes you will work later if he needs the order to go out. But he’s not paying you very good for the overtime. It’s just a couple of hours. He’ll pay you about R3 or R4 for the hour. You can’t do anything with that money.22

Because the burden of maintaining the home falls so squarely on the shoulders of women, many are forced to find jobs that will be able to feed their families. The women in our discussions say they will take whatever jobs they can. Shirley explains that she would ‘do whatever jobs come my way. I try and work for two or three weeks’ (Focus Group 3). Queenie also tried to get a job. She travelled about 20 km to work in a tote office. She says that the male owner of the tote office wanted her to work from 6:30 am until after 9 pm. He was willing to pay her R30 for the day, i.e. 15 hours of work (Focus Group 1). The women agreed that sometimes they are forced to do whatever work comes their way, including washing clothes for other middle-class women because at the end of the day ‘if a child is hungry it will go to its mother for food [because the] men can just sit around or walk around here with no care about how food will get onto the table’.23
The massive unemployment through the destruction of the clothing, textile and leather industries has torn apart the social fabric of many communities across the country. Other industries and sectors also shed millions of jobs further entrenching poverty and ghettoizing ‘the poors’.

**Basic Services**

The adoption of neoliberal policies has meant the privatization of basic services such as water, electricity, housing, education, health care, transport (formerly public transport). Privatization has led to an escalation of the costs of these services, increasing the level of poverty inherited from the era of apartheid.

By privatizing basic services, GEAR totally contradicted the RDP’s promise of free basic services to all. Based on the premise of cost recovery, electricity, water, housing and education have become beyond the reach of millions of poor people. Cost recovery policies in basic services have been defined as:

> [T]he recovery of all, or most, of the cost associated with providing a particular service by a service provider. For publicly owned service providers, this may or may not include a surplus above and beyond the cost of production, whereas, for private sector providers it necessarily includes a surplus (i.e. profit). In either case, the objective is to recoup the full cost of production. (McDonald and Pape, 2002: 18)

McDonald asserts that although the apartheid state discriminated against the black townships in its delivery of services, the provision of these services was subsidized, albeit unevenly. The democratic state has removed most of the state subsidies in the provision of basic services and over and above that has inserted the cost recovery policies in the provision of these services in the quest to maximize profit.

The installation of pre-paid water meters in areas like Orange Farm and Phiri in Gauteng and in Mpumalanga in Kwazulu-Natal has ensured that people are entitled to these basic services only if they have the money to pay for them.

Contrary to popular opinion, McDonald concludes that people cannot pay for basic services because they cannot afford to and not because they are lazy or because they embody a culture of non-payment. In addition, many sacrifice basic needs such as food and clothing to be in a position to pay for access to water and energy (2002: 7). However not paying for
the exorbitant and unaffordable water and electricity means that they can now have some food to eat.\textsuperscript{25}

The dilemma of either paying for basic services or putting food on the table has precipitated a crisis around food. In a study conducted by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre to assess food security, it was found that:

About 70\% of the respondents indicated that their households had experienced a food shortage at some time during the previous 12 months. About a quarter – 25.8\% – of children exhibited a degree of stunting.\textsuperscript{26}

The study by National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) into the food security crisis confirms that there has been a steady increase in food prices and this has created a crisis in food security. Just in 2002 alone, the price of a maize meal doubled, having a devastating effect on the working class. It noted that ‘workers typically spend more than a third of their income on food. The ultra-poor spend over 50\% of their income on food and up to 20\% on maize alone’. It further mentioned that ‘over two thirds of ultra poor households are located in rural areas and more than half have members who are pensioners and whose main supporters are women’ (Watkinson and Makgetla, 2002: 1).

In Bayview, despite the fact that all the women in the focus group are unemployed, the responsibility of providing food fell on their shoulders. Some borrowed money from loan sharks and drug dealers to buy something to cook for the day. Others bought on credit from tuck shops in the area.\textsuperscript{27} In both instances, the interest rate is so high that they end up merely paying the interest. There are some women who go begging at street corners and shopping malls while others are forced into prostitution to pay off their debts and maybe also buy some food:

Sometimes…if I owe R300 I have to stand there till I get that money. And maybe just R30–40 for my son and I for the day. But sometimes, it’s like a gamble, you make nothing…On the nights that I do this I find myself drinking excessively to forget who I am. I have to do it. I couldn’t do this in my normal senses.\textsuperscript{28}

Many of ‘the poors’ found that the inability to pay for the escalating costs of basic services such as water and electricity as well as the rental on the government flats saw them fall into arrears with their payment. Some of the arrears for water are estimated to be over R20,000 per household per month.\textsuperscript{29} ‘As a community it’s the majority that earns a little bit of money.
It’s not to say that we are not going to pay. If they scrap the arrears then our people will pay’ (Shirley, Focus Group 3).

However, the ANC government has responded to the inability of ‘the poors’ to pay for basic services by disconnecting their water or electricity or evicting from their homes. In a report done by the Coalition Against Water Privatisation, it was found that despite the ANC government’s claim that it provided an additional seven million people with access to clean running water and connected an additional 3.5 million people with electricity, it had nonetheless disconnected 10 million people’s water, 10 million people’s electricity and evicted more than two million people from their homes, all because of non-payment (Coalition Against Water Privatisation, Anti-Privatisation Forum and Public Citizen, 2004: 7). In an additional study done by the Municipal Services Project it was found that of the people interviewed who could not afford access to basic services, most were unemployed or in flexible, insecure, unprotected, low paying jobs; or had access to a social grant like a pension. Most were black women.

These poor communities, like Bayview, have responded by illegally reconnecting the electricity and water. ‘The poors’ have turned the household into a site of resistance by refusing to pay for unaffordable water and electricity and by illegally taking what they firmly believe is theirs to take. Shirley points out vehemently: ‘It’s not for nothing, we fought for something too you know!’ (Focus Group 3). The democratic state has cottoned on to this old form of resistance and has introduced a ‘tampering fee’:

Let’s say the first time they cut your lights, we put it on (illegally reconnect). So when they come again and they find your lights are on they say ‘tampered meter’ and they put R820 on to your bill. (Julie, Focus Group 3)

The state’s answer to people being unable to pay their rental on government flats is to relocate them to low-cost housing in areas far away from where they currently live. When the ANC came to power in 1994 it promised to build two million houses in five years. Eleven years later it has not met its target. Instead of building houses for those living in squatter camps and informal dwellings, the government has built low-cost housing to relocate those who cannot afford to pay for their rentals thus making space for those whom the government assumes can pay. Those in the flats are threatened with relocation to houses that cost less than the flats they are currently living in:
That low cost housing is just one room. It’s made with hollow bricks. Its not plastered. It’s terribly, terribly built…If they are going to move us to low cost housing then they are still not going to get their money’s worth. (Julie, Focus Group 3)

None of the women in the discussion group want to leave Bayview. They love the community, warts and all. Most of them carry the legacy of forced removals during apartheid. Many of them have already been relocated at least once in their lifetimes. They refuse to be relocated a second time and this time by a government they actually voted for.

**Social Grants**

Despite the history and intentions behind the apartheid government’s plan for social grants, not all Indian and Coloured people rose through the class ranks to become middle-class homeowners. Those that got left behind live in squalor in townships like Bayview. For these people, the social grants are a lifeline, a safety net preventing them for falling into the dark abyss that poverty promises.

In our discussions, it was very clear that all of the women sitting in the room survived on social grants during the days of apartheid. From disability grants to child support grants, these safety nets helped to pay for rent, water and electricity and put food on the table. Falling into arrears was something that happened occasionally to individuals but not to an entire community. But things changed. All of the women pointed to 1996 as the year their lives changed for the worse: their poverty worsened and they attributed it directly to the cut in the social grants they were receiving: ‘People fell into arrears because the grant was cut’.

According to a report published by the Centre for Civil Society on social grants and in particular the Basic Income Grant, the ANC government was intent to restructure the grants’ system to eradicate the racial distortion that had taken place during apartheid. However the ANC had made a series of public statements that giving people hand-outs in the form of state support would inevitably lead to a culture of dependency and laziness. Coupled with the ANC’s anti-poor attitude was the fact that the neoliberal leanings of its macro-economic policy allowed for only a minimal, if any, social welfare programme. The lack of commitment from government to the development of a basic income grant was evident in the entire policy process leading up to the development of the grant.
Knowing full well that the majority of people surviving on the grants were poor black women, the government still went ahead and decreased not only the amount of the child support grant but also the age of eligibility, thus cutting off a large number of children whose families desperately needed the grant to pay for increasing school fees and the rising cost of living. In addition, some of the other grants were also reduced and some disappeared completely. Sweetie explains that before 1996 she was receiving R700 for the two foster children she had with her. Not long after 1996 the foster child grant was reduced to R180 per child.34

PART VI: The Struggle to Survive

‘Women go through life with much more struggle.’35

The poverty that the women of Bayview face daily is a microcosm of the struggles faced by millions of poor black women in South Africa. For thousands of women living in rural areas the situation is far worse. Most of the women living in rural and urban townships, have been poor before and remain poor today. The burden of survival has fallen squarely on their shoulders with the historical responsibility of taking care of the household being women’s. Under the ANC government, the attack on women has filtered from the state into the workplace and into the household: state grants are being cut, industries that hire mostly poor black women are being decimated and the delivery of basic services to the household are in remission.

In South Africa, both during and after apartheid, men have held, and continue to hold power over women and not alongside them. Patriarchal power obtains in both the public and private domains where men have made essential decisions both for the nation, the community and within the family. ‘Such power would include the power to define the values and explanatory systems of the society and the power to define and control the sexual behaviour of women’ (Lerner, 1986: 31). According to Cock (1988: 205) the intersection of race, class and gender is how most black women in South Africa experience oppression. Women who are at the lower rungs of the economic ladder find it increasingly difficult to free themselves of the patriarchal nature of society. In fact, the poorer the woman, the more she finds herself trapped by the oppressive nature of patriarchy as she encounters it from the state, in the workplace and within the family.

The women in the focus group have all confronted patriarchy. Julie’s experience with an exploitative male boss who held the power over her
work, what she earned and her working conditions led to her oppression in her workplace. Sweetie and Shirley both suffered at the hands of violent and abusive husbands. They both married these men because they were struggling financially and these men were working and earning an income. The same holds true for Annie. Unable to get employment after working for years in the clothing industry these women saw their escape from poverty in the job security and steady income that their husbands were earning. But soon their husbands saw that providing for the family financially gave them a degree of power. It wasn’t long before this power was used by the husbands to oppress their wives into submission and to create some dependency. The submission was achieved by violent abuse and withholding money for food. For Annie, her oppression went a step further where her husband also doubled-up as her pimp forcing her into prostitution to feed his drug habit.

Molyneux (2003:102), quoting Engels, notes and recognises the family as a site of female oppression in which the ‘open or disguised enslavement of the women’ was condoned.

South Africa’s patriarchal constructs have survived its colonial and apartheid pasts to become embedded in the bedrock of the democratic dispensation. It has become South Africa’s legacy that has remained for decades. From colonialism through to apartheid, the state used its power to act out the most heinous forms of oppression on the black population. Black women felt much of the repercussions of these acts of oppression from the state. In addition, many were oppressed by the patriarchal nature of their culture and tradition that the apartheid and colonial state embodied in law. Because of this, black women understood inherently that the white state was the immediate enemy and the primary oppressor. They fought to maintain the family unit, regardless of the fact that this unit was also oppressing them. It was important then to maintain that very same oppressive family unit as it was the black family unit that was under attack and disintegrating (Basu, 1995: 133).

It was therefore articulated, in many of the mass-based anti-apartheid organizations like the ANC and the Black Consciousness Movement, that the most pressing issue facing the nation was the state’s attack on black people and that to entertain the ‘woman’ issue was indulgent. The ferociousness of these attacks meant that the issue of women’s oppression and equality could not be dealt with immediacy within the organizations themselves. Despite the fact that black women were severely oppressed by the apartheid and colonial states, they were also subjected to gender
discrimination within the anti-apartheid movement. According to Kemp et al. (1995: 138) adult women in the anti-apartheid movement were confined to ‘playing traditional roles of supplying material and psychological support’ to the predominantly male leadership. As Kemp et al. (1995: 139) remembers the situation in the Black Consciousness Movement:

Survival dictated that we viewed gender contradictions as non-antagonistic ones, which meant that their existence was acknowledged but for the time being would not be taken to issue… . When they said that the liberation of women was ‘inextricably linked’ with the national liberation of the country, they did not mean that political liberation meant overall freedom for women. It was to imply that at some time in the future… there would be a direct confrontation with patriarchy.

As such, the equality of women was placed in a queuing system behind race and class. This situation still persists in democratic South Africa both in terms of the state’s attack on the public and private spaces of poor, black women and in organizational structures that are still the vestiges of male domination.

However, in her book Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa, Gisela Geisler (2004: 63), talks about the political achievements of women in post-liberation countries in Southern Africa. She labels the South African experience as exceptional because ‘women managed to make substantial gains in the transition to majority rule’. Geisler’s work recognizes the entry of women into the South African Parliament, the transformation of institutions to allow the entry of women and the development of institutions such as the Commission on Gender Equality as the key achievements of gender equality. As Giesler (2004: 9) points out, South Africa, in 1999, was ranked eighth in the world for representation of women in parliament. This, she describes as an overwhelming success for women in post-apartheid South Africa.

Whilst the entry of women into parliament must be seen as a victory for South Africa’s democracy, it has meant little for poor, black women still oppressed by a patriarchal state. Kemp et al. (1995: 155) and others point out that women activists are skeptical and wary of the ability of women ministers to apply a gendered analysis and approach to the general responsibilities their positions demand. The inability of women in parliament to act on behalf of their sisters in communities was evidenced by their collective silence when cuts were made to the Child Support Grant and other social welfare provisions, when the government refused
to provide anti-retrovirals to HIV positive people or when the clothing industry (largely dominated by low-skilled poor, black women) was decimated due to tariff reductions. Hence the gains made by women at the level of parliament and legal/constitutional advances, have been made at certain costs. Kemp et al. (1995: 157) and others point out that these gains have been made mainly by middle-class women, both black and white, with better access to education and resources whilst the majority of women ‘still suffer from the secondary status imposed on women in the community and at home through a patriarchal ideology expressed through religion, culture, customary law and tradition’ as well as being caught in an endless cycle of poverty.

In a society structured under the notions of patriarchy, women have been siphoned off into the private sphere of the household. It is therefore their social responsibility to take care of all things related to the home and the welfare of their family. In addition, old forms of patriarchy in capitalist economies ensured that this work that women provided in the home was never valued. However, in some instances, providing free basic services such as education, health care, water, electricity can be perceived as the state giving value to the private household work of women. Under the auspices of capitalist globalization and through neoliberal economic policies, the private sphere of women is under attack.

It becomes impossible to view contemporary society through filters that separate class and gender. Maria Mies (1986) has often argued that seeing patriarchy and capitalism as two separate entities, risks the separation of women’s exploitation in the private sphere from the performance of productive labour in the workplace or public sphere. Women are the most obvious targets for exploitation because patriarchal capitalism defines women as performers of unpaid labour, as wives and mothers responsible for the care of the family. The ANC-government’s attack on this private space of poor black women and the household, is not only indicative of its lack of commitment both on the level of creating class and race equity but also indicative of the lack of interest in relieving the burden of women. It is clear that capitalist patriarchy, once considered to be something that was part of apartheid, has installed itself into the essence of this democratic society in which ‘the women’s issue’ was traded off in the interest of capital accumulation.

However, all across the country, a new phenomenon has entered the South African political landscape. Growing numbers of people frustrated by the non-delivery of basic services from the government have organized
themselves into social movements and have waged a war on the attack against poor people. They have garnered the support of thousands of poor black women and have, through their political action raised consciousness around the plight of poor women and the continued attack by the state on the private sphere of the home, in terms of privatization of basic services.

The BFRA is part of the growing number of communities that have organized themselves and are part of the social movements. The women in Bayview who are members of the BFRA see the organization as the only light in their lives. Through the committee they feel their voices are being heard. They are at the forefront of the struggle against evictions, disconnections and relocations and they have faced the police during evictions and cut-offs. They have asserted that they not only protect their own families and homes from the police and from security guards but they do the same for any family in the community.

Through the new social movements and their collective participation in the wars against the poor, women are occupying new historical spaces. They are producing a new sense of themselves as a collective of women and the movement is providing the space for them to articulate their voices as a collective against the destruction of the lives of the poor by the state. In this way, they are not developing an autonomous definition of ‘woman’ but are seeing themselves holistically as belonging to the oppressed blacks, or oppressed poors. As Desai points out, the social movements have become a space where identities get rethought in the context of struggle.

Of course, this may be seen as a shortcoming that the new movements must view as a challenge. Most of the membership of the new social movements consists of women who see their experiences centrally rooted in the fact that they are women. If it is true that the movements are spaces where identities are rethought then the push by the women and the leadership to rearticulate the struggle in the name of gender, race and class as a holistic struggle (as opposed to a delineated class and race struggle) must be forced to happen.

Conclusion

The situation created by the historical nature of poverty with its roots embedded deeply in colonialism and apartheid begged for a revamping
of the economic system when democracy was ushered into the country. But in the transition, the charms of the market appealed more to the ANC government than the pleading eyes of millions of poor people who voted them into power. The tragic ‘victims’ of the ongoing cycle of poverty have been and continue to be poor black people who have no means of escaping this cycle. The adoption of neoliberalism not only removed all possible means for the poor to survive poverty but it added on to people’s poverty.

Neoliberalism combined with an already established patriarchal society has resulted in a growing number of women becoming poor. This mixed with the legacy of apartheid has created a cocktail of poverty that has debilitated poor black women, urban and rural. Crippled by growing unemployment and lack of adequate social security, the denial of basic services has seen many of these women forced into survival mode that has taken the form of borrowing, cycles of debt, begging or prostitution. Some see marriage as a potential alleviation of their poverty situation only to find that the men they have married turn out to be abusive, violent men wanting to control them.

The women in Bayview have placed on record all of their experiences with poverty. The key point that is being raised is that they were poor once and they are poor again. The ANC government reneged on its promise to the poor to create a better life for all. It delivered this better life to a growing number of black businessmen with a few black women thrown in for good measure. This has now become the measure of success and the poor continue to suffer from the ANC’s anti-poor stance.

The other key point that the women in Bayview raised is that they are no longer afraid to stand up and take what they, together with thousands of other poor people, feel is theirs to take. They feel that they have fought just as hard for democracy and to free themselves from poverty and they will no longer be denied the right to live a better life. They have organized themselves into a formidable force that is waging a battle with the government for the basics that will ensure a life worth living: jobs, water, electricity, housing, health care, education – the basics. It becomes heart-breaking when people who fought so hard for their freedom look at the government and say: ‘How can the President have luxury jets when his people are starving. Can’t he see how poor we are?’ (Shirley, Focus Group 3)
NOTES

1. Protest action for housing, water, electricity, education, HIV treatment started as early as 2000, just after the second national election.

2. From the ‘enews’ 10 pm news coverage on the 23 May 2005.

3. I had chosen the option of a focus group as a way to get to know the women whose stories I wanted to tell. I had known some of them for a few years so it was easy for me to gain their trust. As we went along it became clear that it was no longer a focus group and had transformed itself into something more, something deeper. It’s possible at this stage that this is emerging into an ethnographic study. For the ease of referencing the information I will refer to direct quotes as taken from focus group discussions.


5. Taken from the title of Ashwin Desai’s study of the lived experience of poor people in post-apartheid South Africa. This work was one of the most important pieces of empirical research done to articulate the frustrations of poor people living in a democratic state with Chatsworth being the case study. This book was followed by ‘We are the Poors’, which extended the story into a national one. Desai, through his work, introduced the concept of ‘The Poors’ as a valid identity for people struggling against poverty.

6. See Desai’s work The Poors of Chatsworth for a detailed account of the history of people’s living conditions in Chatsworth prior to apartheid and their struggle to survive in post-apartheid South Africa.

7. All statistics quoted here are from the Census Survey 2001 conducted by Statistics SA. This institution is a government research institute and these are the official statistics. See www.statssa.gov.za/census2001/atlas_ward2/stats/stats_59200069.html.

8. This study was later updated by a qualitative study done by a young group of researchers from the BFRA. They have generously allowed me to use their research findings here.


11. This is not a comprehensive list but rather gives an example of some issues.

12. David McDonald has done extensive work in the area of commodification of basic services in post-apartheid South Africa and the impact these policies have had on the living conditions of the poor. The policies for cost recovery are a new phenomenon and were not a strategy considered or adopted by the apartheid regime. It does therefore account for why
people often feel that life was considerably easier (in terms of accessing food, basic services) under apartheid. This will be addressed later on in the article.

13. This was further exacerbated by the establishment of the tricameral parliament which was a three-tiered racialized parliamentary structure. According to McKinley and Veriavia, this structure was rejected by the liberation movement as a tool that was being used for co-option and a means of dividing oppressed groups.


15. The RDP focused on redistribution of the wealth and resources of the country. It promised to give land back to the dispossessed. It spoke about free basic services to all. It promised that the state would take back the wealth through nationalizing certain industries and then redistribute it back to all those who had been denied a better life.

16. Patrick Bond (1996) and Hein Marais (2001) describe the process of elite pacting that took place between the ANC, the National Party and the business community. Hein Marais starts his discussion from around 1987 when some members of the ANC were in exile where international as well as local business communities were courting them. Patrick Bond starts his discussion from 1990 until 1994 and focuses his attention on the local developments. A lot of their focus is spent on the transitional arrangements that were made to safeguard the economy from any socialist ideas and to steer the economy in the direction of market-driven economics, a similar kind of arrangement that existed with the Nationalist Party.

17. Julie, Focus Group 2, 1 June 2005.


19. ‘Short time’ refers to when a company operates on shorter hours and on skeletal staff because there is not enough work coming into the company. This has a detrimental effect on workers who are paid only for the hours they work.

20. Julie, Focus Group 1, 26 May 2005.


22. ibid.

23. Sweetie, Focus Group 1, 26 May 2005.

24. For more information on this please refer to Coalition Against Water Privatisation, Anti-privatisation Forum and Public Citizen 2004).


26. See *Mail and Guardian*, 15–21 April 2005, p. 28 for a summary of the findings. The full report is published by Andries Du Toit at the Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town.
27. ‘Tuck shops’ are little stands run by members of the community. These small little shops built on the side of the road inside communities, provide the basic foods like bread, milk and vegetables. These shops are more inclined to provide food on credit.
28. From an in-depth interview with Annie in the Bayview flats.
29. Sweetie, Focus Group 3, 6 June 2005.
30. During apartheid, the anti-apartheid movement engaged in the rent boycott refusing to pay rentals on government-owned flats. This also extended into non-payment of rates.
32. Shirley, Focus Group 3, 6 June 2005.
34. Sweetie, Focus Group 3, 6 June 2005.
35. Taken from the focus group discussion 1. Speaker: Julie.

REFERENCES

Benjamin: Feminization of Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa


Saranel Benjamin was formerly a researcher and project manager with the Centre for Civil Society, based at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. Today, she is an independent researcher and training consultant for social movements, community based organizations and non-governmental organizations in South Africa. [email: saranelb@metroweb.co.za]