

Informal Housing in the Global North

Exploring Practices, Actors and Processes
in a Transforming Housing System

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Chapter 8

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8 Unpacking everyday management in a city improvement district

Property caretakers as street-level bureaucrats in Ekhaya, Hillbrow, Johannesburg

Thembanani Mkhize

Introduction

This chapter draws from property caretakers' daily roles and routine practices in the Ekhaya Neighbourhood Improvement Programme, a voluntary residential city improvement district (RCID) in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, to understand the linkages between internal and external space management and between formal agendas and practical norms in urban regeneration initiatives. In scholarship on inner-city Johannesburg, neighbourhoods like Hillbrow are portrayed as cosmopolitan but indigent and violent areas that have undergone significant metamorphoses since their establishment amidst the Witwatersrand gold rush of the 1880s (see Zack and Lewis, 2022; Stadler and Dugmore, 2017; Lipietz, 2004; Morris, 1999a). Originally planned as a prosperous whites-only area in 1894, Hillbrow underwent drastic demographic change (from the late 1970s to 1990) before experiencing marked physical and socio-spatial decline (overpopulation, dilapidation, dereliction) from 1994 onwards (Stadler and Dugmore, 2017). A significant port-of-entry neighbourhood for many arrivals into Johannesburg (Winkler, 2013), Hillbrow is one of South Africa's most densely populated urban neighbourhoods, with a "conservative estimate of 75,000 people living in approximately 200 buildings, some over 15 stories high, spread across one square kilometer [...] Nearly 10,000 apartments, a handful of hotels and freestanding houses accommodate 24,857 households" (Stadler and Dugmore, 2017, p. 7). "Many apartment blocks are run by illegal slumlords, some buildings are 'hijacked'¹ and 'managed' through intimidation and violence" (City of Johannesburg, 2011, p. 54). Characterised by hypermobility, transience, multiple belonging and survivalist arrangements – attributes which Simone (2004) argues render any type of formal management doomed – Hillbrow has become infamous as a high-crime hotspot and a haven for police corruption, gangsterism, drug barons, and prostitution (Morris, 1999a; Winkler, 2013; Stadler and Dugmore, 2017).

Meanwhile, Hillbrow provides the setting for the ongoing Ekhaya RCID, an informal/voluntary association of social housing institutions, for-profit property firms and managing agents, their caretakers, tenants, and City of Johannesburg agencies working collaboratively to regenerate the neighbourhood. Literature on

city improvement districts (CIDs) in South Africa and elsewhere has generated much global discussion. There are raging debates around CIDs' inherently neoliberal, undemocratic and exclusionary nature – their cooptation of private sector actors (property owners and businesses) and exclusion of the urban poor in decision-making and everyday space management (Schaller and Modan, 2005; Paasche, 2013; Miraftab, 2007) – against their ability to channel much-needed private levies that contribute to urban regeneration in run-down areas (Mkhize, 2014). Ekhaya (Nguni for 'at home') was founded in 2004 as an unlegislated/informal RCID seeking to, *inter alia*, clean Hillbrow up, make its streets safer, make the locality liveable, and dispel perceptions of it as a no-go criminality zone (City of Johannesburg, 2012; Mkhize, 2018). Hailed as the first of its kind in a predominantly high-rise, high-density residential neighbourhood, Ekhaya considers social capital to be the main ingredient in urban regeneration recipes (Mkhize, 2014). Although Ekhaya became a registered RCID in 2015 (Mkhize, 2018), its formalisation was momentary. Following a 2015 Supreme Court ruling that repealed the 1997 Gauteng City Improvement District Act² and declared all (R)CIDs unconstitutional, Ekhaya and other Johannesburg CIDs have been operating informally (R2, interview, 2015; Matubatuba et al., 2018). Indeed, Ekhaya, acknowledged as South Africa's first-ever bottom-up and community-driven RCID (Mkhize, 2014), has continued resting "on voluntary, not compulsory, contributions by property owners in the area (a proportion of property value)" (Matubatuba et al., 2018, p. 4).

One of Ekhaya's key objectives is improving housing quality and internal building management (HDA, 2012). The City of Johannesburg (2012), a prominent Ekhaya stakeholder that has upgraded public furniture within the precinct (Mkhize, 2018), praises the RCID for promoting property caretakers' empowerment of tenants. Correspondingly, in an interview, the RCID's founder asserted that Ekhaya caretakers have "become a proud asset; they know each other strong[ly]; they are good for their management and internal governance in the buildings because they've been given the confidence" (R1, interview, 2013). In a neighbourhood typified by violence and pronounced landlord-tenant tensions (R1, interview, 2013), this positions Ekhaya property caretakers as agents of urban change tasked with enforcing formal regulations yet confronted with much more chaotic realities of everyday life in Hillbrow. Given that some scholarship portrays property caretakers as part of inner-city Johannesburg residential properties' management problems (Lipietz, 2004) – ruthless and money-loving individuals who "either intimidate tenants or mobilise them into false action" (Mkhize, 2014, p. 52) – it became imperative for me to study Ekhaya caretakers. The discretionary power they hold. How they use it to manage streets and high-rise Ekhaya member buildings. Their governmental strategies, tactics and rationality. I argue that Ekhaya caretakers manage contested and dangerous public and private realms. Vested with some form of 'mission', Ekhaya caretakers, through their everyday practices and the rationalities underpinning them, contribute markedly to implementing – reshaping – policies that they had little-to-no formal say in formulating (not least City bylaws and Ekhaya properties' house rules).

The study was also inspired by gaps in existing literature on property caretakers in urban regeneration efforts. There exist seminal studies on property caretakers' lived experiences in volatile social housing projects in cities of the Global North, chief among them Bourdieu's (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Some of this ethnography book's chapters draw our attention to French live-in property caretakers' struggles in managing neighbourhoods that have experienced significant socio-physical degeneration (see Balasz, 1999; Champagne, 1999). In a context of government neglect, these caretakers receive threats from neighbourhood gangs for intervening in criminal activity, with gang vandalism constantly subverting their physical regeneration attempts. Against the backdrop of property firms whose main concern is generating rental profit by any means, including undermining caretakers' discretionary power via leasing apartments to 'undesirable tenants', such caretakers have very limited authority to enforce any kind of rule. Their only bargaining chip is their discretion towards helping tenants individually (Bourdieu, 1999). Remarkably, ethnographers in both the Global North and the Global South argue that in contexts characterised by a perceivably ephemeral or non-existent state presence, the state is nevertheless present but tends to govern at a distance due to, *inter alia*, its limited resources, impartiality on urban informality, and municipal officials' agency and discretionary power (see Modiba, 2024; Hillbrandt, 2019). According to this scholarship, we can only understand the government's workings in such settings by studying governing strategies and tactics of non-state actors, including informal leaders, whose governance involves an interweaving of official rules and informal discourses in daily micro-practices. In Hillbrow, a so-called misconduct minefield with "a qualitative intangible distance from the state" (Gossman and Premo, 2012, p. 4) despite being physically proximal to state institutions (Mkhize, 2018), such stakeholders arguably include Ekhaya property caretakers.

Extant scholarship on Hillbrow offers a useful glimpse into the practices and discretionary power of caretakers (see third section). Yet, such literature has barely focused on how caretakers' everyday micro-practices and agency in 'regenerating' inner-city Johannesburg's residential neighbourhoods get affected by urban regeneration tools like RCIDs. Coincidentally, research on CIDs has been silent on the everyday governance of properties constituting improvement districts, having overlooked the daily practices and roles of CID rule implementers, not least property caretakers, in managing urban change and housing access. This study contributes to filling that gap by focusing on Ekhaya caretakers – transmission belts between tenants and external stakeholders (City officials, property owners, absentee landlords). I use them as a lens through which to understand, *inter alia*, internal-external space management relations, and workings of the state in RCIDs. Given both the power vested in Ekhaya caretakers for managing properties and their exposure and vulnerability to violence in Hillbrow – some caretakers have died in their lines of duty (Mkhize, 2014, p. 1) – it became imperative for me to examine their everyday practices. Specifically, I examined how they managed buildings and coped with Hillbrow's so-called hyperfluidity, and the difference that the RCID makes. Accordingly, the chapter reflects on the way Ekhaya caretakers

engage with informal and context-specific means in implementing Ekhaya's somewhat formal agendas.

This work is based on qualitative fieldwork. It is grounded in several years of research into processes of urban change and everyday governance in Hillbrow (2013 to 2017), first as part of my postgraduate dissertation, and subsequently under the auspices of a work-related project. The fieldwork entailed a series of formal/recorded one-on-one interviews with two Ekhaya RCID coordinators (R1 and R2) and four Ekhaya member building caretakers (R3, R4, R5 and R6). The interviews were triangulated with other ethnographic work. I attended two monthly Ekhaya caretaker meetings; shadowed one Ekhaya coordinator and three Ekhaya caretakers as they went about their daily routines; and spent time on the streets of the Ekhaya RCID observing everyday life and engaging Ekhaya building guards, street patrollers and tenants in informal conversations. Additionally, in getting a sense of the discretion that Ekhaya caretakers possessed, I referred to Ekhaya buildings' house rules (attached at the back of tenants' leases) and City bylaws governing the RCID.

The rest of the chapter comprises four sections. The second part is a theoretical framework revolving around three concepts – Foucault's governmentality, Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy, and Olivier de Sardan's practical norms – and relating them to Ekhaya caretakers. The third section goes back in time to excavate the property caretaker figure's role and rationality in managing Hillbrow's decline since the 1980s. I analyse how landlord-tenant relations in Hillbrow have changed over time, and ways in which the City of Johannesburg came to intervene in a perceivably private relationship – how this gave rise to the dire need for management in the form of managing agents and caretakers, and the point at which they, through Ekhaya, started actively engaging with the City. The penultimate part discusses Ekhaya caretakers' roles, practices and governmental rationality as street-level bureaucrats under three sub-sections – 'managing internal environs', 'managing external environs', and 'managing social relations'. The ultimate section highlights lessons presented by Ekhaya caretakers' everyday practices.

Theoretical framework

Foucault's notion of governmentality posits that government is not confined to party, state and parliamentary politics but also appears in innumerable forms throughout the social fabric, including in institutions and individuals. Since governing has much to do with producing and maintaining power relations, every act of exercising power is underpinned by political rationality (Foucault, 1991a, 1991b). Foucault defines government as "conduct, or more precisely, as the 'conduct of conduct' and thus as a term which ranges from 'governing the self' to 'governing others'" (Lemke, 2000, p. 2). This implies that Ekhaya caretakers govern themselves and tenants via constructed norms and values through which they are also governed. These norms and values are embedded in, and shape, our most mundane daily practices. As governmentality is concerned with "the ways in which populations are governed through institutional intervention, the production of discourses and

norms, and by inculcating practices of self-discipline” (Ellis, 2012, p. 1142), it is an important lens for understanding how pluralised governance forms in Ekshaya (re-) shape societal norms, and how these norms impact different RCID stakeholders involved. Governmentality also makes it possible to zoom in on Ekshaya caretakers’ daily micro-practices and get a better sense of norms, rules and discourses which they may have embraced, contested, resisted or negotiated in their lines of duty.

Lipsky’s concept of street-level bureaucracy revolves around the state’s lower reaches. Lipsky (1980) reasons that the state is manifest on the ground and in diverse citizens’ everyday lives through street-level bureaucrats. Street-level bureaucrats – public workers like nurses, social workers, police officers, teachers, and housing managers in some contexts – interact with citizens regularly and establish relations in the course of their jobs, represent the frontier of government policy, and “have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions” (Lipsky, 1980, p. xi). Constrained by “rules, regulations and directives from above, or by the norms and practices of their occupational group” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 121), street-level bureaucrats learn to employ their subjective understandings of difficult situations. In their micro-practices, they exercise levels of discretion to bend certain rules in ways they see fit (Lipsky, 1980; Auyero, 2012). Overburdened by structural conditions, including insufficient resources in the face of high demand and ambiguous goal expectations, street-level bureaucrats consequently exercise their discretionary authority by devising ‘new rules’ – informal pragmatic tactics that Olivier de Sardan calls practical norms (Galaty, 2010) – to cope with complex on-the-ground realities (Proudfoot and McCann, 2008). These include mass processing of clients, categorisation, favouritism, ‘routinisation’, control (making clients/citizens wait for services, thereby subliminally inculcating in them a politics of patience and compliance), and simplification of clientele cases (Lipsky, 1969, 1980; Auyero, 2012). Such simplification is made in terms of labels imposed on certain societal groups, including cultural stereotypes (Lipsky, 1980). For instance, house letting officers may decide on who gets accommodation based on their awareness of prevalent stereotypes revolving around certain ethnic groups. In inner-city Johannesburg neighbourhoods, “some blocks and many buildings clearly ‘belong’ to particular national groups, in part due to the disparate practices employed by building owners and their managing agents” (Simone, 2004, p. 515). Quintessentially, street-level bureaucrats effectively (re-)create public policy through their individual responses and daily routines because it is through their conducts that a state’s interactions with its diverse citizenry can be examined (Lipsky, 1980). Accordingly, “policy is best studied where it is enacted, rather than where it is drafted” (Proudfoot and McCann, 2008, p. 349).

In South Africa, building governance is predominantly the domain of private management bodies. Yet, drawing on Ekshaya caretakers’ official roles and routine practices – what they say they do, what other stakeholders say about their practices, what they really do – I argue for an extension of street-level bureaucracy to the caretaker figure, especially in a regenerating context with a sporadic state presence and some degree of formality. While guided by written/official codes of conduct which they may have internalised (City bylaws, property management

firms' professional and house rules, Ekhaya management arrangements), Ekhaya caretakers' daily actions entail a formulation of informal/pragmatic practices to deal with stubborn on-the-ground realities and attain difficult-to-accomplish management goals. They operate in a neighbourhood still largely characterised by transience, so-called undesirables (informal traders, panhandlers and street dwellers), joblessness, poverty, xenophobia and (structural) violence against foreign nationals. Consequently, Ekhaya caretakers use their lived experiences of Hillbrow, stereotypes, and favouritism, to find practical ways of tolerating, empathising and co-existing with informality and other context-specific complexities. Notwithstanding, this leniency towards certain informal/survivalist activities, which are discordant with City bylaws within contested public and private realms, is also underpinned by an economic rationality. Indeed, Ekhaya caretakers' daily practices, coupled with the discretionary power that the RCID affords them, solicit us to view them as 'state actors from below'.

Tracing Hillbrow's building politics: caretakers' rise as 'bureaucrats'

The relationship between the City and the landlords was gone, and the relationship between the landlords and tenants was gone, and the tenants were victims, they were not tenants. The governance in the buildings was bad news. I've said to you that landlords were bad, tenants were bad; the tenants were victims, the landlords were aggressive. It was an absolute nightmare! And I stood and watched all this.

(R1, interview, 2013)

Property caretakers in Hillbrow rose to prominence as intermediaries between landlords and tenants in the 1980s. Around this time, much of inner-city Johannesburg had experienced massive 'white (capital) flight' to Johannesburg's northern suburbs following an equally massive 'influx' of Black population groups³ into the neighbourhood from township areas such as Soweto, Lenasia and Eldorado Park, in the mid- to late-1970s (Morris, 1999a, 1999b). Owing to housing backlogs in greater Johannesburg's Black areas and increased political upheaval (rent boycotts) in townships, such population groups defied the Group Areas Act, a separatist apartheid statute, by entering and residing in Hillbrow (Ballard et al., 2021). While there were laws governing residential buildings in Johannesburg around the 1980s – the Accommodation Establishment bylaws of 1984 and the subsequent, infrequently applied Slums Regulation of the Municipality of Johannesburg – these made no provision for punitive measures against those who defied the Group Areas Act (Morris, 1999b). Moreover, the Johannesburg City Council was largely unresponsive to Hillbrow's challenges – local government had abrogated its responsibilities in the neighbourhood – and banks had redlined it (Morris, 1999a).

Against the backdrop of an increasingly unresponsive City and massive 'White flight' from Hillbrow to Johannesburg's northern suburbs, White property owners, desperate to fill their housing units, either rented out or sold their apartments to those with financial means, irrespective of race. The apartheid City's ineffectiveness and

indifference afforded landlords a chance to maximise their economic capital – charging new tenants high rentals, ignoring leaseholders’ maintenance complaints, and cutting back on building maintenance costs (Morris, 1994). Unable to make rents, most new tenants resorted to subletting, a practice that contributed significantly to Hillbrow’s massive overcrowding and building decay (Morris, 1999a). The breakdown of urban management around the 1980s worsened the already-strained landlord-tenant relationships and gave way to slumlording, violent tenant intimidation, unlawful evictions, building hijackings, unlawful vacant building occupation, rent boycotts, unpaid utility bills and defiant political acts like deliberate building defacement (Ballard et al., 2021; Morris, 1999a, 1999b). Such practices, coupled with the rise of civil rights movements that supported residents with threatened tenancy, made Hillbrow “a highly charged political setting” (Morris, 1999a, p. 515).

Most landlords’ apathy and unwillingness to deal directly with tenants made them delegate this responsibility to property managing agents, who collected rents and had total control of buildings’ day-to-day management, around the 1980s (Morris, 1997). With this shifting terrain, the presence of caretakers, who were responsible for selecting tenants, collecting rents and handling tenants’ grievances, helped ensure better outcomes for both property owners and tenants (Morris, 1999a). A survey conducted by Morris around the late 1980s and early 1990s revealed that Hillbrow building blocks without caretakers fared poorly relative to ones that had management (1999a, 1999b; Stadler and Dugmore, 2017).

Nevertheless, property caretakers’ materiality in some Hillbrow buildings did not necessarily guarantee good management because their capabilities and discretion varied. Some caretakers were powerless in the face of unresponsive property owners and weak body corporates. Since the money stemmed from landlords, landlords always had the final word on building maintenance issues (Morris, 1999b). “Absentee landlords often weakened the control of caretakers by placing unsuitable tenants in their flats” (Morris, 1999b, p. 126) and by overcrowding units with “new residents who would not be eligible for rent control” (Stadler and Dugmore, 2017, p. 13). Notwithstanding, some caretakers’ practices were also influenced by prevalent discourses and racial stereotypes. Some caretakers, informed by criteria such as racial stereotyping, chose which tenants to be courteous and responsive to as well as which renters to be rude and unresponsive towards (Morris, 1997, 1999a). Moreover, in the 1980s, some caretakers seemingly internalised their landlords’ economic rationality for personal/individual benefit. They took advantage of some tenants’ vulnerability to charge them higher rents (Morris, 1999a).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Hillbrow’s complexion had changed significantly. South Africa’s democratic dispensation in 1994 had ushered in a mass arrival of migrants to (inner-city) Johannesburg from other parts of the country and increasingly from across Sub-Saharan Africa (Ballard et al., 2021). Because of its central location, Hillbrow became a premier port-of-entry neighbourhood for economic (im)migrants and asylum seekers (Winkler, 2013). Notwithstanding the multi-causal nature of challenges encountered from the 1990s, immigrants have been widely blamed for the deterioration of inner-city Johannesburg’s socio-physical environment (Ballard et al., 2021; Zack and Lewis, 2022). Foreign nationals in

inner-city Johannesburg's rental property market also struggle to secure rental apartments, with those who do typically getting charged higher rentals than their South African counterparts (Kihato, 2011). Furthermore, given the City's uncompromising stance on foreign nationals post-1994 (Zack and Lewis, 2022), some inner-city Johannesburg building blocks comprise 'invisible populations' evading state harassment and capture (Simone, 2004).

There were several attempts at rejuvenating inner-city residential neighbourhoods and allaying tenant-landlord tensions post-1994. Provincial and local government became more hands-on than their predecessors on the issue of inner-city residential management (Morris, 1999a). As part of efforts to revamp legislation governing building maintenance and landlord-tenant tensions, the Gauteng Provincial Government tightened laws around building management by promulgating the Landlord-Tenant Dispute Resolution Act, which made provision for the Landlord-Tenant Dispute Resolution Board in 1998 (Morris, 1999a). Provincial authorities also appointed an inner-city manager and granted countless subsidies to help inner-city residents purchase their housing units. While social housing initiatives were attempted in the 1990s, among them the Seven Buildings Project, these collapsed (Lipietz, 2004). Such initiatives' failure is largely attributed to their technocratic nature, the City's insensitivity to Hillbrow's hyper-fluid context, and residents' inability to work cooperatively (Winkler, 2013; Lipietz, 2004).

The early 2000s ushered in municipality-driven regeneration intended to create a private investment-driven rental housing and office market (Ballard et al., 2021). The City of Johannesburg encouraged the purchasing of derelict Hillbrow and inner-city buildings (and their conversion into social housing and apartment blocks) by for-profit housing companies, offering tax incentives, infrastructural investment and enhanced policing (Mosselson, 2017). Such firms included the Johannesburg Housing Company (JHC) – a social housing company – Connaught Properties, Vuka Jozi Properties, and Trafalgar Properties, which have a considerable stake in the Ekhaya RCID. They bought and brought into the properties their own live-in property caretakers,⁴ who interacted directly with the City and had daily engagement with their respective buildings' tenants (Mkhize and Mosselson, 2019). Coincidentally, it was in the early 2000s that Ekhaya, following relentless lobbying of the City by a rigorous JHC consultant and community organiser (R1), was founded (JHC, 2010; HDA, 2012). In Hillbrow, then a 'neighbourhood of strangers', R1 built trust, cohesion and ownership among caretakers and residents alike through, *inter alia*, regular meetings, monthly neighbourhood walkabouts with City officials, annual safety and cleanliness campaigns, children's end-of-year parties, and boys' informal soccer tournaments (Mkhize, 2018). After asking property owners for permission to work closely with Ekhaya caretakers, which she obtained, R1 initiated a housing manager forum. This culminated in monthly caretaker meetings, voluntarily attended by City officials, wherein issues around buildings are discussed (HDA, 2012). Since 2004, Ekhaya has grown considerably, with some of its success being attributed to property caretakers (R1, interview, 2013).

Ekhaya caretakers as street-level bureaucrats

The diversity of stakeholders operating on Ekhaya ‘turf’ – coordinators, the private cleaning and security services provider (Bad Boy’z Security), property caretakers, Ekhaya member buildings’ security guards – made Ekhaya’s everyday governance fluid, networked, complex and multifaceted. However, Ekhaya caretakers’ pivotal role in the day-to-day management of spaces and relations within the RCID was unmistakable. All four Ekhaya caretaker respondents lived in the four studied buildings. Accordingly, I regarded them as constituents of the buildings they governed, who were very familiar with and conscious of activities within and outside the properties. When R3, R4 and R5 took me on tours of their buildings, I observed that they had mental maps of building floors with troublesome tenants and ones with ‘good’ tenants. As one caretaker respondent put it, “I know every corner of this building, and I know exactly what’s happening inside this building and outside this building” (R3, interview, 2013). Ekhaya caretakers’ consciousness of their buildings and surroundings was also enhanced by the heavy surveillance technologies at their disposal (CCTV cameras, visitors’ books, building security guards, turnstiles and biometric systems). Using these ‘disciplinary technologies’, the caretakers could define and decide on collective rules for housing management, including who could visit and at what time; who could sleep overnight; how many tenants were allowed in units and on lifts; who could host parties and similar activities; acceptable noise levels; visitor curfews; and what articles were allowed into buildings. In a word, Ekhaya caretakers used their discretion as ‘active governors’ of their buildings and the properties’ environs. This section also shows that some of the practical norms deviated from official/written rules on building and space management and were underpinned by Ekhaya caretakers’ quest to achieve some difficult-to-attain management goals, work with context, stay safe, and economically gain.

Managing internal environs

While the four caretaker respondents were from different management companies, their main roles regarding internal building governance, as brought about by fieldwork and desktop research, were the same. They included: screening applicants (potential tenants) for housing units; collecting rent; monitoring the flow of individuals and goods in and out of buildings; attending to tenants’ maintenance issues; confronting troublesome tenants; and managing social relations. My interactions with them revealed that most rules could be negotiated not just to meet diverse building inhabitants’ needs and contexts (thereby showing the caretakers’ empathetic and humanistic side), but also to suit Ekhaya caretakers’ economic rationality (generating profits). In this sub-section, I discuss their roles, rules governing them, Ekhaya caretakers’ discretion as ‘on-the-ground bureaucrats’, emphasising how they negotiate formal house rules.

One house rule that was open to bending pertained to timeous rent payment. Ekhaya’s sustenance as a property business relied on tenants’ payment of rents in

full at the beginning of each month (R2, interview, 2013). Since Ekhaya caretakers were responsible for collecting monthly rents, letting units and ensuring that all properties' apartments stayed occupied, they were central to this business's running. In all buildings, rents were due by the third day of each month. Failure to pay on time warranted 'punitive' measures like imposed fines and, in extreme cases, evictions. However, as I discovered through interviews, R4 and other caretakers had relaxed rules around rent collection dates to cater for their tenants' diverse situations:

So, your rent must be paid up... by the 3rd. After that, you will get a fine, alright? But my tenants, if they've got a problem, they come to me and-and-and they'll explain to me [...] Yeah, some few of them they'll say, "OK, we waiting for the sub-tenant" and all those things. If they come to me and say they've got problems and stuff like that, I'll say, "OK, pay later." If they said, "I'll pay on the 4th", I'll say, "OK. It's fine; pay on the 4th". I'm not going to kill you just because you didn't pay my rent on the 3rd. We all human; we all working; and some get paid late, some get paid early, so...

(R4, interview, 2013)

Other Ekhaya caretaker respondents shared the same sentiment. They also used humaneness as justification for their relaxation of rules around rent payment, somewhat hinting at their empathy and acclimatisation to context.

Yet, I also observed that Ekhaya caretakers' discretion around rent collection and other house rules was also largely underpinned by an economic rationality. Their economic governmental rationality comprised the logic of subletting and slumlording (collecting rents in full even if this implied having more tenants than formally recommended by their employers). While Ekhaya has a people-centred, bottom-up and humanistic approach to regenerating Hillbrow, the business is still driven by property owners and firms determined to maximise their economic capital. Notwithstanding their various rental unit typologies catering to Hillbrow's transient and indigent character – communal rooms, rooms with communal facilities, transitional housing units, bachelor apartments, one-to-three-bedroom flats (Mosselson, 2017) – mass poverty nonetheless hindered many individuals/households from affording rents in Ekhaya member buildings. Most tenants could only make rent and keep their residential units through subletting, thereby affording other poor tenants access to Ekhaya as their sub-tenants (Ballard et al., 2021). Ekhaya caretakers encouraged subletting as a necessary means to collect rents in full (Mkhize, 2014). R3 made this expressly clear:

So, we tell people, "Listen here, if you want to live alone you can stay alone, but you must remember that rent comes first! You can stay alone, but you can also get 3 more people to help you cover the rent if you can't cover it alone; that is reasonable. [...] If you want to stay alone; then always know that the next time you have financial trouble, we'll still need the rent! We're not forcing people to stay together, but in a one-bedroom flat we need 4 people. So that if 1 person

has problems, then the other 3 can help; If 2 people cannot pay then the other 2 can help. We don't want you to say, 'I cannot pay the rent this month because... my mother died!' No! We don't take that! We want a situation where if you are in trouble, you can still have other people helping you to cover the rent... but bottom line is rent comes first!"

(R3, interview, 2013)

Subletting and slumlording worked to keep Ekhaya member buildings fully occupied and full monthly rents collected, thereby maximising caretakers' employers' profit, in a context of deprivation and unaffordability. Thus, caretakers' leniency towards the urban poor and subletting was possibly a pragmatic choice (adaptation to Hillbrow's hardship) and a means to an economic end. Remarkably, this economic end was also economically beneficial for the Ekhaya caretakers. Caretakers who could collect full monthly rents, and whose building units were all occupied, qualified for end-of-year bonuses (Mkhize, 2014; R4, interview, 2013). While slumlording and subletting were not necessarily encouraged by Ekhaya stakeholders like the City and caretakers' employers, such informal practices were nonetheless requisite for Ekhaya's (economic) survival and caretakers' individual economic gain.

As house letting officers, Ekhaya caretakers' relaxation of house rules for economic gain extended to who they allowed to stay in the residential properties they governed. Formal rules compelled Ekhaya caretakers to thoroughly screen 'clients' applying for housing and obliged housing applicants and their families to possess some legitimate identification. All four Ekhaya member buildings under study had heavy security technologies. Organising biometric access for illegal immigrants and wanted criminals was strictly prohibited. Regardless, in my interview with R3, I discovered that formal rules around who could stay overnight, and for how long, were practically negotiable:

For me to do a fingerprint – we get in here using the fingerprint system – I need to have your ID copy, whether it's a passport or asylum... But then sometimes there will be someone who comes to me and says to me, "No, OK. Listen, man, this person, she is my relative; she doesn't have identity". And then I'll ask "Why?!" Then the person will say, "Because the asylum document has expired". And then I'll say, "When are you going to get another one? When are you going to fix the problem?" And then maybe they'll say, "No, within a month it will be fixed". So, in such a situation, I can take that expired asylum and do the fingerprint for that person maybe for that month; but only for that month, for that short space of time, and then after a month, that's all...

(R3, interview, 2013)

Additionally, while I was either interviewing caretaker respondents in their offices or shadowing them, we were constantly interrupted by tenants asking for one favour. They were all asking Ekhaya caretakers to let the tenants' undocumented foreign family members stay for the December 2013 holidays, specifically to create

biometric access for them, although the relatives had no official identification. In all instances, my caretaker respondents turned the tenants away and asked them to come back much later for a discussion of “the way forward” (R5, interview, 2013). Initially, the caretakers’ turning of the tenants away gave me the impression that they were being respectful and mindful of our recorded interviews. It also showed their discretionary power to make their tenants wait, thereby evoking Auyero’s (2012) ethnographic account of the excruciatingly long waiting periods that Argentine street-level bureaucrats subject indigent social welfare-seeking citizens to. Nevertheless, perhaps owing to later informal conversations with building guards and tenants, I realised that the caretakers had not wanted me, an outsider, to witness transactions that would bring ‘the way forward’. The informal conversations had revealed that favours like creating biometric access for undocumented visitors were necessitated by concerned tenants’ payment of bribes. It then became apparent that some house rules could be broken to align with on-the-ground realities, if only for a ‘fee’.

Interestingly, off-the-record discussions with two Ekhaya street patrollers and building guards revealed that allowing ‘invisible populations’ into the buildings was not limited to tenants’ undocumented family members. There had also been several incidents that involved homeless people and people with no family in Hillbrow asking for temporary shelter in Ekhaya member buildings (Mkhize, 2014). Ekhaya caretakers were usually called in to deal with such requests. Most requests were received favourably and homeless people had sometimes been allowed to sleep in building basements. Two building guards also indicated that the caretakers always allowed the homeless to sleep in the buildings for the night, provided the homeless neither made noise nor harassed (stole from) tenants. The guards hinted at the high likelihood that such arrangements were oftentimes transactional (fascinatingly, Ekhaya building guards themselves were open to bribes for favours like letting renters’ undocumented visitors in, as brought about by informal conversations with tenants.) Notwithstanding, what also became clear was caretakers’ empathy to Hillbrow’s context of indigence and informality.

Ekhaya caretakers’ practices and discretion around who could get an apartment were not only informed by professional norms, but they also hinged on prevalent stereotypes around the various nationalities residing in Hillbrow. All four caretaker respondents shared that asylum seekers could not be leaseholders but could only be sub-tenants because they did not possess “the accepted documentation” (R5, interview, 2013). Moreover, the property management companies that some Ekhaya caretakers reported to were intolerant of, and discouraged the letting of units to, certain foreign nationalities. However, Ekhaya caretakers, desperate to fill their apartments and maximise rent collection, had found ways of accommodating such groups. R4’s account of her experiences as Hillbrow resident and Ekhaya caretaker, shed light on this:

I don’t have problems with my tenants; [...] There’s foreigners here but their papers are legal. [...] They picked up this problem in [another Ekhaya building] of Nigerians that were fighting with the building manager and stuff like that.

Actually, they don't want Nigerians again in the buildings because these guys, they like to do illegal business. But I've got Nigerian guys here staying on the first floor. [...] But these ones of mine they've got shops, they're selling clothes. So... there's a lot of them, like, 5 of them staying in one flat. Brothers. Even next door, I've got Nigerians also [...] But these guys are so smart! You won't even hear them make noise, you know? Believe me. That is why I don't know what is wrong by the other buildings. You know, in the meetings, when they complain about Nigerian guys, when the boss asks me, "How's yours?" I say, "Truly speaking, they are quite respectful, they're reserved people. They-they-they fit into this environment here."

(R4, interview, 2013)

In all four buildings, there were stringent house rules governing tenants' behaviour. For instance, party hosting was prohibited, sleepovers were discouraged (and restricted in one building), and perceivably harmful items like beer bottles were disallowed. Yet, Ekhaya caretakers' familiarity with all their tenants enabled them to negotiate such favours based on their knowledge of each tenant's conduct. Although R4 knew that her Nigerian tenants were bringing beer bottles into her buildings behind her back, she had never made an issue of this because "they've been respectful; they're not disrespecting us, even the guards" (R4, interview, 2013). More interestingly, R4 also mentioned unit numbers of tenants that she would not be doing favours for on the grounds that they had not abided by her rules and, by so doing, had put her job at risk. After lengthily narrating a story of tenants who had asked for a party and had agreed to her rules – no beer bottles, ending the party at 22h00 and getting rid of guests – only to go against all of them, R4 said she had resolved to limit her permission to host parties to compliant tenants:

I don't know. I will see what I do, I'll see who I'll do it for, because I don't want to say no. I'll just have to put down my rules. But then I just have to keep a watcheye, watcheye. Then I won't sleep. I must watch! I will sit here. I will watch on the screen... so I have to watch them here [surveillance footage]. How they get into the lift; how many in the lift; things like that! Then I'll have to call the guard and tell him, "Hey! There's too many in the lift!" We're working very hard when we have parties; we must be so observant. We don't want anything to happen because we will get into trouble, you know?

(R4, interview, 2013)

While it remained unclear whether tenants used money to negotiate for such favours, building guards and tenants alluded to this being commonplace. One Ekhaya street patroller, a Hillbrow resident, said, "Money talks and nothing is for free in Hillbrow." What became apparent, however, was a governmentality of fear. Irrespective of the bribes that they (perceivably) 'earned' from tenants for favours granted, Ekhaya caretakers could forego these as caretakers cannot, and will not, lose their employment. Moreover, the acceptability of what appeared as very strict rules might not only be linked to Hillbrow tenants' precarity but could also be

understood in the wake of violent conflicts between neighbours, especially in adjacent buildings, epitomised by collapsed management.

Ekhaya caretakers' economic rationality and 'governmentality of fear' extended to making tenants pay fines for transgressions against the caretakers' practical norms. This became clear in the interview with R4, wherein she disclosed that she made 'transgressor tenants' pay fines:

They listened! Next door they listened! They don't throw their rubbish out or sweep their rubbish out and leave it there when the cleaners are finished with their cleaning. So, I went around I said, "You, you and you; If this happens again tomorrow, I'm gonna give you letters and you'll be fined R200 for throwing the rubbish there. These cleaners are also human beings; they're working very hard to keep this place clean; they getting pressurised from me if it's not right [well, I don't pressure them] But you guys need to keep this clean. If you see that the floors are shiny, don't let your kids slide just because it's shining. You have to keep it like that, you know? If the big boss can come in the building one day, he's going to congratulate you as tenants – not me or the cleaners – for keeping it clean. He's gonna congratulate you and say, 'Guys, you are good tenants. You're keeping the building clean'".

(R4, interview, 2013)

Additionally, when R4 engaged me on a tour of her building, I witnessed flyers alluding to payment of this ZAR200 fine, pasted on lifts and notice boards. This hinted at the use of an economic rationality and punishment (fines) to produce compliant, disciplined and responsible tenants. While I initially doubted R4's discretionary power to enforce fines or punishment in a neighbourhood marked by tenant precarity and violence, my doubts were later allayed by informal chats with some of her tenants. Disturbingly, they said R4 always drew on human resources within her disposal – armed building guards and Ekhaya street patrollers – to enforce practical rules around fines for transgressions. This then gave me the notion that the Ekhaya caretaker governed and was governed by a politics of fear. Fear of Hillbrow's not-too-distant memories as a grimy, crime-ridden and chaotic neighbourhood. Fear of not complying with their employers' agendas and, worse, losing their livelihoods. Fear of losing their lives on the frontline. The caretakers mitigated these fears in their ambivalent roles as patrons (shaping tenants' conduct around penalties for transgressions, thereby making them 'clients') and brokers (mediators) also practising an economy of self-care (keeping their lives and livelihoods by any means necessary, not least using Ekhaya guards within and beyond buildings as backup when confronting troublesome tenants).

Managing external environs

Regardless of party-political changes that have swept across Johannesburg over the years, and notwithstanding informal traders' significant economic contribution, the City has regularly displayed hostility towards them (Zack and Lewis, 2022; Modiba,

2024). There have been several violent, xenophobic, ‘quasi-revanchist’, state-driven cleansing operations aimed at eliminating undocumented and unlicensed informal traders from inner-city Johannesburg (Zack and Lewis, 2022). Correspondingly, literature on South African improvement districts portrays such actors as typical casualties of gentrification and urban regeneration initiatives (Miraftab, 2007). Refreshingly, Ekhaya has a somewhat *laissez-faire* approach to street hawkers and traders. R2, when asked about the RCID’s stance on survivalist activities within Ekhaya, shared that informal micro-traders were permitted, with some provisos:

We are not like other CIDs. Other CIDs see street traders and chase them away, but we allow them to operate, as long as they clean their trading areas. The JMPD [Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department] does not want them to be there because it’s against City bylaws, but we have no problem with street traders, and it’s up to them how they deal with the JMPD.

(R2, interview, 2013)

Ekhaya, by virtue of its various actors’ agency, is nuanced on the issue of informality. On the one hand, Ekhaya stakeholders ‘at the top’, for instance City agencies like the JMPD, appear intolerant of (unlicensed) informal traders on the grounds that they contravene City bylaws. On the other hand, Ekhaya actors at street level, who must work with street traders and the homeless on an everyday basis, had found ways of tolerating and co-existing with them. This leniency towards informal traders and/or survivalist livelihood activities regarded by City officials as extra-legal was articulated in interviews with some caretakers. While R3 and R6 were not actively supportive of informal trade, panhandling and homelessness around their buildings, R4 and R5 expressed empathy. For instance, while I was waiting for R5 in his building’s foyer, a female informal trader carrying her wares stormed into the property to evade a passing JMPD truck. I then overheard her remarking that she was not about to give the JMPD officers “an early Christmas present” (a bribe). R5, whose building environs were utilised by many street traders, said he had mutually beneficial relationships with them:

Look, I have nothing against street traders. Yes, they know that they are violating bylaws, and they know that... they will be harassed by the police people and their things will be taken from them if the police catch them. But one thing you must realise is that these people help me in my job sometimes. They bring us clients who then become tenants in this building and in my other building. [...] They recommend people looking for flats to us, and then the people will call me and say, “Oh I heard from one of the street traders outside your building that there is a flat to let in your building”, and then we give that person a flat, you see?

(R5, interview, 2013)

Informal traders helped R5 with finding tenants and were thus economically useful to him. While Hillbrow’s informality was undesirable and intolerable to the City

and other Ekhaya stakeholders at the top, it offered economic opportunities for on-the-ground actors like the Ekhaya caretaker. Accordingly, some Ekhaya caretakers violated City rules by granting unlicensed, and possibly undocumented, micro-traders trading space just outside buildings within the RCID.

The notion that Ekhaya caretakers and informal actors could co-exist and assist each other was also held by R4. Although her building's pavements had no informal activity, R4 still expressed empathy for street dwellers, adding that they could be assets for caretakers:

You know, sometimes when you look at a homeless person, [...] You need to meet that person halfway. You have to become half like him and he have to become half like you. So, then you will have an understanding, you know? Sometimes you find that those people are the ones that can protect you and your building from outside, while they're sleeping there, eating there. But it's just they like to mess! So, if you have an understanding with them to say, "You can sleep here, you can eat here, but you must clean up!" I don't think you'll have a problem.

(R4, interview, 2013)

This excerpt points to the reflexivity and unwritten tolerance of informal activities in Ekhaya. As stakeholders with some discretionary influence on Ekhaya territory, caretakers 'got by' through accommodating so-called undesirables. This spoke to caretakers' mutual recognition and their devising of practical ways of making space manageable via drawing on the social capital at their disposal within Hillbrow.

Caretakers' everyday governance of their buildings' immediate surroundings was also dependent on the informal, incremental and interdependent relationships that they had forged with City officials. In the two monthly Ekhaya caretaker meetings that I attended, chaired by R2, there were numerous apologies from City agency representatives who could not attend. Some meeting attendants' complaints revealed that City officials had long stopped coming to monthly meetings and neighbourhood walkabouts. Several Ekhaya caretakers also lamented that City agencies took eternity to respond to caretakers' operational grievances (including reading water and power metres, repairing potholes, collecting refuse, fixing dysfunctional streetlights). Interestingly, all four caretaker respondents, in our interviews, appeared unfazed by this because they already had some municipal officials, whom they had encountered in prior Ekhaya meetings and walkabouts, on speed-dial. One caretaker shared that he had City contacts who regularly read his utility metres and fixed broken street infrastructure (R6, interview, 2013). As it appeared, while the state was physically absent in Ekhaya, it maintained its presence through City officials' strengthened informal networks with Ekhaya caretakers (Mkhize, 2018). The difference that Ekhaya makes, specifically easier access to the local state, also became manifest. Additionally, given the state's sporadic presence in Hillbrow and its absence in Ekhaya's 'invited spaces', the RCID's caretakers arguably become the lens through which we can examine how City bylaws and other policies emanating from the top get implemented on the ground. Apparently, "the

state [informally] works with non-state actors to find assistance to expand its reach and wield its influence indirectly” (Modiba, 2024, p. 138).

Managing social relations: Ekhaya caretakers as ‘governed governors’

Shadowing three caretaker respondents and observing them as they went about their daily routines shed light on the multiplicity of roles that they took on, their discretionary power, and their humanity. They listened to leaseholders’ personal problems, gave advice, accepted tenants’ reasons for late rents, resolved renters’ maintenance complaints, and made decisions on grievances to prioritise. Yet, since some Hillbrow caretakers have been either hurt or killed by tenants in arguments over petty issues like noise (Mkhize, 2014), I questioned my caretaker respondents’ discretionary power and wondered how they managed the dangers that came with working in a notoriously violent neighbourhood. If tenants decided to be physically violent, what discretionary power did/would Ekhaya caretakers really have and how did/would they exercise it? In attempting to understand this, I shared stories of slain Hillbrow caretakers in interviews. Interviews with all caretakers, wherein I learnt that they were also central to mediating disputes between tenants, brought forward enlightening perspectives on their positions and ambivalent stances on managing social relations. I discuss some of them below.

Caretakers’ general sentiment was that although there were uncontrollable tenants in their buildings, the caretakers themselves were professionally obliged to exercise some level of restraint and respect when confronting ungovernable leaseholders. For instance, R4 opined that she had very few difficult tenants in her building because of the respectful manner with which she approached and talked to them whenever misunderstandings ensued:

People in the caretaker meetings, they ask me, “How do you get it right?!” I said, “Guys, just communicate with your people, communicate with your tenants. Don’t scream at the tenants! Don’t shout at them! Don’t swear at them! Don’t fight with them! You making them stubborn, and once they are stubborn then they are stubborn, and you can do nothing about it! So... just talk to the people nicely. Talk to them; tell them, ‘This is how it is’”. [Other caretakers] say, “No, we can’t talk a lot” and I say, “No. I’ll talk to the tenants even if it had to cost me talking the whole day with a tenant. But once you get them into that line, they will stay in that line. Don’t let them fall off or go this way; keep them in that line”.

(R4, interview, 2013)

R3, upon hearing one story of a caretaker who got killed by a tenant after an argument around the tenants’ noisemaking, recounted a similar prior personal experience within his building. One of his tenants, an elderly woman, had asked for permission to host a party using the false pretext of hosting a *stokvel*,⁵ which R3 had approved unknowingly. R3 would later regret approving the alleged *stokvel* because the guests made too much noise even after the initially agreed-on cut-off

time (22h00). After receiving several noise-related complaints from tenants, R3 had asked building guards and Ekhaya guards to ‘back him up’ on his way to confronting the tenant. As it turned out, the tenant had not only lied about the type of event, but she had also fibbed about the number of guests that would be coming (30 as opposed to the agreed-on 15). The situation would have gotten out of hand had it not been for R3’s modest approach and social capital:

I greeted them nicely, and then I said, “What’s happening here?! People can’t sleep, guys. You didn’t tell me you were gonna have a party here; you said you were gonna have a *stokvel*. Your neighbours cannot sleep here because you’re making noise”. And the other ones were so drunk, man! [...] I remember one guy who was getting really violent. His family had to sit him down and talk to him, seriously. He kept asking me, “And then who do you think you are?! Who’re you?!” [...] And you know this was after I had introduced myself, “Hello guys, my name is So-and-so, and I’m a building manager”. The guy kept saying, (*bangs on table*) “Who’re you?! We don’t know you!” [...] But we solved it... easy! If you confront them nicely, you’ll never have a problem.

(R3, interview, 2013)

Surprisingly, in stressing this point, R3 used the story I had narrated to argue that the slain property caretaker, most probably because of his approach, had brought his death upon himself:

It was probably that building manager’s fault. [...] I think that building manager that you telling me about, he got shot because of his approach towards the tenant. Probably his approach wasn’t right... He was not going to get shot if he had used the right approach, they were not going to shoot him if he had talked to them nicely, you understand?

(R3, interview, 2013)

While accounting for the modest way they tackled conflicts in the face of abuse by tenants, all caretakers attributed their modest approach of tackling ill governance by tenants to company rules, which they said constrained them from engaging in physical fights with violent renters. This point was emphasised by R5 thus:

Our company is intolerant of wars and fights and conflicts. And I, as a building manager, have no right to hit a tenant. I cannot fight with a tenant or beat a tenant. If I beat a tenant up, I’m fired immediately! [...] Exactly! I don’t have the right. I must control my temper, and I must always be calm. Even in instances where the tenant wants to fight with me, I must be the calm one. I have to be the better person and talk to the tenant and find the way forward to solve the problem.

(R5, interview, 2013)

Curiously, while Ekhaya caretakers’ self-presentation as calm and rational beings in times of ill government by tenants hinted at ways in which their practices were

influenced by professional conventions, they also pointed to caretakers' exercise of self-governance and self-control. Despite their self-presentation as professionals who used modest approaches to deal with ungovernable tenants, Ekhaya caretakers' reliance on their social networks – Bad Boy'z Security and building guards – was clearly underpinned by fear. Here, official norms and practical norms may coincide. Given Hillbrow's notoriety for violence, Ekhaya caretakers could not risk losing their lives. With the security personnel that it afforded the Ekhaya caretaker, the RCID offered a 'safety cushion'. Without security backup, as is likely the case in Hillbrow buildings characterised by failed management, Ekhaya caretakers might not firmly and amicably 'tame' ungovernable tenants. Thus, Ekhaya caretakers were figures governing social relations within their buildings but who were also governed by fear.

Disturbingly, some Ekhaya caretakers appeared to have internalised a heavy-handed approach in dealing with non-compliant tenants, albeit as a last resort. All caretaker respondents shared this notion of forceful management when I asked them about the measures they had taken, or would take, when it proved difficult to verbally solve issues with tenants. They disclosed that they usually drew on Bad Boy'z Security and building guards to resolve such matters. R3 shared that he would always use Ekhaya street patrollers and building guards for protection and added that he encouraged them to resort to physical means against violent tenants. Somewhat similarly, R4 said she relied on human surveillance within Ekhaya whenever tenants became ungovernable, violent and irrational:

People are so respectful here, towards each other, you know? Some people will fight in the house, I know! Some of them they argue and stuff like that, and the next day I will hear about it. But then the tenants will come the next day to say, "We're really sorry we made a noise yesterday. We were fighting", you know? And then everything will be back to normal [...] Sometimes they get out of line, and if you take me to that limit, then I will just start and they'll say, "OK, OK, OK" because they know I don't get angry, I don't fight. If you start to be a problem, I'll just look at you like that; you'll get discipline there by the Ekhaya guards. They will discipline you, not me! They will really discipline you!

(R4, interview, 2013)

Ekhaya's security guards are infamous for their quasi-vigilante treatment of caught criminals and troublesome tenants (Mkhize, 2018). In two properties that formed part of the fieldwork, house rules were splashed across the building foyers' notice boards. Alarming, one rule explicitly stated that criminals would be thoroughly dealt with before being handed over to the police. This, coupled with all caretakers' accounts of how the Ekhaya guards worked, gave the disconcerting impression that there existed a kind of punitive 'vigilante mentality' among some policing agents within Ekhaya, property caretakers included. Hence, I tentatively reasoned that perhaps given Hillbrow's context of violence, certain scenarios called for specific conducts of conduct. I also observed that caretakers' reliance on human resources at their disposal (guards and patrollers) for protection as well as physically curbing

violence (through equally violent measures), showed their role as governed governors. Caretaker respondents had the power and discretion to make Ekhaya guards do as they asked, yet their need for security guards' protection in volatile situations also portrayed them as figures nonetheless governed by Ekhaya security stakeholders. Ekhaya caretakers and guards needed one another in managing and controlling the 'social chaoses' that occasionally erupted within and around the RCID's member buildings. Here, the difference that the Ekhaya RCID makes – social capital and networks – also became evident.

Conclusion

The case of Ekhaya RCID's property caretakers shows that if we intend to see the state's workings in the regeneration of urban neighbourhoods characterised by an ephemeral presence of state actors, who are argued to be the state's arms and legs, we may need to look beyond them. Indeed, we may need to broaden our scope by engaging with often overlooked non-state actors actively involved in, say, managing RCIDs' external and internal spaces, not least Ekhaya caretakers. Ekhaya caretakers' practices shed light on the likelihood that urban socio-spatial change is not only constructed by official municipal actors and policies. Rather, private institutions and individuals also hold the power to instil it through minor bureaucrats' everyday micro-practices. By so doing, such stakeholders indirectly valorise the state's broad agendas of urban renewal. Ekhaya caretakers' collection of fully-paid-up monthly rents from poor tenants generates profit for property owners/firms, aiding in the sustenance of inner-city Johannesburg's rental market. In a context of pronounced building hijacking, Ekhaya caretakers' management of urban regeneration indirectly endorses "a regeneration project intended to create a private investment driven rental housing market" (Ballard et al., 2021, p. 45) spearheaded by the City since the early 2000s. Given the City's physical absence in Hillbrow and Ekhaya, the Ekhaya caretaker becomes the unlikely frontline soldier carrying out formal agendas like collecting rents; informally 'colluding' with state actors to achieve change; administering tenants and managing their social relations. By virtue of their contribution to Ekhaya's 'technocratic' stakeholders' formal agendas, we may view Ekhaya caretakers as street-level bureaucrats or, at the very least, 'quasi-street-level bureaucrats'.

Nevertheless, Ekhaya caretakers' roles and routine daily practices also bring forth the impossibility, and perhaps undesirability, of continually enforcing stringent formal rules in the quest to realise formal objectives within settings of hyperfluidity and informality. Indeed, Ekhaya caretakers' practices show us that "by-the-book enforcement [of formal rules] benefits no one" (Proudfoot and McCann, 2008, p. 361) in everyday management because certain contexts call for certain conducts of conduct. While subletting, slumlording and letting units to certain populations are discouraged by the property owners that Ekhaya caretakers report to, they may be the most viable means of generating profits from Hillbrow's many poor tenants. Furthermore, although City bylaws restrict (unlicensed and undocumented) street trading and other informal activities, some Ekhaya caretakers inevitably work

with them on the ground, out of empathy and economic self-interest. This justifies Kihato's argument that in inner-city Johannesburg:

There are other social norms, values and codes that determine acceptable and reprehensible behaviour, and these compete alongside the codes of the official city [...] By looking from the ground up, yet another reality and perspective of the city emerges drawing our attention to the complexity of urban relationships.
(Kihato, 2011, p. 359)

In this sense, using informal means is not only the most practical way of getting things done or a strategy dictated by Ekhaya caretakers' self-interest, but it also fulfils the broader financial and policy objectives of Ekhaya (generating profit while also avoiding violence and other potential disruptions to full rent collection, sometimes through forceful means). This is true even if the City, and possibly other key Ekhaya stakeholders, may strive for a thoroughly gentrified neighbourhood in which such complex and informal relationships are ultimately replaced by the orderliness characteristic of Hillbrow's very distant past and its envisaged future.

Notes

- 1 Building hijacking is the criminal takeover of a building from its rightful owners, usually absentee landlords or slumlords who neither personally collect rents nor maintain their buildings' internal affairs.
- 2 This law made provision for (R)CIDs in RSA only after 51% of property owners within a designated area had given consent for CID approval and registration. Interestingly, while Ekhaya was/is an informal CID, its establishment was based on the said provision (R1, interview, 2013).
- 3 Black, in this instance, denotes black Africans, Coloureds/biracial and Indian population groups.
- 4 Remarkably, three caretaker respondents (R3, R4 and R5) managed two buildings. Notwithstanding, the fieldwork focused on the buildings they governed and lived in.
- 5 *Stokvels* are informal savings syndicates mostly among black South Africans.

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