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A MATTER OF TIMING: MIGRATION AND HOUSING ACCESS IN METROPOLITAN JOHANNESBURG

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A Matter of Timing: Migration and Housing Access in Metropolitan Johannesburg[1]

Introduction

The city of Johannesburg lies at the centre of the largest urban conurbation in sub-Saharan Africa. In the past, this conurbation was known by the clumsy acronym 'PWV', which stood for the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging complex. Today, this urban region has the political status of a province and has been re-named 'Gauteng', a popular local name meaning 'place of gold'. A province that is almost entirely urban, Gauteng is home to 7.3 million people: about one-third of the national urban population of 21.8 million.[2] At the last census in 1996, the population of Johannesburg itself was about 2.6 million.[3] In the national hierarchy, this placed the city of Johannesburg just after the largest city in South Africa, namely Durban (2.8 million) and marginally ahead of Cape Town (also about 2.6 million).

Although Johannesburg is in most respects a modern industrial city, it nonetheless shares many of the demographic features of other African cities. For a start, its population has grown rapidly during the past half century. Although the population growth rate of Johannesburg is now slowing down, its population is still growing in absolute terms. In this respect, Johannesburg is similar to most African cities, particularly the larger ones, which grew rapidly during the twentieth century, especially during the post-colonial period (Becker and Morrison, 1995:110-116; Miller and Singh, 1994:68-70; Rakodi, 1997:32-39). The main difference, of course, between Johannesburg and most African cities outside South Africa was state control over urbanisation, which resulted in lower urban growth rates than would otherwise have been the case. Another feature of major urban centres in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is high levels of in-migration (Miller and Singh, 1994:72-74). Although the urbanisation of Africans in Johannesburg was curtailed by government policy for most of the twentieth century, we shall present evidence to show that in-migration contributed substantially to population growth. Finally, urbanisation in Johannesburg is also characterised by the dynamic of circular migration, a phenomenon that it shares with most African cities (Mabin, 1990; Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990; Prothero and Chapman, 1985; Standing, 1985).

The study that we present here is an analysis of the relationship between urbanisation and settlement patterns of the African population in the area under the administration of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council. Specifically, our aim is to provide an overview of the rate of population growth in Johannesburg over the twentieth century, and the extent of in-migration and circular migration; also the way in which housing policy has shaped the relationship between urbanisation and access to different kinds of accommodation. In order to do so, we have conceptualised migration in two ways. The first is 'in-migration'. By this definition, anyone who was born

1 The authors would like to thank Debby Potts for her helpful and critical comments on the first draft of this chapter and Kathy Forbes for her copy editing. We would also like to thank the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, the National Research Foundation and the University of Cape Town for funding this research.

2 This estimate of the urban population defines the urban population as those residents who are under the authority of a local government. If this definition were expanded to include people living in dense, non-agricultural settlements that fall outside local authority jurisdiction, this estimate would increase significantly.

3 These figures are based on the latest boundaries of the new metropolitan municipalities, which only became available recently. In the case of Johannesburg, the final demarcation of December 2000 incorporated the settlements of Midrand to the north and Orange Farm to the south. Consequently, the population of 2.6 million is somewhat larger than the figure of 2.3 million presented in Table 1, which was the population within the boundaries of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, an interim phase of local government that lasted from 1994 until 2000.

outside the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Area is regarded as a migrant or, to be more precise, an 'in-migrant'. The second is 'oscillating' labour migration. This definition of a migrant is the one used in the last population census and includes people who live away from their homes in order to earn a living or to look for employment. We will refer to such migrants as 'circular migrants'.

1. Population Trends in Metropolitan Johannesburg, 1911-1996

Although the population censuses do not provide information that can be used directly to establish the extent and patterns of in-migration to Johannesburg, they nonetheless can provide us with data on long-term trends in the size of the city's population and its racial, as well as its gender compositions.[4] Like many cities of the South, the population of Johannesburg is still increasing. The earliest census of all races, taken in 1911, reported a population of just less than a quarter of million. By the time of the last census, in 1996, this figure had increased to almost 2.3 million (Table 1).

Table 1: Population of metropolitan Johannesburg by race and gender, 1911-1996

	African		Coloured and Indian		White		All Races		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1911	97,614	4,357	9,307	5,873	67,775	52,178	174,696	62,408	237,104
1921	118,571	14,736	10,497	8,383	81,007	77,264	210,075	100,383	310,458
1936	196,605	65,457	17,387	15,660	134,529	131,926	348,521	213,043	561,564
1946	290,668	147,139	21,093	20,286	173,505	176,296	485,266	343,721	828,987
1951	320,612	195,807	31,402	31,067	192,588	198,171	544,602	425,045	969,647
1960	389,747	311,788	46,242	46,828	222,292	230,709	658,281	589,325	1,247,606
1970	465,464	409,457	64,584	67,172	274,166	280,328	804,214	756,957	1,561,171
1980	584,985	517,045	76,426	83,691	300,724	317,893	962,135	918,629	1,880,764
1991	690,171	597,674	122,158	158,179	317,621	329,382	1,129,950	1,085,235	2,215,185
1996	793,201	772,778	110,907	118,387	230,669	246,713	1,134,777	1,137,878	2,272,655

Source: Population Censuses

[4] This is because the population censuses provide only the country of each person's birthplace and not the specific place of birth within South Africa. Consequently, it is impossible to calculate the extent of in-migration to specific regions such as metropolitan Johannesburg.

Table 2: Average annual population growth rate of metropolitan Johannesburg by race and gender (percentage)

	African			Coloured and Indian			White			All Races		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1911-1921	2.0	13.0	2.7	1.2	3.6	2.2	1.8	4.0	2.8	1.9	4.9	2.7
1921-1936	3.4	10.5	4.6	3.4	4.3	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.4	5.1	4.0
1936-1946	4.0	8.4	5.3	2.0	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.9	2.8	3.4	4.9	4.0
1946-1951	2.0	5.9	3.4	8.3	8.9	8.6	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.3	4.3	3.2
1951-1960	2.2	5.3	3.5	4.4	4.7	4.5	1.6	1.7	1.7	2.1	3.7	2.8
1960-1970	1.8	2.8	2.2	3.4	3.7	3.5	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.3
1970-1980	2.3	2.4	2.3	1.7	2.2	2.0	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.8	2.0	1.9
1980-1991	1.5	1.3	1.4	4.4	6.0	5.2	0.5	0.3	0.4	1.5	1.5	1.5
1991-1996	2.8	5.3	4.0	-1.9	-5.6	-3.9	-6.2	-5.6	-5.9	0.1	1.0	0.5

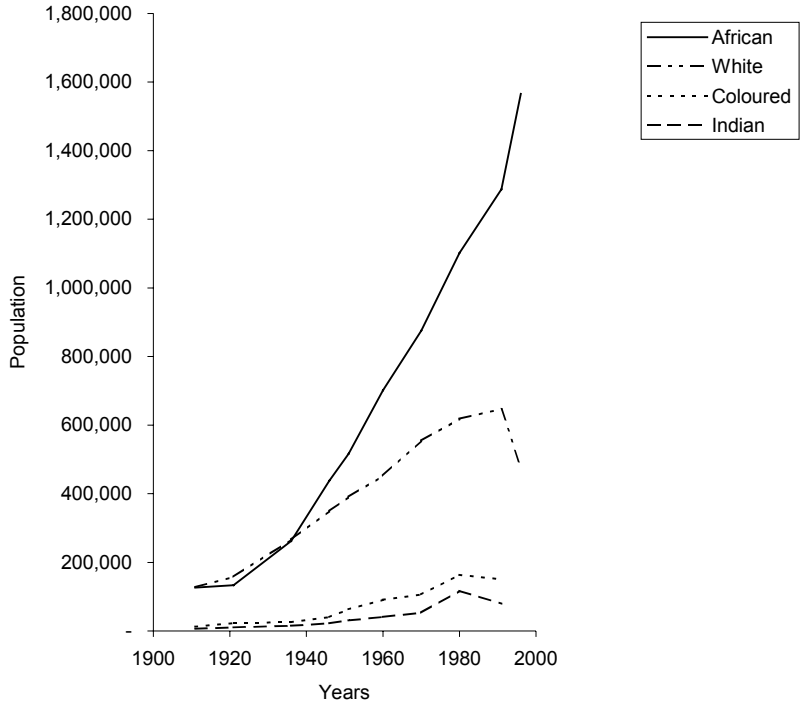
Source: Population Censuses

However, although Johannesburg's population is still growing, the rate of this growth is slowing down and has been doing so since 1946. The average annual rate of growth peaked at 4% in the period between 1920 and 1946 and has declined steadily ever since, falling to only 0.5% in the early 1990s (Table 2).

In order to gain a better understanding of this overall trend, we need to analyse Johannesburg's population growth trends by race and gender. The main reason for this is that there have been important differences in the urbanisation dynamics of these different groups. The first observation is that Johannesburg's overall population growth has been driven increasingly by the African population from as early as the 1920s. At that time Africans made up 43% of Johannesburg's population and whites 51%. The remaining 6% comprised coloured and Indian residents. Until the 1920s, the rate of growth of both the African and white populations was the same. Since then, however, the growth rate of the African population has been higher than that of the white population. Consequently, the percentage of Africans in Johannesburg's population rose steadily, and by 1996, reached 69% (Figure 1).

The growth of Johannesburg's African population was curtailed, at least in part, by

Figure 1: Metropolitan Johannesburg's Population by Race, 1911-1996



government policies limiting the urbanisation of Africans outside the reserves.[5] This was achieved by restricting the right to permanent urban settlement only to those Africans who had been born in Johannesburg or to rural-born migrants who had worked continuously for one employer for 10 years or for more than one employer for 15 years. Until they had secured permanent urban rights, rural-born migrants were not permitted to bring their families to Johannesburg and were forced to live in non-family accommodation, such as hostels and domestic servant's rooms. This policy therefore retarded African urbanisation by excluding unemployed and retired rural migrants from the city and also by ensuring that the dependants of rural migrants did not live in Johannesburg. African in-migration to Johannesburg was also limited by the government policy of displacing African urbanisation to towns in the African reserves. This was achieved through state subsidies and tax breaks for employers who set up businesses in the reserves and by state expenditure on housing and other infrastructure in towns within the reserves. These government policies were put in place from the early 1950s and were intensified during the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s, opposition to apartheid policies from a variety of quarters resulted in reforms to influx control. By the mid-1980s, the pass law system was abolished and, in its place, the government hoped that African urbanisation could be managed indirectly through the strategic provision of formal housing and strict controls over slums and the location of squatter settlements. Changes in the rate of growth of Johannesburg's African population broadly reflect these shifts in urbanisation policy, suggesting that in-migration was a significant component overall. From 1911 to 1960, the average annual rate of growth was high, rising from 2.7% in the 1910s, to 4.6% between 1921 and 1936 and reaching a high of 5.3% between 1936 and 1946. By contrast, in the following decades from 1960 to 1980, when state control over African urbanisation was at its most intense, the average annual rate of growth fell to just over 2%. Curiously, this dropped even further to only 1.4% during the 1980s. Such a figure seems anomalous because the decade was one of intense political rebellion, during which the state lost control over housing and settlement in African townships. Furthermore, influx control was finally abolished in 1986, so one would have expected to see increasing in-migration during the 1980s. It was only

[5] The following discussion is based on Hindson (1987) and Posel (1991).

during the 1990s, however, that the annual population growth rate increased again, rising to an average of 4.0%, a rate not seen since the pre-War years (Table 2).

This surge in the growth rate of the African population did not produce an increase in that of the overall population. The reason for this was the absolute decline in the white, coloured and Indian populations between 1991 and 1996, which offset the increase in the African population. Although it is true that many middle-class whites emigrated during this period, it is also widely acknowledged that middle-class areas were seriously under-enumerated by the 1996 census. However, this does not necessarily mean that Johannesburg's population growth rate will increase dramatically once the out-migration rate of non-Africans stabilises. Even if we assumed a constant population for non-Africans between 1991 and 1996, the overall average growth rate is only 2% per annum for this period.

Johannesburg's historical pattern of population growth is characterised by striking differences in the respective rates of growth of the male and female components over specific periods. From 1911 to 1921, the female population increased at over twice the rate as the male population. This gender difference in the population growth rate declined slowly over subsequent decades and equalised only during the 1970s (Table 2). The reason for these different growth rates is that the first residents of Johannesburg were mostly men who came to work in the gold mines that were first discovered in the mid-1880s. For the first twenty to thirty years of its existence, Johannesburg was therefore more like a mining camp than a city, and a high male/female ratio was to be found among all races. However, by the time of the 1936 population census, there were more or less equal numbers of men and women among the white, coloured and Indian races. By contrast, there were still three men to one woman among the African population. This high male/female ratio among Africans was due to the employment of circular migrant workers from remote rural areas both within South Africa and in foreign countries, mostly Mozambique, but also other African countries to the north (Jeeves, 1985). When coupled with pass laws preventing permanent African urbanisation, this pattern of labour migration ensured that the male/female ratio among Africans approached unity only in the late 1980s.

2. In-Migration to Johannesburg: Greater Soweto

Another source of information for the study of the urbanisation of the African population is a survey that was conducted among households in Greater Soweto during 1997.[6] The sample design was that of a stratified two-stage cluster sample with 112 clusters selected in the first stage. In the second stage, about 25 households were selected systematically within each cluster. This yielded a final sample of 2,947 households. The sample was stratified (non-proportional to population size) by type of accommodation, the strata being as follows: formal houses that were built by the state; formal houses built by the private sector; backyard dwellings, shacks in illegal shack settlements; dwellings in site-and-service schemes; and rooms in hostels. The analysis presented here was weighted by the actual numbers of units in each of these strata.[7] Information concerning migration was not, unfortunately, collected for every adult in each sampled household- only the migration history of the household head. The latter were selected not because of their status in the household, but because of their

[6] The questionnaire and sample was designed by Owen Crankshaw in consultation with the other members of the Soweto in Transition Committee, which was based in the Sociology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. The logistical aspects of the fieldwork were managed by Progressus cc. and the quality of the interviews and the sample were monitored in the field by Owen Crankshaw. The survey was funded by the Southern, Western and Northern Metropolitan Substructures of Johannesburg,the Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, the Human Sciences Research Council, The Anglo American and De Beers Chairman's Fund and the Foschini Group.

[7] The number of formal houses and shacks was determined from recent aerial photographs and the number of hostel beds and rooms was provided by the hostel administration. The average numbers of backyard dwellings per formal stand were calculated from the survey results.

leadership of the household's migration. We acknowledge that this method probably introduced an unknown bias in the sample because adult household members may have had different residential careers to that of the household head.

Clearly, this survey of Sowetan households is not representative of all African households within metropolitan Johannesburg. Although the population of Soweto amounts to about 67% of all Africans in the city, important social groups were excluded. The first of these comprises domestic servants and gardeners who live in servant's rooms in the middle-class areas of the city. These residents are likely to be rural-born and also to be circular migrants. The second group of Africans comprises urban-born residents who have left Soweto and other African townships to live in the erstwhile white residential areas of Johannesburg. The third group consists of circular migrant workers, housed in hostels in Johannesburg's central business district (Pirie and da Silva, 1986). The last group that is excluded comprises the residents of Alexandra, an African township in the north of metropolitan Johannesburg.
Calculating the extent of in-migration from household surveys is fraught with one major problem, namely that the survey excludes all people who have left metropolitan Johannesburg and those who have died. The latter can be remedied by controlling the statistical analysis for age. This means analysing the proportion of in-migrants versus the proportion of city-born respondents by age cohort. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3 below. The first observation we can make is that the levels of net in-migration are surprisingly high, considering the kinds of state controls that were instituted to prevent in-migration. Throughout the apartheid period, the proportion of household heads that were in-migrants did not drop below 47% (Tables 3 and 4).

The second observation is that the rate of in-migration shows a distinct historical trend. As one would expect, the results show that the proportion of in-migrants to city-born people is lowest among respondents from 40 to 59 years of age and increases in both younger and older age cohorts. This evidence therefore suggests that the extent of in-migration was higher during both the early apartheid period and the late apartheid periods. In other words, the age cohorts from 40 to 59 years of age, most of which urbanised from the late 1950s to the 1970s, comprise fewer in-migrants than other age cohorts. This evidence makes sense because this was the period during which apartheid control over African settlement was at its height.

Table 3: Percentage of in-migrants and city-born respondents in metropolitan Joh by age cohort

	In-migrant	City-born	Total	Sample size
up to 29 years old	67	33	100	335
30 to 39 years old	55	45	100	761
40 to 49 years old	47	53	100	708
50 to 59 years old	52	47	100	499
60 to 69 years old	70	30	100	360
over 69 years old	83	17	100	266
Missing data	60	40	100	18
Total	58	41	100	2,935

Source: Greater Soweto Household Survey, 1997

The age cohorts comprising respondents younger than 40 years of age, who urbanised during the 1980s and 1990s, have a higher percentage of in-migrants. This finding reflects the erosion of the apartheid government's control over African townships during the late 1980s and the final abolition of influx control in 1986. Finally, the age cohorts of 60 years and older are characterised by relatively high in-migration rates. This

corresponds with the period during which most of them urbanised, namely the period before the 1950s when apartheid controls over African urbanisation were still relatively weak and ineffectual.

Table 4: Year of urbanisation by age cohort

	up to 29 years	30 to 39 years	40 to 49 years	50 to 59 years	60 to 69 years	over 69 years
1916-1920	0	0	0	0	0	1
1921-1925	0	0	0	0	0	2
1926-1930	0	0	0	0	0	3
1931-1935	0	0	0	0	1	7
1936-1940	0	0	0	1	7	24
1941-1945	0	0	0	2	8	20
1946-1950	0	0	1	4	22	22
1951-1955	0	0	3	4	17	6
1956-1960	0	0	3	26	20	4
1961-1965	0	0	7	15	6	2
1966-1970	0	3	18	17	6	2
1971-1975	0	6	20	11	1	0
1976-1980	4	18	17	11	0	1
1981-1985	9	26	12	3	0	1
1986-1990	37	24	9	3	3	0
1991-1995	39	18	3	1	3	0
1996-	10	1	3	0	0	0
No answer	1	3	4	4	5	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sample size	335	761	708	499	360	266

Source: Greater Soweto Household Survey, 1997

3. African In-Migration and Housing Provision in Metropolitan Johannesburg

Before the 1940s, state attempts to control and regulate African urbanisation were both limited and ineffectual (Parnell, 2002). Official accommodation for Africans took the form of rented accommodation in the state-controlled townships (for families) and single-sex hostels (for circular migrants). The official Western Native Township and the hostels were located within six kilometres of the town centre. However, the state had already begun to build new African townships as far as 15 kilometres from the centre of town. These townships of Klipspruit, Pimville and Orlando were the nucleus around which Soweto was to be built. Most African residents who lived in metropolitan Johannesburg during the 1930s were circular migrants who lived in single-sex hostels (44%); only a small proportion was housed in official townships (Bonner, 1995). The rest of the African migrants lived in

different forms of unofficial accommodation. Most of them lived either in domestic servants' quarters in the backyards of white residential areas or in freehold African townships a few miles from the city centre. Although a small, wealthy minority of Africans owned houses in these freehold African townships, the majority rented backyard shacks (Hart and Pirie, 1984; Parnell and Pirie, 1991; Proctor, 1979). Smaller, but significant numbers also lived in slumyards in central Johannesburg. These slumyards contained rooms that lined the perimeter of the property and were provided with communal services. This form of accommodation was usually built by employers in the backyards of their industrial and commercial premises, but many landlords built such yards for the sole purpose of renting them out (Hellmann, 1948; Parnell, 1993). Many African miners lived with their families in shantytowns that their employers allowed them to build on unused land owned by the mining companies (Sapire, 1989). Others lived illegally on peri-urban farmland, but with the permission of the farmer to whom they paid rent (Bonner, 1995).

As we have shown above, the pace of African urbanisation rose dramatically between 1921 and 1946. During the 1930s, the Government took the first steps to ensure that Johannesburg would become an increasingly racially segregated city by demolishing the inner city slumyards and forcibly removing the African residents to hostels and official townships (Parnell, 1988). Those Africans without urban passes were left with no option but to find accommodation in the freehold black townships where they were beyond the reach of the law Hart and Pirie, 1984:39). As a consequence of rising African urbanisation and the above-mentioned slum clearances, both official and freehold African townships became overcrowded. In the official townships, a pattern of sharing Council houses developed, since officials would not tolerate the construction of backyard shacks (Stadler, 1979:95). In the unregulated freehold townships, 'almost every stand' had shacks in the backyard (van Tonder, 1993:319). In response to this housing crisis, a number of land invasions took place from the mid- to late-1940s. Stadler estimates that most of these squatters (between one half to three-quarters) were residents who had already established themselves in the city and were not migrants who had moved in directly from rural districts (Stadler, 1979:119-120).

Partly in response to the housing shortage and partly to ensure the racial segregation of Johannesburg's population, the Council accelerated its housing construction programme. The African residents of the freehold townships of Alexandra, Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare were forcibly removed by the government and re-housed in what became known as Greater Soweto (Hart and Pirie, 1984; Lodge, 1981; Proctor, 1979; van Tonder, 1993). Most of the current housing stock of Soweto was built between 1956 and 1962 and at the peak of delivery, about 11,000 houses were built in one year (Morris, 1981:63; Parnell and Hart, 1999). During this period, the number of hostel beds in Soweto was doubled.[8] So, with the demolition and forced removal of Africans from inner city areas in Johannesburg, the new townships of Soweto became an increasingly important reception area for migrants. The exception was the township of Alexandra. Although many Africans were removed from that township during the 1950s, Alexandra is still a residential area, albeit a slum, for poor Africans today.

By the end of the 1960s, Government policy slowed down the supply of formal housing for Africans to a mere trickle. Consequently, the 1970s and 1980s were decades of a chronic and growing housing shortage. This was expressed, during the late 1970s in the overcrowding of formal Council houses. Later, as the authority of the state was undermined by popular resistance, the housing shortage resulted in the widespread construction of backyard shacks and finally, in land invasions (Crankshaw, 1993; Sapire, 1992). Again, as in the pre-1940s period, rural born in-migrants were faced with a range of unregulated forms of accommodation, although most land invasions in metropolitan Johannesburg took place within the boundaries of greater Soweto. The exceptions were a number of relatively small squatter camps in peri-urban farmland (Abrahams, 1992; Adler *et al*, 1985; Crankshaw, 1993; Sapire, 1992).

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[8] Issues of *Vade Mecum*, 1937-1973.

The period during which in-migrants first came to live in metropolitan Johannesburg appears to play a significant role in determining the type of accommodation that they first lived in and the type of accommodation that they live in now. The reason for this trend lies in the different regimes of housing provision during the apartheid period, discussed above. Essentially, in-migrants that arrived in the city before the mid-1960s were much more likely to live in a formal Council-built house, either as their first accommodation or that which they occupy today. The reason for this is that it was during this period that a large number of low-cost houses was built by the state. This housing regime was reversed by the end of the 1960s, after which very few low-cost houses were constructed. Most of Soweto's hostels were also built during the late 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, in-migrants who arrived from the late-1960s onward were much less likely to live in formal family housing of any kind and much more likely to live in single-sex hostels or in backyard shacks and squatter settlements (Gilbert and Crankshaw, 1999). This evidence is summarised in Tables 5 and 6 below.

Table 5: First type of accommodation in metropolitan Johannesburg by year of arrival

	1906-1955	1956-1965	1966-1980	1981-1990	1991-1996	Total
Rented a formal house	29	20	15	6	7	15
Shared a formal house with another family (including relatives)	23	26	29	16	16	22
Rented a backyard room or shack	22	24	22	41	44	31
A shack settlement	8	5	2	2	14	5
A domestic servant's room	8	5	2	4	2	4
A hostel	5	14	26	26	14	18
A room on employer's premises	5	7	5	5	3	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sample Size	268	145	296	278	145	1,132

Source: Greater Soweto Household Survey, 1997

Up to the mid-1960s, the proportion of in-migrants who secured formal family housing in their first place of residence was in the region of 20 to 30% (Table 5). After that, this proportion dropped steadily to 15% for the period between 1966 and 1980, and then to about 6% from 1981 onwards. Correspondingly, the proportion of in-migrants whose first accommodation was a backyard shack doubled from about one-fifth between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s to two-fifths during the 1980s and 1990s. Before the mid-1950s, the proportion of in-migrants whose first accommodation was a hostel was a mere 5%. This figure rose to 14% during the late 1950s and early 1960s and then increased again to 26% in the period from the late 1960s to the end of the 1980s (Table 5).

If we examine the present type of accommodation occupied by Sowetan in-migrants, a similar pattern is evident (Crankshaw, Gilbert and Morris, 2000). In-migrants who arrived in metropolitan Johannesburg before the late 1960s were much more likely to secure formal accommodation than those who arrived from the mid-1960s onward. Specifically, 87% of those in-migrants who arrived before the mid-1950s now live in houses that were built by the local authority (Table 6). Although those in-migrants who arrived between 1956 and 1965 are less likely to live in a Council-built house today, the proportion is still relatively high at 43%. By contrast, of those in-migrants who arrived after 1965, less than 14% now occupy a Council-built house (Table 6).

Table 6: Present type of accommodation by year of arrival in metropolitan Johannesburg

	1906-1955	1956-1965	1966-1980	1981-1990	1991-1996	Total
Rented Council house	87	43	14	3	2	28
Privately built and owned house	3	4	5	2	1	3
Backyard shack or room	3	27	48	62	68	43
Informal settlement	3	6	10	9	9	8
Hostel	3	18	17	23	20	16
Site & service	1	2	6	2	1	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sample size	268	145	296	278	145	1,132

Source: Greater Soweto Household Survey, 1997

4. Circular Migrants in Metropolitan Johannesburg

What is the extent of circular migrant labour in metropolitan Johannesburg? To answer this question, we have relied on the results of the 1996 Population Census, which is the only source of information that can provide an estimate for the whole city. Defining a circular migrant worker as someone who is absent from home for more than one month each year in order to work or to seek work, this Population Census asked about circular migrant workers in two different ways. Each household member who was present in the household on the 10th of October 1996 was asked if they were a circular migrant worker or not.[9] In addition, the Census asked if there was anyone who was a member of the household but who was living elsewhere because they were a circular migrant worker.[10] The Census therefore captured circular migrant workers at both their homes, from which they were absent, and their place of residence at the time of the Census.

The first estimate of the number of circular migrants comes from households within metropolitan Johannesburg that have members who are migrant workers. This source estimates that there are 92,144 circular migrants out of a total population of 2,306,777 (about 4% of the total population). The second estimate comes from households outside metropolitan Johannesburg that have absent members who live and work in the city.[11] This source suggests that there were about 274,749 circular migrants living in the city in 1996 (about 12% of the population). The discrepancy between these two estimates is large and deserves some explanation. However, there is no method

[9] The exact question was, 'Is (the person) a migrant worker? (Someone who is absent from home **for more than a month** each year to work or to seek work).' [original emphasis], Census '96 Questionnaire, Section A, Question 10, p.4. These data are not available on the Community Profiles for the 1996 Census. Instead they are available on the Unit Records and were provided for us by Ms Amiena Mohamed, a statistician at the Statistics South Africa office, Cape Town.

[10] The exact question was, 'Are there any persons who are usually members of this household, but who are away for a month or more because they are migrant workers? (A migrant worker is someone who is absent from home for more than a month each year to work or to seek work).' Census '96 Questionnaire, Section B, Question 1.3, p.10. These data are available on the Community Profile Data Bases and were calculated by ourselves.

[11] According to Ms Amiena Mohamed, a statistician at the Statistics South Africa office in Cape Town, these population estimates are not adjusted for undercount.

whereby any explanation can be thoroughly tested. One possibility is that the large size of the second estimate may be a result of the use of Magisterial Districts in the Census questionnaire to identify the whereabouts of absent migrants. According to the organisation of the Census results, metropolitan Johannesburg is made up of three Magisterial Districts (Johannesburg, Randburg and Roodepoort) and Soweto. It might be the case that rural households used the name of 'Johannesburg' to mean a much larger area than the Johannesburg Magisterial District. This would explain why, according to the second (higher) estimate, 88% of circular migrants lived in the Johannesburg Magisterial District and only 12% lived in Roodepoort, Randburg and Soweto. By contrast, according to the first (lower) estimate of circular migrants, only 51% live in the Johannesburg Magisterial District.

Another possible explanation for these widely divergent estimates of the number of circular migrants is that rural households may still consider an absent household member to be a circular migrant, even though the migrant considers him or herself to be fully urbanised.[12] This kind of reasoning leads us to suggest that the estimate based on urban households may be the more accurate one. Yet another explanation for the discrepancy in these estimates may be due to the fact that the concept of 'home' is not defined in the questionnaire. Although the questionnaire design implies that the 'home' referred to in Section A, Question 10 is the migrant's household of origin, it could be interpreted by respondents to mean the home they currently live in. If the meaning of 'home' was confused in this way, then the Census results from this question are flawed (Posel, 2002). However, our view is that the concepts of 'migrant worker' and 'home', when used in Johannesburg households, would be interpreted as they were designed to be.

An important finding from the analysis of the 1996 Population Census results is that as much as one-third of all circular migrants are women. This finding is fairly robust, since both the above methods of identifying circular migrants produced very similar estimates of the gender composition of the circular migrant workforce (Table 7). This finding shows the extent to which the early pattern of male-dominated circular migration has been eroded by the feminisation of the African workforce, especially of unskilled jobs in the service sector, such as domestic service and office cleaning. A comparison of the gender composition by age cohort of circular migrants suggests that women have been a significant component of the circular migrant workforce for at least thirty years (Table 8).

Table 7: Gender composition of circular migrants in metropolitan Johannesburg

	Circular Migrants		Non-Migrants
	Estimate 1	Estimate 2	
Men	64	68	49
Women	36	32	51
Total	100	100	100

Source: 1996 Population Census

[12] We are grateful to Debby Potts for this insight.

Table 8: Gender composition of circular migrants by age cohort in metropolitan Johannesburg

Age	Men	Women	Total
15 – 19 years	58	42	100
20 – 24 years	67	33	100
25 – 29 years	68	32	100
30 – 34 years	65	35	100
35 – 39 years	63	37	100
40 – 44 years	62	38	100
45 – 49 years	62	38	100
50 – 54 years	60	40	100
55 – 59 years	62	38	100
60 - 64 years	60	40	100
Over 64 years	54	46	100
Unspecified	61	39	100
Total	64	36	100

Source: 1996 Population Census (estimate 1)

What are the housing circumstances of circular migrants in Johannesburg? To address this question, we turned to an analysis of the Soweto household survey. This survey tried to establish the extent of circular migration by asking, firstly, whether or not respondents had an additional home of their own. Because we did not want to exclude from our definition of circular migrants those respondents who did not have a second home of their own, but who were still members of their parent's household, we also asked if respondents had a rural house that they considered their family home. To establish the respondent's involvement with their other home, we asked where their spouses and children lived and how often they visited there. The results showed that out of a total of 298,985 household heads, about 118,000 had access to a rural family home and that, for some 34,800 of these individuals, this family home was their own second house.[13] An additional 8,000 respondents had a second home in an urban area. So, if we count as circular migrants all respondents who had a second house of their own, then about 14% of all Sowetan household heads are circular migrants. If we broaden this definition to include those who do not have their own second home but were rural born and still visit a rural family home at least once a year, the estimate increases to 31%. However, the problem with this latter estimate is that it must include individuals who are fully urbanised and who simply visit the family homestead without being members of the rural household. Nonetheless, this exercise does provide us with an outside estimate of the extent of circular migration among Sowetan households.

[13] These figures were calculated by weighting the survey results according to the actual population of Soweto. The population estimate was calculated by multiplying the occupancy rate per formal stand/shack (established through the survey) by the number of formal stands/shacks (established from aerial photographs). Hostel managers provided us with the number of hostel residents.

Table 9: Type of accommodation occupied by circular migrants and fully urbanised respondents in Greater Soweto

	Circular Migrants	Urbanites
Council houses	16	44
Private sector houses	13	8
Backyards	50	36
Squatter settlements	8	5
Hostels	20	3
Site & service schemes	3	4
Total	100	100
Sample size	843	2,102

Source: Greater Soweto Household Survey, 1997

The importance of backyard accommodation as a source of shelter for in-migrants suggests that it may play a similar role for circular labour migrants. The evidence from the Soweto survey shows that this is indeed the case. Staying with our definition of circular migrants as outlined above, a comparison of the accommodation occupied by circular migrants and urbanites shows that circular migrants are much more likely than urbanites to live in hostels (Table 9). This, of course, is to be expected. What is striking, however, is the finding that more than twice as many circular migrants live in backyards as live in hostels. Put differently, about half of all circular migrants in greater Soweto live in backyard shacks or rooms.

Conclusion

This study has shown that in spite of state control to limit African urbanisation, the African population of Johannesburg grew steadily throughout the apartheid period. Although the population census data cannot identify the extent to which this growth was due either to in-migration or to natural increase, the evidence from a survey of households in greater Soweto suggests that net in-migration may account for over half of all household heads during the apartheid period. This study has also shown that in-migrants' access to formal housing in Soweto has been strongly determined by the period during which they arrived in Johannesburg. Most of those who arrived immediately before and during the mass construction of low-cost housing in Soweto during the late 1950s and early 1960s secured rights to one of these Council houses. By contrast, in-migrants who arrived in Johannesburg from the late-1960s onward were increasingly likely to end up in backyard rooms or shacks and, to a lesser extent, in shack settlements and hostels. These findings shed new light on the dynamics of state control over African urbanisation in Johannesburg and its consequences for social differentiation.

During the 'high apartheid' period of the late 1960s and 1970s, when influx control was at its most effective and the State still exerted tight restrictions over African settlement, most in-migrants were channelled into official accommodation in the form of hostels and family housing. During this period, the pass law system controlling African urbanisation went hand-in-hand with state control over access to housing in African townships. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, the state was increasingly unable to

control settlement in African townships and in-migrants secured illegal and informal forms of accommodation mostly in the backyards of Council houses and, to a lesser extent, in shack settlements. Curiously, the apartheid government began to rely on its control over access to housing to control African urbanisation at precisely the time that this control was wrested away from the state by popular protest. The creation of backyard accommodation in Soweto was therefore an important reason why influx control was undermined in the late apartheid period. Because this form of accommodation became an important reception site for in-migrants, it is not surprising that it also became an important source of accommodation for circular migrants. Instead of being channelled into single-sex hostels, circular migrants increasingly flouted Government controls to live in backyards instead. By 1997, twice as many circular migrants lived in backyards as in hostels.

As a footnote, it is worth remarking that the historically unequal pattern of access to formal housing by in-migrants to Johannesburg has been mirrored by their unequal access to urban jobs (Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell, 2002; Crankshaw and Parnell, forthcoming). Just as in-migrants who arrived during the early years of apartheid had a better chance of gaining access to formal housing than those who arrived during the high apartheid period, so did they also have a better chance of securing unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the formal sector. Not only was the early apartheid economy characterised by a division of labour that required relatively large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers, but it also grew dramatically during the 1960s (Crankshaw, 1997). However, this economic boom came to an end in the mid-1970s, and the demand for this kind of manual work went into permanent decline. Conditions of slow employment growth during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in rising unemployment among less educated and younger workers (Bhorat and Leibbrandt, 1996). Poorly-educated in-migrants who arrived in Johannesburg after 1980 therefore had a higher chance of being unemployed than those who had urbanised in earlier decades.

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