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## **CONCLUSIONS: PROTECT, CONSTRAIN AND DISRUPT**

In this book we demonstrate that within the township economy the trajectory of business development is influenced by the extraction of surplus to benefit companies and individuals who reside outside of these settlements.

# Conclusions: protect, constrain and disrupt

## Overview

In this book, we have sought to provide a new understanding of the township economy, through the prism of its informal micro-enterprises and their entrepreneurs. From a macro-perspective, we have sought to demonstrate that the township economy is an entity of particular spatial characteristics in which the trajectory of business development is influenced by the accumulation of wealth to benefit companies and individuals who reside outside of these settlements. In this process, we have argued that the state has enabled and afforded these extractive businesses with the institutional room to manoeuvre. This has been done, in one part, through apartheid-inspired restrictions on micro-enterprises and, in another part, through state inability (even reluctance) to intervene in markets and against dominant business practices. From a political economy perspective, the constraints on township micro-enterprises resemble a situation of colonialism, with micro-enterprises subject to enforced informalisation and large businesses (including corporates) able to extend their control over markets into these marginalised geographies. While we highlight the overriding logic of profit extraction, we simultaneously recognise, taking a more fine-grained and closer perspective, the 'insurgence' of micro-enterprises responding to opportunities in spite of the state, both independently and in consort with external businesses. We are particularly sensitive to what we describe as 'people-centred' responses and the strategies and innovations employed to enter into markets. We have sought to illustrate how, in different contexts and for different actors, the ability of individuals to establish or grow business is either advanced or restrained through the influence of power. For many township entrepreneurs, such power influences severely limit economic opportunities; in contrast, for much fewer, power enables networks, groupings and 'big men' to dominate local markets and participate alongside (and sometimes in competition with) bigger businesses in extractive accumulation. We have characterised these outcomes in binary terms, as survivalist and entrepreneur responses, though we recognise that there is also a middle-ground position.

In reaching our overarching conclusions, we restate our three principal objectives. One, we sought to contribute towards a theoretical framing for assessing qualitative and quantitative evidence (our own and that from secondary sources) of the constraints that hinder the growth of township micro-enterprises. Two, we sought to identify actions that currently (as well as in the future) unlock opportunities to grow informal businesses in size, sustainability and sophistication, including legal status, while accommodating new

entrants from within township communities. Three, we sought to investigate the ways in which micro-enterprises contribute towards the place making of townships in ways that either reinforce or erode apartheid legacies and the implications thereof for social inclusivity.

The research that informs our analysis was undertaken by collecting primary evidence from 10 sites in South African and Namibian settlements. Our evidence comprises quantitative data from sources including a business census and firm surveys, and qualitative insights from interviews, observations, measurement, diagrams and photography, and participatory, co-produced visual outputs. Considerations of space and time were afforded a central influence in our theoretical framing. We differentiated between six levels of spatiality: one, the comparative level wherein we contrasted data across geographic sites; two, the city level at which we considered specific settlements and their relationship to the urban geography; three, the small-area level at which we provided detailed evidence on the variation and distribution of different categories of micro-enterprise, including cases of sites which change over time; four, the neighbourhood level where we focused on the spatial dynamics of localised markets; five, the micro-context level wherein we discerned intimate spatial and relational influences, including the role of objects; and six, the level of invisible infrastructure of norms, practices, values and beliefs that provided the bedrock of the social relationships which secure and safeguard conditions for doing business. Thinking through the subject of township entrepreneurship in space and time enabled us to shift our focus across multiple spatial terrains and timeframes. On the downside, this weighting towards space/time framing has meant that our findings are not necessarily universal to all townships settings at all times over the past decade. There are no doubt settlements to which our findings are less applicable, such as those located on the peri-urban areas or on tribal trust land where agricultural activities might fulfil a greater role, or in the urban context on municipal, established housing estates or within historically migrant hostels. Furthermore, we make no claim that our results are applicable in developing countries with different urban geographies, socio-political characteristics, economic structures and unfamiliar variables of power such as paramilitary or military control over markets.

The broad consistency of the different kinds of evidence across the research sites implies that our findings have wider resonance. We identified similarities in the scope and proportional scale of enterprises. The evidence shows the dominance of retail activities selling groceries, food and beverages, with the majority of businesses operating from residential settings. Many of these activities can be regarded as 'survivalist', though this does not imply an absence of business strategy or a profit-generating function. We found high streets accommodated roughly a quarter of total business activities, notably of service-related enterprises such as hairdressing. In the high-street context, we recorded patterns of spatial layering, clustering and ordering in each site, with the street space itself constituting a fluid, informal land-use system accessible to multiple users and controls. Though complex in social structure, high-street markets enable greater productivity than residential areas through densification, synergies between businesses, and the fluidity of land use, to name some of the key devices. Where markets have been formally established, such as those around transport nodes, the evidence indicates that urban planners are unable to replicate a similar environment of entrepreneurship. Though 'pregnant with possibilities', to borrow the term of the Africanist urban scholars, Pieterse and Simone (2013, p. 12), we found, nevertheless, that most South African township high streets are in an early phase of development in comparison to Eveline Street in Namibia. In Eveline Street, we saw how formal institutions (including titling, land-use zoning

and business licensing, and state enforcement agencies) are (more closely) aligned to the informal institutions (values, norms and unwritten rules), allowing for purposeful investments in both the private and public realms to enhance business (optimising the commercial outcome) while improving the quality of the social environment.

It is from the high street that township residents connect to inner-city and commercial areas. The minibus transport system arose in response to the inability of the state to provide adequate (affordable, efficient and reliable) spatial connectivity. While the minibus system has beneficial aspects, it generates a concentration of political-industrial-financial power and, as an agency of economic development has weak transformative possibilities for micro-enterprises and does not incubate disruptive spatial outcomes required to undo the apartheid legacy. A contrasting outcome was identified in the role of (informal) sedan taxis which operate within a notably more responsive, adaptive and decentralised system, creating routes on consumer demand and linking residents to micro-nodes and high-street clusters. Yet these taxis are excluded from the benefits of formal institutions, including operating licences, access to finance and routes out of the township. The asymmetry in power relationships is a theme and influence, similarly, in the major retail segments, notably in the case of spaza retailers and the case of taverns and shebeens. In the spaza sector, our research documents the transformation in ownership and business strategies which has accompanied the establishment of shops by immigrant entrepreneurs. The new shops operate on a larger scale with evidence of horizontal and vertical integration and provide a more competitive service and stock a wider range of products. As a result of the incapacity of the state to enforce laws with respect to household grocery retailing, these shops are able to operate in non-compliance with formal requirements. Informality thus provides a competitive advantage against both survivalist micro-enterprises within localised markets and supermarkets situated on township periphery. The financial success of the new shopkeepers has resulted in the closing of most survivalist businesses, many of whom were South African women in a transition noted nationwide. At the area level, shopping malls operated by stock-market listed companies encroach into the township spatial environment, providing a secluded architecture for corporate businesses while simultaneously disqualifying micro-enterprises from setting up shops within the mall compound. From a perspective of opportunity, the sole beneficiaries of these shopping malls are the street traders who precariously trade on the perimeter fence and entrance sidewalks situated on the outside.

In the case of the liquor trade, the incongruence between formal institutions (regulation, law enforcement) and informal institutions (norms, values, cultural practices) is greatest of all enterprise sectors. Here the majority of micro-enterprises trade illegally and are consequently subject to intensive law enforcement with the result that the businesses have stock confiscated and the operators are frequently arrested, given fines, prosecuted and imprisoned either within the judicial process upon their arrest or as a final sanction. Yet these businesses mainly sell products that are both legal and obtained through legal transactions. Despite the intensity of state violence, most shebeen owners elect to continue in business. We have argued that their situation should be understood as one of enforced informalisation since the majority of operators would want to obtain a licence to conduct business (to reduce police raids), if only the institution was accessible. Since the issue of a licence is contingent on compliance with the formal institutions of land use, the applicant needs to secure ownership (title), rezone the property for business use, and ensure that their buildings are compliant with land-use stipulations and building standards. Additionally, the prospective applicant would still need to comply with a raft of other compliance criteria, which entail police inspections and community oversight.

In no other sector, possibly with the exception of educares, does the path to formal institutional inclusion demand such high levels of financial, human and social capital investment.

The reward for formalisation can be muted. Although there is a high demand for liquor in neighbourhood localities (with the shebeen fulfilling the equivalent function of home storage), the market is subject to monopolistic control. The dominant corporate beer producer built its 'route to market' business model through supplying taverns with high-volume orders to be on-sold at low margins, which in turn helps to maintain demand for low prices per volume products. This supply model 'straitjackets' retail outlets to sell products at low profit, with licensed taverns functioning as a conduit of onward supply to the unlicensed shebeen. The model has allowed liquor producers to remain an arms length away from having to take responsibility for the consequence of illegal trade or the sustained culture of heavy drinking, with its associated social and economic costs. The context of micro-enterprise informality thus provides formal businesses an efficient and profitable 'route to market'. In this extractive business process, minimal accountability or investment is required of the supplied businesses. The same situation has also emerged in the relationship between (corporate) wholesalers and spaza shops, as well as those who supply products to micro-enterprises selling takeaway food.

Township micro-enterprises derive their legitimacy, regardless of the business's legal status, by providing services that are culturally acceptable within communities. This notion is reinforced through the respectability afforded to entrepreneurship as a means to sustain livelihoods in a context of high unemployment, spatial marginalisation and resource constraints. Throughout our engagements in the field, over and over we heard the same message: *'I am not committing a crime'*. Such terms of legitimacy apply to most of the business sectors we analyse in this book, with the (possible) exception of some of the informalist-run spaza shops which are seen as businesses originating from outside the community and adhering to different norms and values. We have argued that micro-enterprises have an important role in the process of place making, particularly in the residential context, a function similarly fulfilled by a range of businesses including, less obviously, hair salons, educares, religious institutions and traditional healers. In providing much needed public space where residents can meet to socialise and recreate, to exchange information, to connect with social networks, and to invest in human and social capital, these micro-enterprises collectively contribute to the disruption of the urban fabric that once constituted planned dormitory settlements. We have argued that the micro-enterprises which produce a socio-economic outcome in this respect should be seen as 'pioneers', who through their operation set out spatial landmarks (and nodes) for future economic growth and diversification, including creating opportunities for new entrants. The case of Eveline Street provides a microcosm of insight for the future possibilities for business growth, diversification and place-making transformation in ways that begin to narrow the gap between the city and the township. As a collective, place-influencing micro-enterprises make the townships liveable, authentic and culturally visible in the sense of enabling residents to identify transformative opportunities within the urban landscape. It is largely due to these businesses that the township retains an enduring hold on its residents, including those whose income affords them an opportunity to relocate to wealthier neighbourhoods but who often choose not to.

We end our narrative overview with an examination of the informal institutions which underpin enterprise strategies, enable informal markets to function in reliable and predictable ways, and provide mechanisms to manage risks. These institutions are often illegible to conventional scholarship in business management and economic development

studies and therefore have not been systematically researched and are, consequently, omitted from most of the economic prognoses on informal economy development (see, for example, Fourie 2018c). Yet the township economy supports a repository of 'social technologies', including traditions, beliefs and practices that guide business activities (Du Toit & Neves 2014). We show how a set of informal institutions function to enable opportunities for new entrants to start-up businesses, including survivalists, to trade in public spaces such as street pavements. Informal institutions help to ensure that businesses compete on terms considered to be 'fair', which in turn puts pressure on comparatively more successful entrepreneurs to downplay their financial achievements. In order to avoid looking 'rich', successful township business persons might adopt strategies of fronting (keeping their businesses shabby in appearance), divesting earnings into different businesses in different settings, or investing in human and social capital detached from the business, to list some common strategies. We argue that reciprocal exchanges (rather than notions of a selfless Ubuntu) are a foundational aspect of social etiquette in an economy in which survivalists in particular frequently request and return favours. All such exchanges are grounded in social relationships, constituted on trust. Often, they are founded on kinship, patronage, friendship, though for immigrants both ethnicity and nationality can offer a proximal basis for social networking and coordination of business investment strategies. For this reason, social networks fulfil an important role for township informal businesses, with strong networks providing access to capital, effective risk management institutions, marketing opportunities and hard to obtain goods and services such as contraband tobacco. To analyse micro-enterprises without their underpinning in relationships of reciprocity and complex social networks is to miss the infrastructure that can ensure not simply the survival of the business but the opportunities for future growth. It is for these reasons that township micro-enterprises should be seen as strategic, a feature of even survivalist business endeavours that persist not necessarily to grow the business but to find a pathway to re-enter the (formal) labour market as opportunities arise.

## Themes

This book set out to provide a different perspective on Southern Africa's township economy through taking readers on a journey across space and time. Our objective was to reconcile two divergent narratives; one that characterises informal businesses as 'necessity'- rather than 'opportunity'-driven and locked into a traditional sector with structural deficiencies (Mahajan 2014), in contrast to one that characterises informal micro-enterprises as strategic, responsive and innovative, whose social technologies are potentially sophisticated (Alcock 2015; Du Toit & Neves 2014). We accept that there is truth in both narratives. Looking across the 10 sites, it is easy to conclude that the informal micro-enterprise component of the township economy is under-performing. Township residents need to travel outside their settlements in order to access an array of services and products that are (only) obtainable in either the commercial districts of the city or in shopping malls. The list includes household furniture, new clothing and footwear, motor vehicles, service contracts for phones, financial institutions such as banking and insurance brokerage, and western medical care. Micro-enterprises cannot compete with supermarkets (or large retailers) whose scale of operation and vertical integration affords these businesses a competitive advantage and it is understandable why residents express a demand for shopping malls in the township, not simply for access to commodities and services, but as safe social spaces (Chevalier, 2015). But this is not the most important message.

We are in agreement with scholars who argue that there are structural impediments hindering growth opportunities, but we counter that it is not these impediments per se that 'prevent a modernising component from growing' (Fourie, 2018c, p. 457). Instead, informal micro-enterprises ought to be seen as following a completely different development trajectory. Most businesses operate in a non-western context, with the form, appearance and operations reflecting both pragmatic decisions and socio-cultural considerations. Though different, micro-enterprises can be sustainable, do grow in financial scale and can enable the entrepreneur to generate wealth. Some businesses also create employment (though this is not necessarily their aim) and are capable of technological innovation, though they prioritise social strategies to minimise risks over reinvestment within the business. Often the direction of development is not towards larger units of production or mechanisation, hallmarks of 'modernisation', but towards divestment into multiple different businesses and investment in property. The latter strategy is evident in neighbourhood development, the establishment of rural homes far from the source of income, investments to establish low-cost residential units or, where suitable conditions permit, to develop multi-purpose buildings with both commercial and residential functions.

The township economy represents a valuable platform for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, a means to obtain investment capital, and access to the social networks that connect to informal institutions. These resources have enabled many thousands of individuals to uplift themselves from poverty and secure intergenerational benefits for their immediate family and kinship. The precise scale of this upward elevation is difficult to quantify for the benefits are continually dispersed through investments in human and social capital development as much as in physical assets and savings. The economic contribution of micro-enterprises can be seen, notwithstanding, in the changing township landscape. Older settlements like Tembisa, Thabong and KwaMashu are unrecognisably different from their initial form. New settlements like Ivory Park and Delft South are fast undergoing a process of rebuilding and economic reordering. And in informal settlements, such as Sweet Home Farm and parts of Vrygrond, where the state has only provided a cursory infrastructure of roads and public utilities through communal service points, a process of development through construction is underway with micro-enterprises fulfilling an important role in the provision of a service infrastructure and the creation of public spaces. In all these sites, much of the changing economic landscape aligns to the spaces in which entrepreneurs undertake businesses, with the spaces and places of greatest change correlating to sites of highest business intensity. Furthermore, the imprint of micro-enterprises can be seen in the township lifestyles, in the fusion of the traditional with the modern and the ritualisation of business activities within social events, such as *stokvel* meetings.

In assessing the economic achievement of township micro-enterprises, we draw attention to five themes that weave through the book. These themes are: i) differentiated opportunities; ii) space matters; iii) institutions are incongruent; iv) corporate power stifles transformative potential; and v) informality nurtures economic resistance.

### Differentiated opportunities

We differentiate township business between survivalists and entrepreneurs. Survivalists are in the great majority. Survivalist businesses respond to economic opportunities in the logic of supplementing household income, drawing on existing resources of financial, human and social capital. Most are engaged in selling food, grocery items and beverages, including liquor products. While many survivalists are able to sustain their business

through spatially nimble strategies, including a minimal investment in infrastructure, and through making products relatively more affordable and accessible than competitors, most are not entrepreneurial and will abandon the business if alternative income-generating opportunities emerge. Entrepreneurs have a different propensity for financial risks. These individuals have characteristically invested in physical infrastructure and equipment, employed workers on a full-time or casual basis and sourced products competitively, in some cases from importers or manufacturers operating upstream of the wholesale outlets upon whom survivalists are reliant. To differentiate the business and signify its credibility, most entrepreneurially oriented businesses are named, with the name displayed on signage, business cards or websites. Entrepreneurs draw on human and social capital to advance and amplify their businesses, prioritising their own financial gains. We have shown how immigrants have mobilised finance and access to products through ethnic networks, as another example of utilising these resources, to enter into and dominate markets over survivalist businesses.

An important difference between survivalists and entrepreneurs, notwithstanding, is their respective power responses to structural constraints. For survivalists, their core power responses lie, first, in maintaining social infrastructure through reciprocal investments and, second, in securing continued patronage and exemptions from more powerful actors, such as property owners. Such patrons provide access to trading sites (or indeed the right to trade in direct spatial competition), storage for their goods, electricity and water connectivity, for instance. For entrepreneurs, one of the core power responses for residentially based retail businesses lies in developing or maintaining their business as the dominant outlet within a niche market and then defending their position through overt and covert strategies to restrict competition. In the transport sector, taxi entrepreneurs mobilise through constituted organisational structures to control the market and exclude sedan taxis from competition for routes. On the high street, in one particular case, business persons have utilised the power embodied within formal state institutions to unlock legally protected land rights, which in turn has enabled these entrepreneurs to obtain business licences while safeguarding their development investment in property. We have described three notable power responses within the array of entrepreneurial strategies: i) the violent entrepreneurs; ii) the informalists; and iii) the business pioneers. We illustrate the role of these entrepreneurial power responses in different spatial and sectoral contexts; respectively, the minibus taxi sector, the spaza-shop sector and the high-street tavern owners. It must be stressed that these power responses are not mutually exclusive. Successful township entrepreneurs may use modes of violence (including magic) along with subversions of informality in efforts to dominate their market niche and/or protect business interests, while nevertheless affording spatial, economic and social benefits to non-competing survivalists and others.

Gender relations bisect our differentiation of micro-enterprises. Survivalists are predominantly (not exclusively) women, whereas the violent entrepreneurs and informalists of our case studies are predominantly men. Through our spatial lens, we find that women are spatially compelled to operate businesses from either their home or within the adjacent neighbourhood to accommodate their gendered social responsibilities within the family. The predominance of men and women in particular sectors reflects contrasting gendered influences on social capital, including skills training, cultural expectations and enabling support structures. Men predominate in sectors providing mechanical and repair services as well as taxi transport. Women predominate in educares and food takeaways and have an equal shareholding of liquor retail (especially shebeens), hair care and traditional healing markets. In the hair-care sector, the businesses are gendered in orientation and client base, so that hair

salons and barber shops operate within separate market segments. Female-operated educare and businesses which provide traditional healing characteristically operate as social enterprises, providing a social benefit as a core business objective and tapering profits to base levels of affordability. Service provision is not only gendered, but highly personalised and informed with cultural practices and norms.

### Space matters

Our second theme is that space matters in informal markets and business strategies. The geospatial census identified broadly uniform patterns in business distribution. These revealed a separation between the high street and residential localities. High streets present a more diverse range of spatial opportunities in which to conduct business; these are influenced by, among other things, the intensity and direction of pedestrian movements, the configuration of transport infrastructure, the street morphology and the availability of space within the sidewalk or on open ground to accommodate different infrastructural propositions. Although residential localities accommodate a narrower range of business categories, similar spatial opportunities are replicated across the terrain, with each neighbourhood presenting a geographic micro-market to serve the demand for (top-up) groceries, fast food and beverages. The range of businesses in these niche markets is remarkably similar in all our sites. Neighbourhood markets were stable and therefore non-dynamic in the past, permitting home-based micro-entrepreneurs to operate their business with little threat of competition, resting on their locational advantage to secure business from neighbours. We have shown how this spatial opportunity has been disrupted in recent times, in part through the emergence of new spaza shops willing to compete on service and price, and in part through the establishment of supermarkets on the township periphery.

Our socio-spatial research showed that space also matters in the micro-context, within the micro-enterprise itself. We provided examples of street traders who optimise the use of space to benefit from the high-street opportunities of marketing and access to customers. Far from being the passive actors that characterise the notion of 'necessity' entrepreneurship, the traders make strategic decisions with respect to the use of infrastructure (and in its architecture), their position on the street environment, and in respect to their precise location within the street market space, with some choosing to agglomerate with others selling similar products or services. In the residential context, we show how entrepreneurs have sought to optimise the use of their property to fulfil both residential and commercial objectives. In some cases, optimisation requires the strategic encroachment of buildings beyond building lines and boundary lines, onto neighbours' land and state property. Additionally, we provide evidence of the repurposing of residences into commercial space, a development that sometimes includes investment in security systems or the construction of dedicated infrastructure such as children's playgrounds or toilets. In the case of shebeens in informal settlements, the research highlights the configuration of space to maintain internal boundaries between public (bar) and private (home) use, separating different users while still enabling the entrepreneur to fulfil the important role of spatial control (from surveillance to action). The architecture of the internal drinking venue includes features whose purposeful objective is to minimise risk (to themselves and participants), afford surveillance from the serving counter, control movement into and within the venue, and facilitate spatial connections into neighbouring parts of the settlement.

Our case studies highlighted the myriad ways people adapt and innovate the use of space. Yet space can also present a major constraint to doing business. A limitation

of space can foreclose on entrepreneurial ambitions to make the kinds of investments required to formalise the business, such as in the educare case study where the owner was required to build a separate kitchen, a sick room, an additional classroom and specialised toilets. To unlock future business opportunity from such investments, the investor would need to comply with land-use system criteria that are generally unattainable for most township entrepreneurs. Space limitation also impacts on opportunities for street traders, in situations where the use of public space is subject to the control of more powerful entities, for example. The exclusion of micro-enterprises (and street traders) from shopping mall precincts presents one situation of this scenario. In the taxi sector, we advanced an argument on the spatial exclusion of informal taxis from the formally constituted taxi routes which connect the township to commercial centres. Access to these routes, we demonstrate with evidence, would benefit both township commuters and allied micro-enterprises. The former would derive route flexibility (and potentially greater efficiency), while the latter would gain from providing vehicle services and the spatial-nodal effect which sedan taxis enable. We found that time has an important bearing on the use of space. Businesses in the leisure economy, for example, operate into the night and on weekends. For street traders, trading space faces premium demand at month end when people receive income. There is also a diversity of users trading in the same spaces across different times of the day as trading cycles track commuter movement.

### **Institutions are incongruent**

Our third theme is that formal and informal institutions are mostly incongruent, in other words, misaligned and counteractive in certain situations. For micro-enterprises that require compliance with institutions of land use, the incongruence of their actual land-use situation with formal land-use institutions such as operating on land without appropriate zoning, means that these businesses are rendered illegal. Non-compliance can in turn impede access to business licensing, thus closing off access to benefits from formalisation which include the rights to trade, access to state subsidies and inclusion in government as well as industry SMME development support programmes. Yet these businesses are able to operate illegally and attract informal institutional support because township residents regard most micro-enterprise endeavours as a legitimate means to earn a livelihood. Furthermore, state agencies are generally sympathetic towards their situation, except where they have been specifically mandated into action (such as in the case of liquor trading) or where the opportunities for corruption warrant action. In response to community legitimisation of informal land use, arguments have been made against formalisation, certainly where it entails measures which would significantly constrain or hamstring operations (Charman, Petersen, & Piper 2012; Crush, Chikanda & Skinner 2015; Fourie 2018a). We agree that current terms of formalisation are largely unsuitable and unattainable for all but the largest township businesses.

Formalisation can provide a means to enhance business operations, reduce externalities and achieve socially desirable objectives. In pursuit of formalisation, we have shown how entrepreneurs have purposefully adjusted their businesses practices or made investments to substantially alter the business environment. These reactions include 'ceremonial' (non-approved) actions undertaken to align the business with institutional compliance. In these responses, the entrepreneur has undertaken a careful assessment of the risks of informality versus the benefits of formality, weighing their decision between the objectives of keeping the state away from interference (through seeming to be compliant) and obtaining legal approval. Where the pressure of formalisation is strong, such as on educares, liquor outlets and minibuses taxis, entrepreneurs have taken action to reduce business risks so as to avoid state confrontation that might arise therefrom. The

provision of separate toilets for male and female patrons in taverns is one such example. In contrast, where the pressure of formalisation is weak and where law enforcement is ineffective, as in the spaza sector, amongst fast-food outlets, in shebeens, amongst traditional healers and informal sedan taxis, we saw less evidence of readjustments to the business. This is not to suggest that the businesses within these segments of the township economy are less attentive to social concerns, but to argue that unconstrained informality provides greater scope for subterfuge to entrepreneurs who seek to profit by any means necessary.

The Eveline Street case revealed how an alignment of land institutions helped to reduce the risks of trading illegally, thus contributing towards an enabling environment into which both state and entrepreneurs have made investments. We have argued that the outcome has had a measurable impact on the local economy in terms of property development, enhancements to the social space within bars and in the public domain, technological investments within businesses, and improvements to public space through street lighting, paving, outdoor seating, the installation of traffic-calming measures and the provision of police surveillance, to name some of the main interventions.

### Corporate power stifles

Our fourth theme is that corporate power in general stifles the transformative potential of micro-enterprises to stimulate economic growth and reshape the urban environment. This influence is seen in the minibus taxi system wherein a complex of financial-industrial-political interests conspire to preserve a mode of public transport to the exclusion of diverse elements with broader transformative possibilities. In critiquing the power within this complex, we acknowledge that minibuses do have positive aspects, such as providing a comparatively efficient means of public transport (relative to state-operated rail and bus services) or in terms of its comparatively low subsidisation requirement. Our criticism focuses on the value chain wherein a substantial portion of the profits is extracted out of the township economy and accrues to powerful individuals who own fleets of taxis and the JSE investors whose businesses control the financing, insurance and servicing of minibuses. Taxi owners collaborate through organised bodies to protect the system from internal and external threats. These bodies utilise formal institutions (including taxi routes) and informal mechanisms (including organisation) to regulate the system, in particular to control competition. The repertoire of informal strategies of regulation constitute rule by thugocracy, based on the systematic use of violence, in direct and latent forms. This informal mode of regulation shields the vehicle owners and their corporate partners from sharing responsibility for the consequences of violence, which include the death of drivers, association leaders and ordinary commuters, extortion and harassment. The power of interest groups which sustain the minibus system truncates formal institutions (licensing, routes, state subsidies and access to institutional finance and so forth) from extending similar benefits to informal sedan taxis. We have argued that these taxis are more suitable to micro-enterprises, providing an alternative transport system that is better adapted to local economic conditions, requires less start-up capital and affords greater opportunities for owner-operator control.

Corporate influence can be seen in various levels in the township economy. In this book, we have restricted our analysis of corporate power to those sectors where corporate strategies directly influence the sale of products and the organisation of business. In spatial terms, the scope of corporate influence extends from billboards, to shop-signage, to shelf-products, to delivery vehicles, to pop-up marketing campaigns, to wholesale depots and retail enclaves, and to financial services for purchasing digital products

and transferring money. We found no evidence of corporate investment to create a physical presence outside of shopping malls, saving these companies from establishing a presence on the high street and investing directly into township property. Some of the corporate businesses in malls compete directly with micro-enterprises, selling products that could be obtained through these existing township businesses. Apart from their price competitiveness, the mall liquor outlets provide little significant benefit over taverns, for example. In pointing to this market encroachment, we are not advocating a Schumpeterian 'small is beautiful' philosophy, but simply drawing attention to the power of corporate investors to overcome the institutional barriers such as land-use rights which inhibit micro-enterprises from formalising, accessing institutions and growing in scale. Corporatised fast-food makes use of the mall anchorage and position at the entrance/exit to disseminate western notions of food that glorify refined, salty and fatty products, thus setting expectations to which micro-enterprises are pressured to imitate. Alternative township fast foods with greater possibilities for challenging corporatised foods are rarely accommodated within malls, a result which is partly due to the strategic objective of the mall owners to preserve the integrity of the mall as a bastion of corporate brands and franchise retailers.

Corporate producers have long sought to develop 'routes to market'. In most sectors, the main barriers to compete in the township market were the small size of micro-enterprises, their sheer number and the 'necessity' orientation of the operator, rather than regulatory obstacles. This has meant that corporates have been able to supply micro-enterprises, regardless of whether the business was informal and illegal in some or all of its practices. Tobacco companies supply cartons of cigarettes in full knowledge that the cigarettes would be on-sold as loose sticks in contravention of the law. Beverage and grocery companies supply shopkeepers with signage and fridges (and in turn demand exclusive trading terms), and many corporates have supported businesses irrespective of their compliance with municipal by-laws, land and building regulations or other regulatory conditions such as labour rights applicable in the formal economy. While utilising the opportunity of informality to trade outside of the regulatory framework, corporates have simultaneously absolved themselves from risk to their brands and reputation in the event of product failure or business externalities. In an age where contraband products have entered into the township market, corporates whose products are sold through micro-enterprises have concealed any risks to their brands because brand loyalty is regarded as more important than product integrity or consumer safety, commonly leaving consumers uninformed of the presence of counterfeit versions of their own products.

We conducted a detailed analysis of the liquor sector, wherein the role of dominant corporates is especially problematic. Liquor producers have made scant investment into township businesses, apart from supporting the formalisation of a minority of taverns, content to rely on the informal supply chains and unlicensed shebeens to transfer their products into the market. By channelling supply through a business model based on high-volume product turnover, in which the margins for the retailer are squeezed, the largest share of the profits from liquor sales is extracted for the producer and their shareholders. The high profitability of the system rests, in large part, on the ability of the corporate liquor producer to distance their companies from negative social and health consequences attendant on drinking in general and the business externalities of the township liquor retailers in particular (who sell the bulk of their product). We have argued that the corporate dominance is safeguarded within government policies, one aspect of which seeks to prevent the formalisation of micro-enterprises. Yet within the township liquor sector, there are possibilities for an alternative outcome, one in

which micro-enterprises could shift from selling corporate brands to local products. In imagining a different outcome, we should note that brewing and distillation are indigenous skills, controlled by women; hence, the failure of the state to nurture the production of liquor products in micro-enterprises should be viewed as constituting an acceptance and endorsement of the corporate system and its profit-extraction effects on the township economy.

### **Informality nurtures economic resistance**

Our final theme is that informality nurtures economic resistance to the benefit of entrepreneurs willing to operate illegally and, for some, illegitimately as well. The fluid and flexible use of land and infrastructure is an example of how micro-enterprises optimise their use of resources, working around the institutional constraints. Such dexterity occurs at multiple levels. At the micro-context, we showed how entrepreneurs construct 'infrastructure' from social relationships and utilise spatial situations, objects and practices to react with speed and precision to market impulses. The traders hawking vegetables in (stolen) shopping trolleys and calling out to potential customers is one of numerous examples. We also noted deftness in micro-enterprises with physical infrastructure. Since such businesses are not locked into long-lease agreements, the entrepreneur can easily shift from one location to another, as we noted in the case of the spaza shops in Delft South. Such practices of spatial adjustment enable street traders to test different localities at different times before establishing a permanent site. Within businesses, the flexibility afforded by informality permits the entrepreneur to pivot towards different income streams, shifting the focus of the business away from high risk to more profitable activities. Some South African shopkeepers are able to survive through reorienting the business towards selling liquor and fast food, though retaining the semblance of a spaza shop. We identified a similar process amongst shebeen owners who, when the threat of police raids intensifies, refocused the business towards activities such as selling fresh meat or fast foods, or converting their venue into an arcade games shop.

Throughout this book we have sought to highlight the evidence of how informality can create a market opportunity, which in turn affords benefit to micro-enterprises, their suppliers and the customers. Some opportunities arise from the incongruence between formal and informal institutions. Informal taxis, unlicensed shebeens and unregistered educare are examples. Micro-enterprises can provide products and services which are widely seen as legitimate, even though they are illegal. Retailing cheap cigarettes, contraband clothing and various traditional and non-licensed medicines, and Fafi gambling, fulfil the criteria of legitimate, yet illegal, activities. Informality also affords opportunities for some entrepreneurs to exploit others and customers through dubious business practices and products. The industrialists who produce and sell concoctions, the healers who sell magic wallets or 'snake oil' remedies, international church syndicates who extract tribute for unverifiable services, the spaza networks that exploit migrant workers and sell counterfeit goods to unsuspecting customers, the vehicle thieves who operate 'chop-shops' selling spare parts and the drug dealers who sell heroin and crystal methamphetamine fall into this category. In these sectors, the weakness of governability advantages individuals with economic power, who can, if required, mobilise capital, legal means, network support and/or violence to defend their position within the market.

### **Outlook**

We end this book by reflecting on actions which could influence the trajectory of micro-enterprises in the township economy. This final outlook is not intended as a manifesto

for policy-making. Rather we seek to highlight aspects that deserve nurturing, not least to unlock the 'possibilities' for intensification, diversification and transformation. We have intentionally focused on a narrow range of state policies, pointing to instances in the respective chapters where laws and their implementation (or equally their weak application) directly impact on entrepreneurship, positively and negatively. Our choice in limiting the focus to a narrow range of government policies is a reflection of the complete disconnection between the actual situation of micro-enterprises and the imaginary township economy that politicians desire. We have sought to recognise people-centred responses even in sectors and strategies which may unsettle western ideas or Ubuntu sentimentalism about how township micro-entrepreneurs ought to run businesses. It is fanciful for policy-makers to think that entrepreneurs will simply not respond to market demand, and (for example) withdraw from selling products like liquor and contraband tobacco, or from trading in sites of dense pedestrian footfall, if law enforcement is intensified. An important lesson is that enforcing informality does not alter the entrepreneurial pursuit of opportunity, but merely changes the trajectory of businesses development and growth. Since our research has found no evidence to indicate possibilities for leveraging micro-enterprises towards industrialisation, technological modernisation, or the formation of cooperatives, as well as stimulating youth entrepreneurship – important policy concerns in the current age – we conclude that government prospects of achieving these objectives are low.

We organise our suggested actions under three headings: protect, constrain and disrupt. These headings benefit from the differentiation of strategies which Chen, Jhabvala & Lund (2002) propose, though our orientation is not solely towards government policies and agencies, but actions which could be undertaken by state, non-state and private actors, including civil society organisations and businesses. The latter include informal township micro-enterprises.

### **Protect**

There is wide consensus that the most vulnerable and financially marginal entrepreneurs, who we have characterised as survivalists, need protection (Chen, 2018). This begins with accepting that these individuals are working legitimately, in other words, in alignment with community-centred norms, values and cultural practices, though the products they trade might be illegal and they might not have institutional land rights to operate from a particular site. These entrepreneurs operate at the end of the supply chain and have little influence on the process of production or distribution wherein economic power lies. They operate from spatial locations which are affordable, accessible and practical. These spaces include streets and pavements, open fields, backyard structures and rooms within a house. Their businesses utilise infrastructure in an incremental manner, probing and experimenting to reduce risks. Many of these survivalists are women, while men too were found conducting the most precarious activities, with gender having a shaping, not discriminatory, influence. Furthermore, even survivalists engage in strategic arrangements, which include utilising the social networks of kinship, friendships and tightly constituted groups. Our point is that even though survivalists embrace agency through networking, incremental or silent encroachment, and selling illegal goods (or legal goods illegally), their endeavours are vulnerable to individuals and businesses with greater power.

These more powerful entities range from thugs and criminals who rob traders; to the violent entrepreneurs in the taxi sector; to the informalist spaza-shop entrepreneurs who use price competition and illegitimate practices to dominate neighbourhood niche

segments and control all grocery retailing; to the shopping mall developers who spatially restrict opportunities for micro-enterprises; and to the state law enforcement agencies who individually or institutionally seek to control when, where and how survivalists conduct businesses. Survivalists need protection from these groups. One form of protection could entail regulation, to convey institutional rights onto their businesses, though the entry barriers would need to be sufficiently low to recognise their resource constraints. If we consider the restrictive scope of municipal street-trader plans, the inflexibility of physical trading structures outside transport hubs, the impracticality of municipal by-laws, or the hostility of the state towards survivalists operating in regulated sectors, we see little prospect for a regulatory solution. It is unlikely that the mindset of politicians is amenable to change, not least because the evidence for and against regulation remains a contested domain. From an administrative perspective, there is little point in formalising survivalist micro-enterprises as their income is too low to raise tax revenue and their businesses per se pose little direct social threat to society or other businesses. Another means of protection is through organisation in bodies with collective decision-making power. It is important to recognise that collective organisation is not a panacea, as advocated in some sectors and spatial situations (Bénil-Gbaffou 2016; Chen 2018). Our experience in the township is that these organisations can (and are) dominated by the self-interest of their leadership and there is a tendency with informal trader organisations to 'privatise' space with the objective to control access to markets and extract tributes (Stillerman 2006). A further path towards securing protection is through patronising violent entrepreneurs and interlopers. As much as the minibus sector warrants our critique, we concede that taxi drivers can and do protect informal traders at the ranks. In another example, we have also found evidence of survivalists working with street committees or even gangs to enforce legal contracts against clients in a comparatively stronger position, such as shop tenants who withhold rent or refuse to vacate the building after the expiry of an agreement, and to enforce 'justice' in crime situations. We see that this pathway of protection is likely to remain important in survivalist strategies, not least so long as the state remains hostile towards what township communities often see as legitimate informal micro-enterprises (run by individuals who would be otherwise unemployed) and state agents are motivated by corruption.

### Constrain

Not all informal micro-enterprise activities are deserving of protection. Some threaten other businesses and weaken opportunities for new market entrants. Some entrepreneurs seek to dominate markets and profit from unsuspecting, ill-informed and simply poor consumers. The embracing of opportunities of informality by informalists in the spaza sector, where businesses engage in exploitative labour practices, peddle contraband and counterfeit products and aim to dominate geographic market niches in a way that precludes opportunities for survivalists is one such situation. Liquor businesses that trade in an illegitimate manner, operating in disrespect of community norms through opening until late at night, generating noise, failing to provide adequate toilet facilities and stimulating public disturbances is another situation. In the minibus taxi sector, the unrestrained use of violence under the direction of organised structures has direct consequences for drivers, commuters and alternative forms of transport which remain subservient. Across each sector we found examples of practices that ought to be constrained. These include charlatan healers, sham churches, unqualified (and unsafe) medical services and educarees which place children at risk of harm. The use of infrastructure and buildings in ways that are harmful or unsafe also falls within the catalogue of informal business activities with detrimental consequences.

The prospect of addressing such problematic strategies of business through 'engagement' are minimal, we would argue, our scepticism being based on the failure of various engagement-type interventions such as public meetings to discuss the problem, awareness messaging and self-monitoring. State pressure also needs to be applied through tools such as regulation, though institutional controls are only effective when the regulatory bar is placed at a level that is attainable and where recognition is afforded to legitimate practices. Our examination of the regulation of the liquor trade provides a case of how inappropriate policies serve to exclude and marginalise rather than include and transform and thus meaningfully reduce potential harm caused by liquor usage. There is little evidence to support the idea that regulation can be made effective through intensifying securitisation strategies alone; top-down measures (such as policing) require some bottom-up compliance (a realignment to informal rules and norms). Action to increase the policing of minibuses has had little impact on the lawless behaviour which characterises business operations in the sector. There must be pressure within supply chains, targeting manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors who maintain routes to market through working with informal micro-enterprises that knowingly operate on an illegal and illegitimate basis. Township entrepreneurs who, on a regular basis, spend huge amounts of money purchasing stock from formal businesses are simply too large in size to be afforded the right to operate informally. Similarly, informalists who transfer substantial sums of money via cell-phone banking platforms outside South Africa should be made to account for the funds acquired. These individuals (or networks) have the means to operate within the law, but voluntarily choose informal strategies so as to avoid institutional compliance and income-tax obligations. So, the point of pressure should be directed towards formal businesses which embrace opportunities to partner with cash-generating informal businesses, permitting them to limit their exposure and risks. But such is the power of corporates in the South African economy that it is unlikely that the state will have the confidence or capacity to effectively 'disrupt' this business. Thus, it is probable that extractive business practices will continue as usual, until such time as informal businesses challenge the corporates through creating alternative sources of supply and distribution. Only then, we suspect, the state will be pressurised to react.

The modes of constraining informality that are most likely to intensify are those constituted at the micro-context. These actions will entail various scales of social mobilisation and the actual or threatened use of violence. We have seen this in the case of the spaza sector through targeted (and indiscriminate) attacks on immigrant-owned shops. At a different level, we have also seen how community groups have compelled trading time restrictions on shebeens or compelled businesses to adhere to floor prices on select products. In the minibus sector, the associations can enforce adherence to 'rules' and impose penalties on drivers which range from fines to dismissals to the enforcement of a dress code, as happens in Ivory Park where drivers have to be dressed in a collar and tie when they work on Mondays. In the educare sector, power is exercised in more subtle ways through networks where access to resources, information and opportunities can be denied to individuals who operate in ways that may bring about collective risk.

### **Disrupt**

If the many 'possibilities' that we highlight in this book are to be unlocked or amplified, it will be necessary to disrupt systems. These include land use, building standards, principles of planning and design, production, supply chains, business regulation and government support programmes. The Eveline Street case provides an insight into the transformative possibilities arising from relaxing land-use zoning and enabling businesses

to operate legally and thus attract investment. The resulting supportive spatial and economic disruption to what was historically a homogenous residential settlement was established upon an evolving high-street model. Through means such as broadening the width of the sidewalk, introducing soft kerbing and environmental improvements such as street lighting, traffic calming and CCTV, the local economy has organically diversified and grown. Looking from the outside, such disruptive change might provide a sense of discomfort for policy-makers and investors who perceive micro-enterprises as 'unruly'. Yet where we have seen evidence of disruption to systems and business practices, the pace of change happens quickly. Sector business characteristics are constantly evolving and will look different in the future, but exactly what changes occur will depend on the appropriateness or otherwise of the mechanisms applied through which activities are protected or constrained.

In our analysis of specific topics, we have sought to highlight some of the major opportunities for disruption. Illustratively, the following state actions could, through 'disruptive' changes to policies and practices, enhance economic responses. One, inflexible land-use systems could be revised. Two, settlement layout could prioritise spatial opportunities for business, particularly on high streets though also in residential situations. Three, overly restrictive by-laws could be overhauled. Four, dominance over markets ought to be restricted, as larger businesses tend to retard the emergence of alternative opportunities which might be more adaptable and suitable to micro-enterprise growth and enhanced social outcomes. Five, the design and function of shopping malls which exclude micro-enterprises presents a further opportunity for disruption whereby the state could proactively legislate for inclusion. A sixth target is the supply chains which provide routes to market, perpetuating surplus extraction and informal business practices. B-BBEE codes could be reformulated to necessitate investment at the end of the value chain. Lastly, development programmes could be calibrated to reflect the differentiation within micro-enterprises and take cognisance of our findings that most survivalists are unlikely to develop into competitive businesses, let alone follow a modernising trajectory, and therefore strategies must be low-gear.

Such disruption will require confronting powerful interest groups. Some of these groups operate within political parties; some hold bureaucratic positions in the state and manage institutions across the three tiers of government; some are positioned with educational institutions and think-tanks where research aims to shape and defend policy; some manage corporate entities; and some are business investors. With the balance of this power falling across these stakeholders and allied with current political and corporate interests, the most likely outcome is the current inertia when it comes to supporting the township economy in transformative ways. The bureaucrats who oversee state institutions are quick to formulate policies in subservience to their political leaders, but slow to implement and cautious of disruption. Against all the evidence we present in this book, there are (and will be) new findings which suggest different ideas and analysis, some of which will be utilised, no doubt, to justify state inertia and sustain policies to satisfy political audiences rather than embrace a path along which people-centred economic responses can be nurtured. As we have sought to demonstrate through this book, township entrepreneurs have sufficient resolve, capital and social technologies to navigate their own paths towards economic growth, though reshaping policies and reducing the scale of extractive business would enable swifter growth and deliver more inclusive benefits.

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Andrew trained as a sociologist and development specialist, studying at the University of Cape Town and Cambridge where he obtained a PhD degree. Andrew has worked as a researcher, a project manager and development practitioner on a range of projects across diverse settings in Southern Africa, including rural areas and townships. In 2010, Andrew co-founded the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF) ([www.livelihoods.org.za](http://www.livelihoods.org.za)) with the aim of contributing knowledge to socio-economic development challenges, through conducting research, enabling participatory engagement and facilitating appropriate support. At SLF, Andrew has led a series of projects to understand the policy and regulatory barriers impacting on micro-enterprises in South Africa's townships. As a development practitioner, Andrew seeks to translate research into interventions that can better serve people's development needs through innovative enterprise development solutions, targeted infrastructure investments, new forms of social organisation and policy reforms.

### Leif Petersen

Leif Petersen has worked in the field of South Africa's township microenterprises and markets for the last 15 years. As a co-founding director of SLF, he has presented a substantive body of academic, commercial and mainstream reporting and presentations on township economy markets, in particular market intelligence for sectors including Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) retailing, supply chain development, and market dynamics of grocery trading, liquor retailing, traditional medicine, and informal manufacturing. His PhD and Post-Doctoral work focused on the qualitative understanding of businesses and consumers of traditional medicines and food in the township context. He has strong interests in translating research insights and interconnectedness within developing economies of Africa, Asia and the Pacific into practical interventions to support livelihoods. Among his range of projects and interests, Leif is a Research Fellow at the Africa Open Institute at the University of Stellenbosch.

### Thireshen Govender

Thireshen Govender is an architect practising and teaching in Johannesburg. Having graduated from the University of Cape Town as an architect, he trained in local practices in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Through the awarding of a Chevening Scholarship, he further advanced his studies in Urban Design at The University College of London (Bartlett) in the United Kingdom. He travelled extensively, widely informed by a keen interest on how post-traumatic cities define themselves socially and spatially. In 2008, he founded UrbanWorks Architecture & Urbanism, a design-research studio, to deepen knowledge on post-apartheid spatial practices in order to develop innovative and responsive design strategies toward radical transformation in South African cities. The practice works across scales and disciplines to explore how space and design can productively play a role in urban transformation through carefully curated interventions. In addition to international teaching and talks, Thireshen leads a design-research unit at the University of Johannesburg's Graduate School of Architecture. The unit investigates and documents the spatial consequence of post-apartheid socio-economic practices in architecture and urbanism.

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